



# 161 new virus cases in Kuwait; deaths top 103,000 worldwide

## More than 2,000 deaths in one day in US • Yemen reports first case

### Coronavirus found in air samples up to 4 m from patients

WASHINGTON: A new study examining air samples from hospital wards with COVID-19 patients has found the virus can travel up to 13 feet (four meters) - twice the distance current guidelines say people should leave between themselves in public. The preliminary results of the investigation by Chinese researchers were published Friday in Emerging Infectious Diseases, a journal of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

They add to a growing debate on how the disease is transmitted, with the scientists themselves cautioning that the small quantities of virus they found at this distance are not necessarily infectious. The researchers, led by a team at the Academy of Military Medical Sciences in Beijing, tested surface and air samples from an intensive care unit and a general COVID-19 ward at Huoshenshan Hospital in Wuhan. They housed a total of 24 patients between February 19 and March 2.

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KUWAIT: The health ministry announced yesterday that 161 people were infected by the coronavirus in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 1,154. Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad told KUNA that 27 patients are in intensive care. Those currently receiving treatment at hospitals have reached 1,020, said the spokesperson, adding that 1,445 individuals have completed quarantine. One death has been reported so far.

Regarding the new infected cases, Sanad said travel-related cases numbered 31, part of the recent evacuation flights, who were under institutional quarantine. Seventeen cases are related to Kuwaiti citizens arriving from the UK, nine Kuwaitis arriving from Germany, three citizens arriving from the US, one case related to an illegal resident (bedoon) arriving from the UK and one Indian resident arriving from Egypt.

Sanad added that 127 cases are related to people who were in contact with infected patients - four Kuwaitis, 101 Indians, 15 Bangladeshis, one Saudi, one Filipino, one Jordanian and one Pakistani. As for cases under epidemiological investigation, Sanad indicated

that the tally reached six patients, including one Kuwaiti, two Indians, one Bulgarian, one Egyptian and one Filipino. Earlier yesterday, the ministry announced the recovery of 10 new patients, bringing the total to 133 recoveries.

Meanwhile, the global coronavirus death toll topped 100,000 as Easter weekend celebrations around the world kicked off in near-empty churches with billions of people stuck indoors to halt the pandemic. Extraordinary measures from New York to Naples to New Delhi have seen businesses and schools closed in a desperate bid to halt the virus's spread, and the IMF has warned that the world now faces the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

More than 103,000 people have died of COVID-19 with 1.7 million infections detected globally, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker, with nearly 70 percent of the fatalities in Europe. The United States, now the pandemic's epicenter, became the first country to record more than 2,000 virus deaths in one day and is closing in on Italy's 18,849

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Sat. 11/04/2020

### Updates on COVID 19

Total cases	New cases	Active cases	ICU	Recovered	Deaths
1154	161	1020	26	133	1

Related to travel 31

17 cases of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to United Kingdom, 9 cases of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to Germany, 3 cases of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to U.S.A, 1 case of N.K resident related to travel to United Kingdom, 1 case of Indian resident related to travel to Egypt.

Cases in contact 124

4 cases of Kuwaiti nationals, 101 cases of Indian residents, 15 cases of Bangladeshi residents, 1 case of Saudi resident, 1 case of Philipino resident, 1 case of Jordanian resident, 1 case of Pakestani resident.

Under investigation 6

1 case of Kuwaiti national, 2 cases of Indian resident, 1 case of Bulgarian resident, 1 case of Egyptian resident, 1 case of Philipino resident.

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# V O L V O

# STAY SAFE STAY HOME



## Local

# Kuwait Health Ministry urges COVID-19 recovered persons to donate blood

## Plasma can be used to help treat infected people

KUWAIT: Kuwait Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah Friday urged persons recovering from coronavirus to donate blood to use extracted plasma to treat infected people, after success of this treatment was medically proven. "We urge all persons who recovered from the novel coronavirus to donate blood to use the plasma in treatment of infected persons because the success of this treatment was proven medically," Sheikh Dr Basel said on his Twitter account.

Kuwait Central Blood Bank (KCBB) started on April 8 started producing plasma artificially to help treat patients suffering from COVID-19. The process entails collecting plasma from donors who were formerly COVID-19 patients and then transfusing it into the blood of patients to strengthen their immunity. Director of KCBB Blood Transfusion Division Dr Reem Al-Radhwan said. "According to the standards of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), the plasma donation from former patients should start soon after the end of their home quarantine. When a person



Health Minister  
Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah

contracts a disease, their bodies start producing antibodies to face down the new enemy," she said.

### Treatment's success medically proven

contracts a disease, their bodies start producing antibodies to face down the new enemy," she said. "In the case of COVID-19, a former patient keeps a high level of antibodies three weeks after their recovery, and then the antibodies start taking a downward slant towards the normal level. Therefore, the plasma generating process requires setting a time schedule for each donor," Dr Radhwan explained, noting that a recovered person can help treat three patients. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Volunteers stepped up to distribute bread to Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh residents during a total lockdown imposed there as part of efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaiikh

#### Pandemic Diaries

## Shhhhh... silent victims



By Jamie Etheridge

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We're all aware now of the call by governments to stay home, stay safe. For most of us this is great advice. Our homes are our sanctuaries - the place where we are safest, most relaxed and, well, 'at home'.

But for one category of people, primarily women, home is the most dangerous place of all. Across the globe, authorities are reporting an increase in domestic violence cases triggered by the 'stay at home' directives from authorities. In families where male abusers are already active, the added stress of the coronavirus pandemic can trigger additional violent attacks on female relatives, especially wives, sisters and children.

In Kuwait, domestic violence is one of those taboos rarely discussed openly in public. There are a few important initiatives like Abolish 153 that are working to change the laws surrounding the issue. But there are few resources for victims. Women must get a medical report and file a police report, and quite often the police will only call the abuser and ask him to 'sign an undertaking' not to repeat the offense.

This seldom has any lasting impact, and moreover, many women do not ever seek medical help because of the taboo against the subject. This is true for both the Kuwaiti and much of the expatriate communities. Victims may or may not have some family support; otherwise they are pretty much on their own.

The situation is exponentially worsened in crisis periods, especially when abusers are ordered to stay at home. Even within families without violence, patience will wear thin and tempers will flare after spending days and weeks confined together with limited outside options.

In other countries, a variety of resources are available to victims of abuse including hotlines, safe shelters and government assistance. None of these are reliably available for all the women of Kuwait. As the pandemic has shown, however, Kuwait is capable of responding to the needs of all her citizens and residents. Isn't it time that those who are silenced also receive help?

**Editor's Note:** If you are a victim of domestic violence from a father, husband, brother or some other male relative, please seek help. You can go to get a medical report and file a police report. The Kuwait Psychological Association is also offering free telephone conversations during this period for those suffering mental stress, and even being able to speak to someone about your situation may help. Ask a friend or trusted family member for support or assistance.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 1,154 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to one death. With the exception of 27 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, 133 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,020 people receiving treatment and 2,552 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 grades.

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-Aslamya 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

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day.

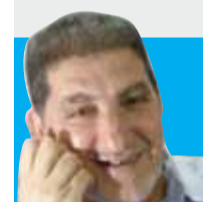
#### Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

- **Dr Rashed Al-Sahl:** on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.
- **Dr Fahad Al-Tasha:** daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.
- **Dr Othman Al-Asfour:** daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.
- **Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team):** daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
- **Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi:** daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
- **Dr Muneera Al-Qattan:** Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
- **Dr Zainab Al-Saffar:** Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
- **Dr Sameera Al-Kandari:** Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
- **Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout:** Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

#### In My View

## Simple yet effective routine



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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On March 12, 2006, ABC news in the US had a report which read: "Will there be an outbreak of avian flu that threatens humans? Many experts disagree when or if a human pandemic will occur, but do say there is a chance that the virus could mutate, leading to widespread infection. In that case, the best thing you and your family can do right now is to prepare for that possibility." The first thing the report mentioned was that if you want to minimize your chance of catching the virus, stay indoors - "you might even be required to stay home if the government asks that people remain in quarantine."

The habits that can help keep you healthy in an outbreak are the same good habits that can keep you from catching the common cold: Maintain a balanced diet, exercise regularly and get sufficient rest. Particularly during a flu outbreak, it is important to wash your hands thoroughly and remind loved ones, especially children, to do the same. Be diligent about covering coughs and sneezes with tissues, and teaching children in your family to do the same. Also teach children to stay away from others as much as possible if they are sick, and stay home from work or school if you are sick.

These familiar statements were made about 15 years ago - as if they were made for the current crisis. If we pay attention, we realize that the most important act is to stay at home and maintain social distancing. No matter what the crisis is, one must use common sense in our daily lives and follow a routine that is simple yet highly effective in safeguarding our wellbeing.

Scenes in Jleeb at the weekend were not promising at all. Three days after the lockdown, residents rushed to get basic needs within the area, and it was anything but in order. Men carrying gas cylinders on their shoulders were running every which way without the least care, while attempts to get some kind of organization in place went in vain.

We must cooperate with each other and follow official instructions and guidelines to be able to cross this giant hurdle and move forward. We are in a real state of war and the loss of one battle may cause us to lose the entire war. So please be patient and follow the rules of common sense and things will be fine. Believe me - there is a bright light at the end of the tunnel if you just look closely.

Final word: "Success has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It's what you do for others". — Danny Thomas

## Local

# Kuwait steps up measures to confront coronavirus

## Govt assigns state departments to consider full curfew: Spokesman

local spotlight

### Rent is due



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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For millions of people living in apartments, a new month means the rent is due. Of course, in normal circumstances, this is not an issue. But with the COVID-19 outbreak, many tenants have stopped working. There are fears of job losses or reduced salaries, and rent is turning into a cause for concern and dispute, especially for low- and middle-income people. But hopefully not for long. The economic repercussions of the coronavirus crisis have affected many sectors around the world and not only in Kuwait, including the real estate sector, which is natural, although its impact in Kuwait is still limited for many reasons. But, the Kuwait Real Estate Union is trying to avoid a crisis by having a win-win solution for both owners and tenants. The real estate sector, including its investment, commercial and residential fields, has entered into a new phase of unprecedented economic repercussions. But the view is not completely bleak in Kuwait because the situation is not the same for everyone. A large number of employees working in the government and private sectors, especially in major financial institutions, are still receiving their salaries as usual, so their rents should not be reviewed, as their salaries were not affected. But they are worried if the crisis continues for a long time, it may lead to a change in their salaries or benefits.

All real estate owners are also not the same - some have reduced the rent or waived it. Then there are those who see that the majority of people in Kuwait are employees who still receive their salaries as usual, so a reduction is not necessary, despite the large number of sympathetic campaigns urging landlords to reduce or waive the rent for tenants during this crisis.

I think it is necessary to take into account the situation of the real estate sector after the COVID-19 crisis, when property owners may be forced to reduce the rent to attract new tenants. So reaching an amicable compromise between the owners and tenants to reduce the rent is required - this is my personal opinion. I believe that the real estate sector is one of the largest and most powerful sectors of the state. Even if the owner does not receive the rent in full, say for a period of two months for example, he will not be harmed.

Among the solutions adopted by some landlords is to obligate the tenant to pay only 50 percent of their rent and postpone the remaining 50 percent to pay in installments in accordance with the tenant's financial condition and the extent of his losses.

I believe that low- and middle-income people and small businesses have been badly affected by this health crisis. Everyone knows that restaurants and cafes are the most affected. As their activities stopped, as well as their income, many complex owners have taken into account the conditions of investors. But the problem is the inability to determine the time duration of the crisis, which adds further difficulty to the issue. There is no doubt that the companies that were able to operate successfully in this crisis are those that are doing business using the Internet and providing online services - they have witnessed unprecedented success. I believe the state can intervene to impose a law that reduces the proportion of the value of the rent of investment and residential properties for a specific period from the start of this crisis until its end, because real estate is an important and fast-growing sector.

### Fines still collected for expired visas

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Although the interior ministry announced previously that expats don't have to pay fines if their residency visa expires during the official shutdown when all public sector institutions are not working, yet fines have appeared when renewing iqamas online. The interior ministry initially allowed article 18 (for employees in private sector) and article 20 (domestic helpers) residencies to be renewed online. Later, renewal of article 22 (family dependent) and article 24 (self-sponsors) residencies were added to online services at the beginning of this month.

Some people have complained of still having to pay fines for being late in renewing residencies, although it's not their fault as the government is on holiday and due to not having this service online earlier. An official at the immigration department told Kuwait Times that people still have to pay fines when renewing their iqamas. "The ministry of interior gave an option to visa violators to leave the country without paying fines between April 1 and 30, 2020. But if they want to stay in Kuwait, then

they have to pay the fines," he said. He added sometimes there is high load on the system, so applicants should try repeatedly.

Aliasgar Fakhruddin, a Kuwait Times reader, explained his problem with renewing the iqamas of his wife and daughter, who are family dependents on article 22. "Their passport is expiring in March 2021, so they can't renew the residency as the validity of their passport is less than one year. So I issued a new passport for each of them and tried to renew their residency, but the website of the interior ministry is not accepting the renewal," he said.

"I tried to contact the ministry through their email, but I didn't get any response. I also paid the fines for the expired residencies although it's not my fault, as the ministry had announced that they will not penalize those whose visas expire during the period of the closure. Now with not accepting the renewal, I will also have to pay more fines," complained Fakhruddin.

Afsar, another reader of the Kuwait Times, also faced a problem when renewing the visas of his wife and son. "The residencies of my wife and son expired on March 22 - during the public holiday - and the ministry opened renewals of family visas only in April. So when I tried to renew their iqamas, a fine of KD 2 per day was charged. Even after paying this amount, the visas were not renewed," he pointed out.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the cabinet's meeting. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait government Thursday stepped up measures aimed at confronting the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including considering a full curfew and increasing medical workers while planning resumption of state departments including remotely. The cabinet discussed the health condition in general and the preventive measures to preserve wellbeing of the public, as well as conditions in areas of Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, which were under complete lockdown, but medical services and food are provided for inhabitants. A statement by Deputy Premier, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Anas Al-Saleh said the government, during a meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, decided to cut by half passes granted for workers in different bodies that guarantee movement during curfew. It assigned Ministry of Interior to consider the distribution of passes.

#### Full curfew

Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem had announced that state departments were assigned to complete arrangements to consider imposition of full curfew nationwide in order to boost efforts to curb spread of coronavirus. Mezrem, at an online news conference, said relevant authorities were assigned to place executive plans to deal with possibility of imposing a curfew, and to avoid any obstacles that might hamper execution of the curfew.

He was speaking after the cabinet meeting, during which the government also assigned the Directorate General for Civil Aviation to allow operation of all airlines in order to allow expatriates wishing to return to their countries do so. The government, said Mezrem, compelled cleaning and guarding companies committed to contracts with the government to pay wages of their employees and to make sure they live in decent housing units. "The government will take legal action against companies violating this issue," he said. Mezrem approved the Ministry of Health's recruitment of medical staff of private hospitals as well as the use of their facilities to deal with coronavirus patients. He also said the government approved a request by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to launch an electronic application to organize shopping at cooperative societies in order to avoid gatherings.

#### Resumption of work

The government also formed a team to prepare for resumption of work at government departments, including through online mechanism, minister Saleh said. It assigned the Ministries of Health and Finance to guarantee payment of medical workers in private hospitals. The cabinet praised outcome of

a meeting between His Highness the Prime Minister and President of the State Audit Bureau Faisal Al-Shaya on preservation of public funds. The government, meanwhile, would provide appropriations for ministries and state departments to help them confront spread of the virus, took note of preparations for repatriation of citizens end of next week following registration in a special website designed for this purpose.

#### Citizens abroad

Meanwhile, Mezrem said that the government is serious about returning all citizens who are currently abroad, inviting them to register their data through a website dedicated for that purpose solely. The remarks by Mezrem came during a joint video conference at Seif Palace, accompanied by Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem, addressing local media, following the extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet earlier this evening.

Mezrem added that the website [www.withyou.e.gov.kw](http://www.withyou.e.gov.kw) is dedicated to filling out forms by Kuwaitis currently outside the country,



### Govt serious about citizens' repatriation

calling on them to respond swiftly and register all the information required so that government agencies can setup a timetable for repatriation that guarantees facilitating the procedures and maintaining health care for them and their families in Kuwait.

This platform will allow citizens abroad to register their information in order to facilitate their repatriation, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem told the news conference. "This platform will allow government departments to take appropriate decisions regarding the repatriation," said Jassem. He urged all citizens to register at [withyou.e.gov.kw](http://withyou.e.gov.kw). "The purpose is to have a single database for all citizens which will facilitate their admission into health facilities," said Jassem.

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Friday urged Kuwaiti nationals abroad to register their names and post other required information on [withyou.e.gov.kw](http://withyou.e.gov.kw), to ensure their repatriation. The ministry said in a statement that it was exerting efforts, in coordination with the center agency for information technology, other concerned min-

istries and government departments, to organize safe and secure return of the nationals abroad. The ministry urged these citizens to register their names and post other required information on this internet platform because it is the sole accredited reference for the concerned authorities involved in the operation.

#### Cooperation

Mezrem indicated that the implementation of the next stage of the plan to evacuate citizens abroad, which will take place this week, is of great importance to the government, stressing on the need to transfer citizens and bring them to Kuwait International Airport in a full and healthy manner. The spokesperson explained that cooperation by citizens abroad in providing accurate information in the website, which is prepared in coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and health authorities would facilitate and simplify the work of the health authorities in the process of receiving them at airport, especially information regarding their locations and their current physical status in recent days.

He pointed out to allocating numbers to communicate in the website, and to answer any questions or inquiries regarding data registration, calling on all citizen who has trouble registering data through the site to communicate with Kuwait embassy in the country they're currently in. In response to a question about flight schedules of trips to citizens abroad that were published on social networking sites, Mezrem reiterated not to believe or circulate any information that is not true or was not issued by official authorities, referring to the government's call since the beginning of the crisis to obtain information from official government sources.

#### Yemen ceasefire

In other news, the cabinet welcomed the announcement of a two-week ceasefire made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen. The coalition announced the two-week ceasefire and said it aimed at building confidence towards a comprehensive political solution. The cabinet stressed that this decision reflects a high awareness of the international emergency conditions imposed on the world and our region due to the spread of the coronavirus and a sincere desire to spare the Yemeni society the consequences of this disaster. It also expressed hope that Houthi militia would respond to this noble humanitarian initiative as a basis for the resumption of negotiations leading to a comprehensive and lasting political solution in brotherly Yemen under the auspices of the UN represented by the Secretary-General of the UN to Yemen Martin Griffiths. —KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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# Egyptians avail amnesty; Bangladeshis next in line



KUWAIT: Egyptian nationals queue up outside a school in Farwaniya which was turned into a center to receive applications wishing to avail an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Egyptian nationals headed to centers set up by the Ministry of Interior to receive expatriates without valid residencies who are wishing to avail 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. Egyptian nationals were received on April 6 - 10, following a five-day period to receive applicants from the Philippines. Bangladeshi applicants are next in line on April 11 - 15, followed by Indians on April 16 - 20, Sri Lankans on April 21 - 25, and other

nationalities on April 26 - 30.

Violators are received from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm at the following locations: 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.

Residency violators from all nationalities are also received in two difference locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh as follows: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslameya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

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Local

News in brief

**Kuwait, Palestine discuss relations**

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Friday a telephone call from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, exploring the good bilateral relations, issues of common concern and latest regional developments.

**Driver's license validity**

**KUWAIT:** A special edition of Kuwait Al-Youm was released on Thursday containing amendments to the traffic law, based on which driver's licenses will be issued to Kuwaitis and GCC nationals valid for 15 years, to expatriates valid for 3 years, and to bedoons valid according to the validity of their ID cards.

**Pharmacies' delivery**

**KUWAIT:** All licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. This decision was made with the approval of the Health Ministry, reads a statement released by the ministry on Friday. Special permits are given for such service, which continues throughout the day and night, it affirmed.

**Volunteer doctors**

**KUWAIT:** The Health Ministry opened the door for doctors and nurses working in private sector to volunteer for three days starting today, to contribute to government's efforts to confront the spread of coronavirus. Doctors can apply at the office of Assistant Undersecretary for Technical Affairs, while the nurses can apply at the office of the Assistant Undersecretary for medical services. Every volunteer should provide a copy of practicing license, the civil ID and a letter of approval of the company he or she works in, said the ministry.

**Injured man rescued**

**KUWAIT:** Salmiya Sea Fire Station men rescued a citizen with a broken foot from Failaka island after giving him first aid. The man was transferred to hospital for treatment.

# Kuwait police arrest officer involved in human trafficking

## Four persons detained for breaching lockdown

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh on Thursday suspended an officer from work and referred him to Public Prosecution after suspicions of involvement in human trafficking. As part of the efforts made by the security apparatus to combat human trafficking and after investigations, a company, owned by the officer, was found involved in the field of recruiting workers from abroad and obtaining sums of money in return. The company is accused of human trafficking and suspicions of forgery, said the interior ministry in a statement. It added that a lawsuit is being initiated against the officer and his partners, to take the necessary legal measures against them, while continuing to intensify investigations to uncover all violations committed by the owners of the company to refer them to the competent authorities.



### Driver held for smuggling workers

policemen arrested four expatriate workers for cutting barbed wire fences to break out of Mahboula area in Al-Ahmadi Governorate which is locked down due to coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. "During interrogations, the four persons confessed to the charges, and therefore legal measures to extradite them from Kuwait got underway," according to a press release from the Ministry's public relations and security media department. Highlighting the need of everybody abiding by the decisions related to the combat against the pandemic, the statement said, "The security institution adopts a policy of zero tolerance in enforcing the lockdown to protect the public health."

### Smuggling workers

In the meantime, the ministry said police arrested a bus driver working for a Ministry of Health contractor because he attempted to smuggle 100 people from Jleeb Al-Shuyouk, and legal actions were taken against him. Policeman



stopped the bus and asked the driver about identities of passengers and he claimed they were MoH employees, a MoI statement said. The policemen checked identities of the passengers who were working for different companies irrelevant to the MoH, it added. The bus driver then confessed he was smuggling the people outside Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh for 20 Kuwaiti Dinars (around \$65) per person, said the ministry. Legal actions against the driver are underway. Based on recommendations from the health authorities, the cabinet decided on Monday to lock down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, after several infection cases were identified in both areas. —KUNA

### Breaching lockdown

Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry said Thursday

## Air force plane back with medical supplies

**KUWAIT:** A Kuwaiti military plane, returning from Bangladesh with emergency medical supplies, landed in

the country Friday. The Defense Ministry media and public relations department said that the flight was within the ministry's strategy to provide state entities with necessary medical supplies during the current trying times. The Defense and Health Ministries are regularly cooperating to ensure that Kuwait has enough medical supplies. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Road workers carry out street repairs in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh during a full lockdown in the area. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



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Drowned out by pandemic, a muted victory for Biden

## Florida's nightmare: A hurricane during the pandemic



NEW YORK: Nurses and healthcare workers form the word "Hope" with candles as they mourn and remember their colleagues who died during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus outside Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan on Friday. — AFP

# Virus victims buried in mass graves in NY

## WHO: Hasty lockdown lift could spark 'deadly resurgence'

NEW YORK: Unclaimed victims of the new coronavirus are being buried in unmarked mass graves by contract laborers on an island in New York, officials confirmed Friday. Hart Island is one of America's largest public cemeteries, with more than one million people buried there.

New York authorities have used the site for over 150 years to lay to rest unclaimed bodies, unidentified people and residents whose families could not afford a private burial. "We will continue using the island in that fashion during this crisis and it is likely that people who have passed away from COVID who fit this description will be buried on the island in the coming days," a spokesperson for the city government told AFP.

The New York Times reported that around 25 people are being buried on Hart Island a day since the coronavirus crisis started last month. Before the outbreak it was 25 a week. New York has borne the brunt of America's pandemic, registering some 160,000 confirmed cases, more than any country outside of the United States, including Europe's hardest-hit nations of Spain and Italy.

The state's death toll is 7,844, around half of deaths across the US. The mile-long Hart island, which sits in a tidal estuary in the Bronx, became a potter's field in 1869 after the city purchased it from a private landholder to bury unknown and indigent residents. Approximately 1,200 burials take place every year. The dead are placed in pine coffins laid in trenches. There are no gravestones but small white markers indicate the trenches.

The site has long been run by the city's prisons department, and inmates from the nearby Rikers Island,

one of America's most notorious jails, are typically paid to perform the burials - although not during the coronavirus pandemic. "We are using contract labor," the spokesperson said. Still-born children and AIDS victims have also been buried on Hart Island over the years. The site was off-limits to the public for decades but in recent years relatives have been allowed to visit on designated days.

Late last year, New York's city council voted to transfer control of Hart Island to its parks department and make it easier for the public to visit. The island has served as a prison camp for captured Confederates in the US Civil War, a mental asylum, a sanatorium for tuberculosis sufferers, a youth detention center and even a Cold War-era missile base. It is often referred to as New York's "island of the dead" or "jail for the dead."

### Tributes

Clutching flowers, candles and photos, New York hospital workers paid tribute to colleagues who have died from the coronavirus since the beginning of the epidemic that has ravaged the city with a modest ceremony in the freezing cold Friday. Standing in front of the Mount Sinai Hospital Group in Manhattan, with a heart drawn in electric candles on the sidewalk and letters spelling out the word "HOPE", they made short speeches remembering the nurses, doctors and other

hospital workers who fell victim to the virus.

Many clutched photographs of the deceased. "We are here to honor, to pray and remember our fallen heroes," said nurse Joanne Mee Wah Loo to the small group of people who came to pay tribute despite the chill wind. No one knows exactly how many caregivers have died since the beginning of the epidemic in New York City, the most affected metropolis in the US, with nearly 95,000 people infected and more than 5,800 dead.

But was at Mount Sinai that Kious Kelly, the first New York nurse known to die of coronavirus, passed away at the end of March. "He was a good person, a hard worker, he loved what he was doing," says Lenore Leiba, a nurse who knew him and attended this tribute. "It is important to celebrate his life, their lives, and who they really were. They were not worried about their lives, they were thinking of others."

### 'Inhumane'

Tirzah Caraballo, surgical pathologist secretary at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, came to honor Christine Hunt, who died last Sunday after 35 years as a receptionist at the hospital. "She was our mom, our friend, our sister," Caraballo said. "She was denied a mask because she was a secretary. And this is why she's no longer with us."

In the early days of the pandemic, she explained, administrative staff were not allowed masks as they were reserved for nurses and doctors. She acknowledges there are now masks for everyone. "Yes, things have improved since, but we lost so many. It shouldn't have been a decision of who gets a mask and who doesn't. That's inhumane," she said.

The ceremony didn't last long. It began at 7:00 pm, the time when the applause for the caregivers in New York City resounded. A fire truck stopped and several firefighters took the time to applaud, as well as a few passers-by. Forty minutes later, it was over. "Thank you for coming," said Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, president of the New York State Nurses Association, who attended the ceremony. "We hope we don't have to do this again."

Meanwhile, any premature lifting of restrictions imposed to control the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to a fatal resurgence of the new coronavirus, the World Health Organization warned Friday. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that while some states were considering ways to ease the restrictions which have placed around half of humanity under some form of lockdown, doing so too quickly could be dangerous.

"I know that some countries are already planning the transition out of stay-at-home restrictions. WHO wants to see restrictions lifted as much as anyone," he told a virtual press conference in Geneva. "At the same time, lifting restrictions too quickly could lead to a deadly resurgence. The way down can be as dangerous as the way up if not managed properly. "WHO is working with affected countries on strategies for gradually and safely easing restrictions." — AFP

## Why have so many died in New York?

NEW YORK: New York has more coronavirus cases than any country and accounts for around half of all deaths in the United States. Why was it so badly hit and could its leaders have done anything differently?

### Was New York more vulnerable?

As of Friday, New York state has almost 160,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections, more than Europe's worst-hit countries of Spain and Italy, and over 7,800 deaths. Governor Andrew Cuomo has said repeatedly that density and number of foreign visitors made New York City, which has almost 93,000 confirmed cases, an ideal breeding ground for infectious disease. America's financial capital has 8.6 million inhabitants. There are 10,000 people per square kilometer, making it the densest city in the US.

Millions of commuters brush up against each other on its packed subway system every day, while keeping distance on its sometimes narrow sidewalks can be difficult. NYC gets more than 60 million tourists a year and is the entry point to America for many travelers, meaning anyone carrying the virus is likely to start infecting others there first. American geneticists estimate that it started spreading there from Europe

in February, before New York's first confirmed case on March 1.

The Big Apple is also characterized by massive socioeconomic inequality. Overcrowded, deprived areas - particularly in the Bronx and Queens, where many people already suffer health problems and lack medical care - have experienced the highest rate of infections. "New York City had all the preconditions that would support the idea that it was going to be hit very hard," said Irwin Redlener, public health professor and expert in disaster preparedness at Columbia University.

### Did officials underestimate risk?

On March 2, as the state's second case was confirmed in New Rochelle, just north of New York City, Cuomo said the health care system was the best "on the planet." "We don't even think it's going to be as bad as it was in other countries," he added. After much hesitation, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the closure of public schools, bars and restaurants from March 16. The governor ordered all non-essential businesses to close and residents to stay at home a week later on March 22.

Experts hesitate to say that they waited too long. "The mayor and the governor were being pushed and pulled by two opposing forces. "One was saying we have to close schools and restaurants as quickly as possible, the other saying there were lots of economic and social consequences of shutting down everything early," said Redlener. "Everyone was getting mixed messages, including from the federal government, from (President Donald) Trump," he added. — AFP

## Counting the dead difficult process

PARIS: The daily count of fatalities of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose official toll has now passed 100,000, is a sensitive business, with data often incomplete and differing methods between countries. The place of death, identifying the cause, and the time lags in collecting the information, all can impact on the count, which will be an underestimate, but essential to overseeing the development of the pandemic. Counting fatalities in this unprecedented health crisis is a "statistical challenge", according to the French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED).

### Hospitals, retirement homes

While Spain and South Korea count all deaths of those who have tested positive for COVID-19, whether they take place in hospital or elsewhere, it is not the case in every country. Iran, for example, only counts deaths in hospital. Until recently France and Britain did not include deaths in retirement homes in their official figures. They turned out to be considerable, now accounting for more than a third of the French toll.

In the United States, the counting method varies from one state to another: while New York State counts deaths in old

people's homes, California does not. Even in Italy, which has the world's highest death toll with more than 18,000 fatalities, only the biggest retirement home hotspots are accounted for, according to the Civil Protection.

### COVID-19, or another disease?

While some countries, such as Britain, Italy, South Korea and Spain include in their figures all the people who have tested positive for the coronavirus, even those who died of complications from a pre-existing condition, other countries are more selective. Iran excludes from its toll patients who have tested positive but die of another serious respiratory illness. In the United States, there are an increasing number of complaints from people whose relatives have died, officially of pneumonia, before COVID-19 tests were available or at a time they were difficult to get.

### Lack of tests, delays

During an epidemic, it takes time to gather and process information, even if attempts are made to speed things up, according to INED demographic experts Gilles Pison and France Mesle. "You need several weeks or several months to be able to precisely count all the deaths," they say.

In the United States, even if there has been no test carried out, death certificates have to mention whether COVID-19 is the "probable" cause of death. But these certificates take time to mount up and can not be taken into account for real time death tolls. In Spain, birth and death registers

and the number of funerals have pointed to an unusually high death rate than that from results from the official COVID-19 toll. Due to a lack of tests, Spain carries out very little post-mortem screening, so if a person was not screened before dying, he is not counted by the health authorities.

Data collected by the judicial authorities is less restrictive and reveals a much higher toll: legal authorities in the Spanish region of Castilla La Mancha, for example, recorded in March three times more deaths "due to COVID or suspected COVID" than those recorded by the health authorities. In Bergamo in Italy's region of Lombardy, in the first half of March, 108 more deaths were recorded compared to the same period last year, an increase of 193 percent, but only 31 were linked to the coronavirus.

### China, Iran accused of lying

Some countries have been accused of lying about their death statistics. In Iran the official figures have been disputed, particularly at the start of the epidemic, by officials in the provinces and parliamentarians. The official press agency IRNA has on occasion published higher death tolls than given by the authorities, tolls then denied by the government. Washington has in particular accused Tehran of covering up its real figures. As regards China, where the epidemic started in December, a secret report by US intelligence quoted by Bloomberg, accused Beijing of having intentionally under-estimated its toll. Iranian officials have also cast doubt on China's figures. — AFP

## International

# Turkey hospital sees hope as 93-yr-old patient discharged

## Health workers have been working day and night

**ISTANBUL:** Cheered by her doctors, 93-year-old Aye Gunduz was discharged from an Istanbul hospital after recovering from the novel coronavirus following 10 days of treatment. Her recovery from the disease that is killing chiefly the old offered some hope to health workers at Istanbul's Cerrahpasa Medical Faculty hospital as they battle the outbreak, which risks hitting Turkey hard. "It is promising because patients at this age and with chronic diseases are most of the time unable to recover because they are at highest risk from COVID-19," chief physician Zekayi Kutlubay told AFP. "A 93-year-old woman walking out of intensive care sound and safe is inspiring for us as well as for other coronavirus patients at her age."

Suffering from hypertension, Gunduz, a farmer from Turkey's south-eastern city of Batman, was taken to hospital on March 31 with complaints of a high fever and stomachache. She was discharged on Friday. "I wish a speedy recovery to everyone," the elderly woman said as she was helped by her grandson. Turkey has registered more than 47,000 COVID-19 cases - ranking it among the 10 most infected countries in the world. It has recorded over a thousand deaths and the disease is spreading fast.

“

I wish a speedy recovery to everyone

”

### 'Battlefield'

Facing a growing number of cases each day, Turkish health workers have been working day and night to treat patients. One doctor has died and more than 600 health workers have been infected so far. "Everyone is working arduously as if they are at war," Nuri Aydin, rector of Cerrahpasa Medical Faculty of Istanbul University, told AFP at the hospital. "The ambulance here is like it's not a workplace but rather a battlefield."

Istanbul, Turkey's largest city of about 15 million people, has emerged as the country's virus epicentre with more than 60 percent of the nationwide cases. The Cerrahpasa Medical Faculty has responded fast since the outbreak in mid-March, turning its operating theatres into intensive care units and creating special COVID-19 sections - separating ordinary patients from others infected with the deadly disease. The physicians are currently treating 210 patients with 30 others in intensive care. One building has been allocated to treat only medical workers.

### Staying 'hopeful'

Isolated from their own families, some of the health workers stay in dorms or hotels to avoid spreading the disease to their loved ones. "It's hard to put into words. They are making a superhuman effort," Aydin said. "There is no price to the service provided by health workers. They serve the humanity." Furkan Kurt, a 28-year-old physician associate, has been away from his parents for four weeks while he

lives in a rented flat.

"We are taking all the protective measures but it is not guaranteed that we will not get infected," he said. "The only hope we have is the beautiful days we will see. Being hopeful; there is nothing else we can do." After being diagnosed with COVID-19, some patients are caught unprepared without their mobile phones or other personal belongings.

"On Saturday (when) I was on duty we received a patient at the emergency service. He didn't have anything, neither slippers nor pyjamas. We addressed their needs and give our mobiles if needed," said head nurse Merve Pirecioglu. "When

tions, in which the paramount social role is allotted to men and gender-based violence is considered a norm. Nearly one in two people find it acceptable for a spouse to beat their intimate partner, according to the UN Population Fund. "I often manage to satisfy him sexually. But there are times when I'm too tired and that is when blows just come flying," said Soarolahy, after she had cooked dinner and fetched water for her six children.

In Madagascar, one of the poorest countries in the world, the cast-iron role of tradition is having a disastrous impact on women, said Simon Ravelojaona, coordinator of CECJ, a charity supporting victims of violence in the southern region of Ambovombe. "Some women feel neglected if they are not beaten by their husbands," he said. People "don't consider women as full members of society," said Ravelojaona, listing examples of humiliations women ordinarily suffer.

In Madagascar "a woman has no right to

wars and uprisings, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where most Christians believe Jesus was crucified and resurrected, has not been closed over Easter for at least a century, according to Palestinian historian Johnny Mansour.

The Sepulchre is considered the holiest site in Christianity, but Friday's morning mass was celebrated behind closed doors. Usually thousands mark Jesus's crucifixion on Good Friday with a procession marking the 14 Stations of the Cross, the route Christians believe Jesus walked while carrying his cross before being put to death. But this year, only four faithful retraced his footsteps under the watchful eye of Israeli police, with the narrow cobbled streets of the old City largely deserted.

Police were out in large numbers monitoring and enforcing the country's strict social distancing rules. Officers handed out a fine to one journalist who was not respecting the two-metre distancing rule, AFP journalists at the scene said. Bitar, who is in her sixties, finds it "depressing" she will not be able to celebrate Easter in church. Israel - which occupied east Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967 and later

funding to boost its battered economy, he said. "If Europe doesn't intervene soon the multiplication of mafioso money that's already in Germany, France, Spain, Holland, Belgium will be unrestrained," Saviano told journalists on Thursday.

Saviano, best known for his non-fiction book "Gomorra" about southern Italy's Camorra clan, is an expert on mafia groups and how they have successfully expanded beyond drugs and other illegal activity to worm their way into otherwise legitimate businesses and sectors across the world. At the most basic level, criminal organizations are providing groceries for the poorest Italians, Saviano said.

Moreover, in Italy's southern capital Naples, moneylenders, on orders of the Camorra, have cancelled

nating pro-Iran groups in Iraq. Kawtharani is a senior official of the Lebanese Shiite movement in Iraq, "and has taken over some of the political coordination of Iran-aligned paramilitary groups formerly organized by Qassim Suleimani," the US State Department said in a statement.

Suleimani, a powerful leader of the Revolutionary Guard, the ideological army of Tehran, was killed in early January in an American strike targeting him in Baghdad. According to Washington, Kawtharani,



**ISTANBUL:** Medical staff cheer as Aye Gunduz, 93 years old, who was treated for COVID-19, is escorted to be discharged from the Istanbul University's Cerrahpasa medical faculty hospital after 10 days of treatment on Friday. —AFP

they first hear the diagnosis, patients are naturally panicking. We advise them that this is nothing to fear. With healthy nutrition and morale as well as heeding isolation rules, it can be overcome."

### 'More motivated'

Omer Faruk Bilici, 34, a practitioner at another hospital, who caught the coronavirus, was discharged from Cerrahpasa after 20 days of treatment including in intensive care. "I know what it's like to be shut in a six-square-metre room," he told AFP. "This scared my other colleagues who are at risk like me. I've seen nobody's face for 20 days." Bilici hopes to resume his duties as soon as

express herself. In case of a divorce she gets nothing from her husband. She inherits nothing. That's what women's life is," he said. Unsurprisingly, just five percent of assault cases end up in court, according to Ravelojaona. Resigned to their fate, feeling shameful and caving in to social pressure or ignorant of their rights, most abused women simply do not lay charges. "At the gendarmerie, you have to bribe to sue someone," explained Sourayah Banou Vololomihanga, who heads the CECJ.

### New law

After much heated public debate, Madagascar last year adopted a law punishing gender-based violence such as "physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence within the family... including traditional practices harmful to both sexes". Flouting the law attracts sentences of between six months and five years in prison and fines of up to \$270 - a punishment that has been welcomed by campaigners. —AFP



**JERUSALEM:** A Christian pilgrim stands in front of the closed door of the Holy Sepulchre Church in the Old City on Good Friday amid the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. —AFP

annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community - has confirmed more than 10,000 coronavirus infections, with 92 dead. —AFP

interest on debt, he said. "For what purpose? For favors," he said. That could be votes, or allowing someone to put their name on a contract as a front for the mafia, he added. Saviano, who currently lives in New York, has been under police protection after receiving death threats following the release of "Gomorra".

The book, which details how the Neapolitan crime syndicate Camorra profits from multiple economic sectors from fashion to waste recycling, was later turned into a film and a TV series. Saviano's comments came the same day an opinion piece in Germany's Die Welt newspaper warned that if Chancellor Angela Merkel did not "stand firm" and resist Italy's appeals for so-called coronabonds, or shared eurozone debt, the mafia would benefit. —AFP

already on the US blacklist for terrorism since 2013, "facilitates the actions of groups operating outside the control of the Government of Iraq that have violently suppressed protests" or "attacked foreign diplomatic missions". The State Department, which considers Hezbollah a terrorist organization, added that the official promoted the interests of the group in Iraq by participating in "training, funding, political and logistical support" of Shiite insurgent groups. —AFP

## In Madagascar, tradition trumps women's rights

**AMBOVOMBE, Madagascar:** "When my husband is under too much stress, he takes it out on me," said Maharo Soarolahy, a 34-year-old Madagascan villager. Domestic violence is an evil that exists in every society. But in patriarchal Madagascar, the problem is entrenched and seems bound to worsen in the coronavirus lockdown. A third of women here say they have suffered gender-based violence at least once in their lives, according to a 2012 study monitoring UN development goals.

Half of such attacks have occurred at home. The high statistics are rooted in Madagascar's tradi-

## In Jerusalem, Christians mark somber Easter

**JERUSALEM:** Eggs on the table and a toy rabbit on the dresser - with a few decorations, Palestinian Christian Sawsan Bitar attempts to salvage some normality from an Easter overshadowed by coronavirus. In the Christian quarter of Jerusalem's Old City that Bitar calls home, roads are deserted and most shops have been closed for two weeks. All cultural sites in the Holy Land are shuttered, regardless of their religious affiliation, as authorities seek to forestall the spread of the deadly respiratory disease.

Christians will be prevented from congregating for the Easter service, whether today - as in the case of Bitar and fellow Catholics - or a week later on April 19 in the case of the Orthodox. Despite

## Mafia buying food for Italy's poor to exert more control

**ROME:** Criminal organizations in Italy are distributing food and ordering interest-free lending to the needy to try to extend their influence, Italian anti-mafia author Roberto Saviano has warned. Italy's mafia groups are also poised to snatch up struggling businesses as the country - which is in crisis over the deadly coronavirus pandemic - awaits European

## \$10m reward for Hezb boss info

**WASHINGTON:** The United States announced on Friday a 10 million-dollar reward for "any information on the activities, networks and associates" of Muhammad Kawtharani, a Lebanese Hezbollah commander accused of playing a key role in coordi-

## Johnson walking in hospital as UK sees record death toll

**LONDON:** Prime Minister Boris Johnson was able to walk in hospital on Friday some 24 hours after leaving intensive care treatment for COVID-19, as Britain recorded nearly 1,000 daily deaths from the virus for the first time. "The Prime Minister has been able to do short walks, between periods of rest, as part of the care he is receiving to aid his recovery," a Downing Street spokesman said. "His thoughts are with those affected by this terrible disease," he added.

Johnson left intensive care at London's St Thomas' Hospital on Thursday evening, three days after being admitted due to his then-worsening condition. News of the 55-year-old's improvement contrasted with the sobering release of the latest official statistics, showing Britain's COVID-19 death toll grew by 980 in the latest 24-hour period, its highest yet. It brings the total number of fatalities from coronavirus in UK hospitals to nearly 9,000, while the number of confirmed cases in the country climbed close to 74,000.

That is thought to reflect only a fraction of the actual number of people infected because not everyone has been tested for the virus. "We never forget that behind this number, behind each one is a name, a loss and a family that will never be the same again," Health Secretary Matt Hancock said of the grim death toll at a daily briefing. "We all share a responsibility to tackle this virus, first and foremost by staying at home," he added, as Britain was set to bask in high temperatures over the Easter weekend.

### 'Social distancing'

However, fears are growing about the indirect impact of the unprecedented nationwide lockdown introduced on March 23 to try to stop COVID-19's spread. Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty has reportedly stressed in the government's daily coronavirus response meetings that an economic downturn will have a broad impact on people's health and finances. There could be less taxpayer funds for the state-run National Health Service (NHS), and people may not be able to access regular treatments or vaccinations. Increased risk of domestic violence and depression was also cited.

However, the government has insisted the stringent social distancing measures that have brought the economy to a near-standstill are essential to avoid the NHS becoming overburdened. It has also stressed there were signs the lockdown could be starting to have a positive impact, though ministers have cautioned it was too soon to say when it may be lifted. "We don't have enough information yet to be able to make any changes to the social distancing arrangements," Hancock said.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who has been deputizing for Johnson, led the daily meeting of senior ministers Friday ahead of a formal review of the lockdown next week. Implemented for an initial three weeks, the measures are likely to remain in place until at least the end of the month. —AFP

## International

# Drowned out by pandemic, a muted victory for Biden

## Biden offers warm words to Sanders during an internet livestream

WASHINGTON: Barack Obama celebrated the kick-off of his "historic" White House challenge before thousands of ecstatic supporters. Hillary Clinton also marked her "milestone," as the first woman nominee of a major US party, to thunderous applause. And what of Joe Biden? The resurgent Democrat has been denied the climactic rollout that his predecessors enjoyed.

Like most Americans he is under stay-at-home orders due to coronavirus, and therefore marked becoming the party's de facto 2020 nominee this week with a press release and comments broadcast online from his basement. Obama delivered the best of his soaring rhetoric in June 2008 in a passionate speech upon clinching the Democratic Party's nomination, a barrier-busting feat for a man who would become the nation's first black president.

He told a packed Minnesota arena that the moment marked "the end of one historic journey with the beginning of another." It was the launch pad for an unprecedented and victorious campaign, a "huge celebration," his former advisor Dan Pfeiffer recalled on a recent podcast. Biden's conquering moment in the national spotlight has not materialized. Some 15 state primaries have been postponed, and there is no triumphant rally to send him off on his challenge against President Donald Trump.

An anxiety-provoking pandemic does not lend itself to campaign jubilees. Biden, the 77-year-old former vice president, clinched victory in the Democratic primaries more swiftly than both Obama and Clinton, after his lone remaining rival Bernie

Sanders quit the race on Wednesday. That evening, with his gaze fixed on the camera and his library bookshelves as a backdrop in his home studio, Biden offered warm words to Sanders before quickly turning to voters' concerns about the pandemic during an internet livestream.

He has since taken to Twitter to discuss the crisis, called on Americans to help him defeat Trump on November 3, and put forward questions to the president ahead of his daily coronavirus task force briefings. But Biden has struggled to crack through in the national media landscape. "It's certainly a highly unusual time and it has meant that all campaigns are on mute," American University professor of government David Lublin told AFP Friday. "You're competing not just with the president, but also with the international crisis of COVID-19" that is dominating American interest and headlines, he added. Biden's campaign "gets less attention."

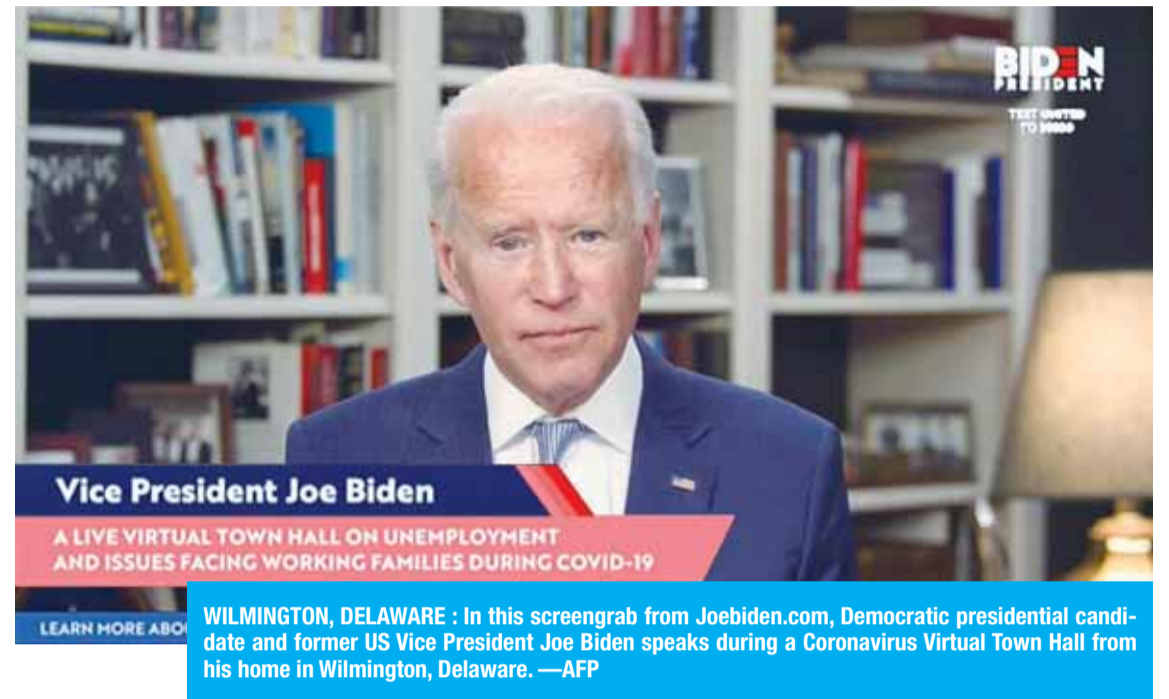


### Trump hosts lengthy daily press conferences

#### Biden can 'lay low'

Could Biden not engage more, such as meeting - at appropriate social distance - with first responders or medical personnel crucial to fighting the outbreak? No doubt he and his team "are continuing to think about what he could be doing" campaign-wise, Lublin said. Biden expects to earn the endorsement of Obama, who remains very popular among Democrats and whose rare public political pronouncements carry significant weight.

Meanwhile the presumptive nominee gives interviews, usually about the pandemic and its effects on Americans, from home. He said early this month that



the clips have been seen by some 20 or 30 million people. Trump, for his part, is front and center as he hosts lengthy daily press conferences on the crisis that are broadcast across major US news outlets.

But the relentless exposure has the potential to backfire. The Wall Street Journal, not among Trump's usual detractors, this week attacked the "wasted briefings" as self-congratulatory ramblings and "boring shows" of the president jousting with journalists. By contrast, the virus crisis allows Biden, a political veteran whose own life has been shaken by tragedy, to highlight key strengths, including "competence and knowledge about how government works, but

also empathy," Lublin added.

Already a known quantity to most Americans, Biden benefits from a slight lead over Trump in head-to-head polls, and perhaps a lack of exposure would be to his advantage now, argued Miles Coleman, a political analyst at University of Virginia. "He already has universal name recognition, and like a sports team that's ahead and trying to run out the clock, it may be in his interest to lay low," Coleman said. Like Trump, Biden is not without his faults. "It seems that the Democrats would do better if they made this election a referendum on Trump," Coleman said, "rather than a choice between two candidates." —AFP

## Burundi shrugs off pandemic, citing 'God's protection'

BUJUMBURA: In Burundi, the delayed arrival of coronavirus was attributed to "God's protection". Now that the country has three cases, authorities again see divine intervention at work and little reason to interrupt everyday life. The ruling party has sought to reassure Burundians they need not worry about the deadly pandemic sweeping the globe, allowing life to proceed as normal and even pressing ahead with a presidential election scheduled for May 20.

"Do not be afraid. God loves Burundi and if there are people who have tested positive, it is so that God may manifest his power in Burundi," said General Evariste Ndayishimiye, the presidential candidate for the ruling CNDD-FDD party.

"If there have been three cases here... I'm told they are doing well, and know the coronavirus is killing people everywhere else," he told supporters at a political gathering last week, to hearty applause. While strict lockdowns have brought life to a halt in cities across Africa and the world, restaurants and bars remain open in Burundi, with authorities ruling out similar curbs on citizens' freedoms.

Weddings and funerals are proceeding, thousands of faithful are flocking to churches and mosques, and bustling markets remain open and trading in the landlocked country of 11 million. Political life also charges ahead, with Ndayishimiye and his main rival for the presidency, Agathon Rwasa of the CNL party, on the campaign trail and staging competing rallies.

Even more astonishing still, Burundi remains one of the few countries on Earth to keep its first and second division football leagues running—just with spectators required to wash their hands and subject to a temperature check. But not all share the government's faith and optimism.

"Everyone is afraid we're going to wake up with an explosion of cases in the country, even if we Burundians are 'God's favorites,'" said a resident in Bujumbura, the main city. "We're trying to take precautions."

#### Elections at any cost?

Some banks are enforcing social distancing measures and hand-washing stations have been introduced at the entrance to many shops and restaurants. The government has also taken some measures, broadcasting public health messages on television and radio, while the international airport in Bujumbura was closed three weeks ago.

Its land borders have been shut to Rwanda—which placed its population under strict confinement on March 21, prohibiting all but the most necessary movement outdoors—and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Only its border with Tanzania remains open, an economic lifeline allowing for heavy vehicles and imports to pass.

The government said 675 people were in quarantine across Burundi as of Wednesday. "We have documented that these containment sites are overcrowded and unsanitary, which increases the risk of an uncontrolled spread of the virus," Lewis Mudge, head of Central Africa at the rights group Human Rights Watch, told AFP. "When quarantine is imposed, the government is obliged to guarantee access to food, water, housing and health care," he said. —AFP

## Florida's nightmare: Hurricane during the pandemic

MIAMI: What could be worse than a pandemic overwhelming healthcare systems and causing global economic collapse? Florida knows the answer: a pandemic that rages into hurricane season, which is already on the horizon and causing the Sunshine State to dramatically update its storm preparations. "COVID is bad, a hurricane is bad. If you combine the two, it is greater than the sum," said Bryan Koon, who until 2017 directed the Florida Division of Emergency Management, and who is currently an independent advisor on emergencies.

"The impact of a hurricane during a COVID environment will be worse than either of them even combined. It will be a multiplier effect, not an additive effect," he said. That worst-case scenario is looking increasingly likely. The United States will certainly still be battling the coronavirus by the time the Atlantic hurricane season begins on June 1, even though storms have hit in the past up to two months earlier than that.

Meteorologists at Colorado University, as well as at Accuweather, are already predicting that this

## Death casts dark shadow over Spanish town

TOMELLOSO, Spain: After burying five elderly people in one morning, the local priest can finally remove his gloves, a job all too familiar in this central Spanish town blighted by death.

These days, they no longer publish death notices in Tomelloso, a town of 36,000 located in the arid plains of La Mancha, about two hours south of Madrid. Before the epidemic took hold, it was a peaceful town visited by tourists following in the footsteps of Don Quixote, the delusional would-be knight in Miguel de Cervantes' 1605 novel.

Known for its vineyards, Tomelloso would normally be gearing up for its end-of-April festival celebrating the Virgin of the Vines featuring floats, fanfares and carts pulled by mules in vibrantly colorful regalia. But things this

## Boy from isolated Amazon tribe dies after being infected

BRASILIA: A Yanomami indigenous boy has died after contracting the coronavirus, authorities in Brazil said Friday, raising fears for the Amazon tribe, which is known for its vulnerability to disease. The 15-year-old boy, the first Yanomami to be diagnosed with the virus, was hospitalized a week ago at an intensive care unit in Boa Vista, the capital of the northern state of Roraima, officials said. He died of severe respiratory complications on Thursday night, the Brazilian health ministry said in a statement.

Isolated indigenous peoples in the Amazon rainforest are particularly vulnerable to diseases brought in from the outside world, and a Yanomami rights group said the boy had come in to contact with "many" other indigenous people after he began showing symptoms. The Hutukara Association blamed "inadequate medical care" for the boy's

year will see a more active than usual hurricane season, saying that between July and November there could be four major hurricanes sweeping in with winds of more than 110 miles per hour (180 kilometers per hour). "We're preparing for the worst obviously," said Florida Governor Rick de Santis on Thursday. "Hopefully we don't have to deal with a hurricane. But I think we have to assume that we're going to have one."

#### 'Hard decisions'

Residents of the state are well versed in what to do when a hurricane threatens: stock up on supplies, board up windows, or evacuate their homes and shops and get out of the way of the storm if it is a bad one. Those who cannot afford to do so are evacuated in buses and lodged in shelters. When they return home afterwards, they have to deal with the clean-up and repairs.

The question facing Florida's leaders now is how to maintain that strategy of mass evacuation this year, when people are being cautioned to practice social distancing? How will shelters be run in an era of highly infectious deadly disease, when the usual protocol is to put people side by side on cot beds in school gyms? None of that will be possible this year, experts warn. "Your friends and your family may not want you at their home because they're trying not to get sick," said Koon. "So bringing in a

lot of extra folks may not work."

"Hotels may not be open. Hotels are closing because of low occupancy. I don't know how you're going to open up large shelters, you can't fill a gymnasium with people right now. So that's going to be problematic." "People are going to have to make hard decisions," he said. "Would I rather stay here and risk my house with a roof blown off my house or the storm surge flooding out my house? Or would I rather go get in the car and drive somewhere and risk being exposed to COVID-19?" —AFP

month of his life, except for during rare video calls with the help of the nurses. Death notices are no longer put up here, says Alcolea, who believes the number of dead is higher than that given by the town hall. —AFP

death, saying he went more than two weeks without a proper diagnosis from the time he first went to the hospital with respiratory symptoms.

It called on the authorities to track them down and help them undergo testing and self-isolation. It also urged the government to crack down on illegal gold miners on indigenous lands, believed to be the source of the contagion. A major outbreak among indigenous communities would amount to a "genocide," said Katia Brasil, editor at Amazonia Real news agency, which specializes in issues facing Amazonian peoples.

"This disease is very dangerous for us," said Dario Yawarioma, a Yanomami leader. "It's a very sad day for the Yanomami." Brazil is home to an estimated 800,000 indigenous people from more than 300 ethnic groups. The Yanomami, who are known for their face paint and intricate piercings, number around 27,000. Largely isolated from the outside world until the mid-20th century, they were devastated by diseases such as measles and malaria in the 1970s.

The boy was studying to become a teacher in the indigenous reserve of Boqueirão, said the Hutukara Association. He was the third indigenous person in Brazil to die after contracting the novel



PANAMA CITY: In this file photo, people wait for breakfast as they and others seek safety in a shelter as Hurricane Michael approaches in Panama City, Florida. What could be worse than the pandemic that is disrupting lives, collapsing health systems and destroying the world economy? —AFP



TOMELLOSO: These days, they no longer publish death notices in Tomelloso, a town of 36,000 located in the arid plains of La Mancha, about two hours south of Madrid. —AFP



Isolated indigenous peoples in the Amazon rainforest are particularly vulnerable to diseases brought in from the outside world. —AFP

coronavirus, according to newspaper Globo. The others were from the Borari and Muru ethnic groups. At least eight indigenous patients from five ethnicities have tested positive for the virus, according to Globo. Brazil is the country hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic in Latin America, with 1,000 deaths so far. —AFP



## Business

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**10** Apple, Google team up on virus 'contact tracing' by smartphone**11** When to reopen US economy 'biggest decision' of presidency, says Trump**11** Furloughed staff in Sweden retrain to help hospitals

RIYADH: A handout photo released by the Saudi Energy Ministry on Friday shows Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman (third left) chairing a virtual extraordinary meeting of G20 Oil ministers, in the capital Riyadh. — AFP

# G20 struggles to finalize oil output cuts

## Final communique glosses over simmering divisions over energy policy

RIYADH: Top oil producers struggled to finalize production cuts during a virtual summit held by G20 energy ministers on Friday, despite US President Donald Trump's mediation efforts to end a standoff with Mexico. The final G20 communique appeared to gloss over simmering divisions over energy policy, making no mention of output cuts and pledging simply to ensure oil "market stability" amid the coronavirus pandemic. Mexico was the lone holdout in a record OPEC-led agreement reached a day earlier that would see output slashed by 10 million barrels per day in May and June followed by a gradual reduction in cuts until April 2022.



### Trump mediates to end standoff with Mexico

The standoff had cast doubt on efforts to bolster oil prices, pushed to near two-decade lows by the demand-sapping pandemic and a Saudi-Russia price war that rattled global markets. The subsequent G20 meeting-hosted by Riyadh-was expected to seal the deal more widely with non-OPEC countries in the group including Mexico, the United States and Canada.



RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman chairing a virtual extraordinary meeting of G20 Oil ministers in Riyadh on Friday. — AFP

But there was no sign of an agreement in the group's final statement. "We commit to ensure that the energy sector continues to make a full, effective contribution to overcoming COVID-19 and powering the subsequent global recovery," said the statement released early yesterday. "We commit to take all the necessary and immediate measures to ensure energy market stability."

There was no sign that countries such as Canada—the world's fourth largest producer—had committed to specific cuts, with Natural Resources Minister Seamus O'Regan saying the G20 summit "didn't discuss numbers". Under the OPEC deal, Mexico was expected to cut production by 400,000 barrels per day but it resisted the suggestion.

Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said he had reached an agreement with Trump to cut production by only 100,000 bpd. He added that Trump had agreed to cut US production by 250,000 bpd "as compensation" for Mexico.

Trump later confirmed the deal, saying the United States will "make up the difference" by cutting "some US production". The G20 statement was silent on the Mexico-US deal.

#### 'Ghostly specter'

The tentative production cut deal, which hinges on Mexico's consent for it to take effect, marked a possible end of the price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Both oil producers took on the lion's share of the cuts as they agreed to slash output to around 8.5 million bpd, according to Bloomberg News.

"Our global energy systems, from producers to consumers, is in uncharted territory and it is our responsibility to find the path forward," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told the G20 gathering. "Saudi Arabia urges all G20 members, including Mexico, as well as invited countries to take appropriate and extraordinary measures to stabilize market conditions."

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak also urged the G20 ministers to act in a spirit of "partnership and solidarity", according to a local television station. OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo warned the global crude storage capacity would be exhausted before the end of May because of a supply glut and a "jaw-dropping" drop in demand.

"There is a ghostly spectre encircling the oil industry," Barkindo told the ministers.

"We need to act now, so we can come out of (the) other side of this pandemic with the strength of our industry intact." The impact of the tentative deal on prices was not immediately clear as the global oil markets were shut on Friday for the Easter weekend.

But Stephen Innes, an analyst at AxiCorp, said the supply cuts were "less than the market hoped for" given the hit to demand from coronavirus lockdowns throughout the world. "The deal currently tabled will only partially offset oil price distress," he said. "The storm clouds for oil prices will only completely dissipate when lockdowns are lifted."

#### 'Deep abyss'

Rystad Energy also said the cuts were not enough to restore market equilibrium. "The proposed 10 million bpd cut for May and June will keep the world from physically testing the limits of storage capacity and save prices from falling into a deep abyss," the energy research firm said. "But it will still not restore the desired market balance." Oil prices have slumped since the beginning of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Compounding the problem, Riyadh and Moscow had both ramped up output in a bid to hold on to market share and undercut US shale producers. —AFP

## US loan program for small businesses yet to take off

NEW YORK: A week after its launch, a giant federal lending program to support small businesses devastated by coronavirus shutdowns is still struggling to completely get off the ground.

Officials in President Donald Trump's administration and large banks have pointed to impressive early loan figures from the \$350 billion Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

But while important sums have indeed reached some companies in need, other small businesses have been unable to apply for loans, as computer problems dog Washington officials and large banks prioritize some clients over others. Some hard-hit firms have criticized the design of the program, which assumes a fairly quick economic bounce back that may be unrealistic in regions where the coronavirus outbreak has been severe.

"We don't know of anyone who has received funding yet," said Mavis Early, executive director of the Greater New Orleans Hotel & Lodging Association. Jim Friedlander, chief executive at Arrangements Abroad, which organizes vacations, said his banks are processing some PPP loans, but have told him they are not ready for him to apply. "I'm watching all this money disappear to other people, and I'm worried that there will be nothing left for us," he said.

#### Overwhelming volume

The PPP program was included in the \$2.2 trillion US relief law enacted in March after government-imposed shutdowns to combat the coronavirus shuttered countless stores, restaurants, cafes and hotels. Businesses with fewer than 500 employees can apply for the loans, which cover eight weeks of payroll or rent and convert to grants if companies maintain their employees or rehire laid-off workers by June 30.

As of Thursday morning, the Small Business Administration (SBA), which is guaranteeing the loans from private lenders, had received more than 450,000 applications and approved loans for nearly \$118 billion, an agency spokeswoman said. That's impressive considering that in all of 2019, the agency approved 58,000 loans worth \$28 billion, according to an annual report.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told CNBC on Thursday that while banks "have been overwhelmed," they "will get to all" companies that need funds.

Mnuchin has asked Congress to provide another

\$250 billion for the program in the next round of federal stimulus. Questions over big banks' willingness to step up arose this week after a senior SBA official in Nevada castigated banks that took federal bailout funds during the global financial crisis in 2008 for dragging their feet on PPP because of questions over paperwork.

#### Data troubles

But a big bottleneck has been the outgunned information technology system at SBA, which has sputtered repeatedly over the last week, freezing banks' loan officers out as they attempt to manually enter data. When the SBA's E-tran system—built for a much smaller volume—functions properly, entering applicant data can take 10-15 minutes, a bank official said on condition of anonymity.

But the computer program has functioned only "intermittently" since the PPP was launched, the official said. Jeanne Crain, chief executive of Bremer Bank in Minnesota, said despite the technical issues, the program's launch had gone well considering the scale of the mission.

The St. Paul-based lender has received 3,200 PPP applications and garnered approval for 1,200 applications worth \$470 million in loans, Crain said. Bremer has already disbursed \$118 million to clients in PPP funds. "It's going pretty well based on a system that's being designed and built in real-time," Crain said. "The circumstances are extraordinary."

Large banks say they are moving as quickly as they can. "To manage volume," Citi is accepting applications "in phases," a Citigroup spokesman said, adding that the bank has also "created a form on our website for clients to register their interest." The Federal Reserve granted Wells Fargo a temporary exemption from an asset cap imposed on it in punishment for creating fake customer accounts to allow it to boost its PPP lending. "We've gotten 170,000 expressions of interest and we're working to assist our customers through the PPP," a Wells Fargo spokesman said.

#### Design flaw?

Aside from the information technology issues, some sectors have said the PPP is poorly designed for their needs. Andrew Rigie, executive director at the New York City Hospitality Alliance, said requiring companies to staff up back to pre-crisis levels within two months was unrealistic.

"Restaurants and bars do not even know if they will be permitted to reopen in June, let alone be open long enough to know what our staffing levels will be," Rigie wrote in Forbes.

Rigie hopes Congress revises the program in the next round of legislation. "The PPP needs to be amended... in order to give the hospitality industry support," he told AFP in an email. "We need grants, not loans and more debt." —AFP

## Business

# Apple, Google team up on virus 'contact tracing' by smartphone

## Rare collaboration between the two Silicon Valley giants

WASHINGTON: Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google said on Friday that they will work together to create contact tracing technology that aims to slow the spread of the coronavirus by allowing users to opt into logging other phones they have been near.

The rare collaboration between the two Silicon Valley companies, whose operating systems power 99 percent of the world's smartphones, could accelerate usage of apps that aim to get potentially infected individuals into testing or quarantine more quickly and reliably than existing systems in much of the world. Such tracing will play a vital role in managing the virus once lockdown orders end, health experts say. The planned technology also throws the weight of the tech leaders into a global conflict between privacy advocates who favor a decentralized system to trace contacts and governments in Europe and Asia pushing centralized approaches that have technical weaknesses and potentially let governments know with whom people associate.



Users can opt into logging other phones

"With Apple and Google, you get all the public health functions you need with a decentralized and privacy-friendly app," said Michael Veale, University College London legal lecturer involved in European contact tracing system DP3T. Centralized solutions such as those proposed in Britain and Germany would no longer work under the new technology, he said. To be effective, the Silicon Valley system would require millions of people to opt in to the system, trusting the technology companies' safeguards, as well as smooth

oversight by public health systems.

The companies said they started developing the technology two weeks ago to streamline technical differences between Apple's iPhones and Google's Android that had stymied the interoperability of some existing contact tracing apps.

Under the plan, users' phones with the technology will emit unique Bluetooth signals. Phones within about six feet can record anonymous information about encounters.

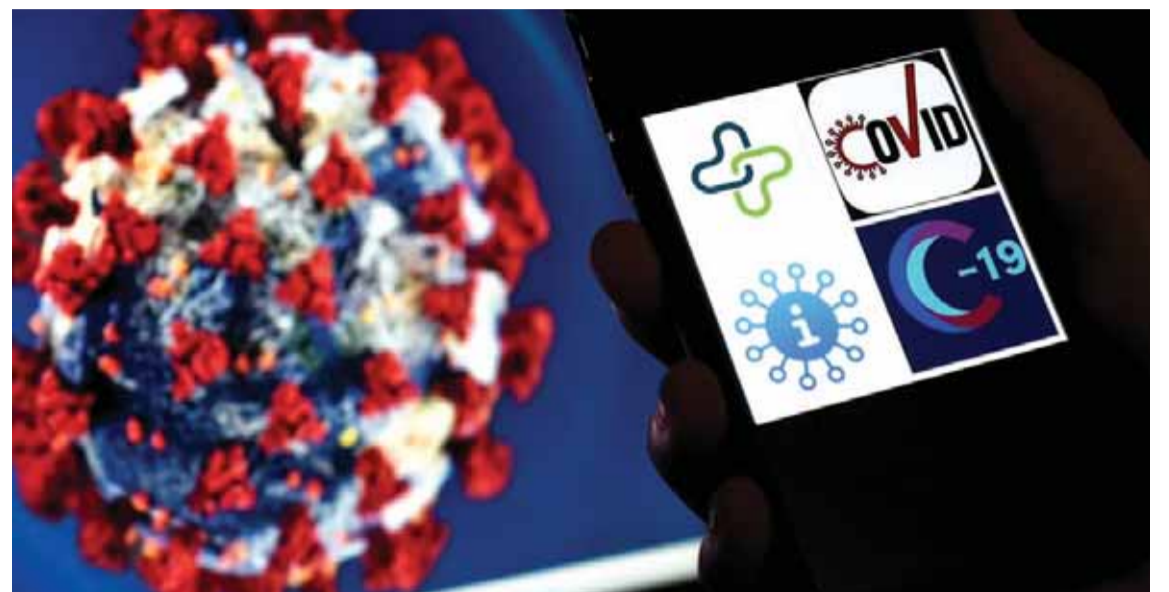
People who test positive for the virus can opt to send an encrypted list of phones they came near to Apple and Google, which will trigger alerts to potentially exposed users to seek more information. Public health authorities would need to sign off that an individual has tested positive before they can send on the data. The logs will be scrambled to keep infected individuals' data anonymous, even to Apple, Google and contact tracing app makers, the companies said. Apple and Google said their contact tracing system will not track GPS location.

"To their credit, Apple and Google have announced an approach that appears to mitigate the worst privacy and centralization risks," Jennifer Granick, surveillance and cybersecurity counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, said.

She added that the companies could have more safeguards such as specifying that contact tracing features would not be used beyond the current pandemic.

### Not a substitute for testing

Apple and Google plan to release software tools in mid-May to contact tracing apps that they and public health authorities approve. Apps including Private Kit and CoEpi, which had contacted Apple and Google for help a month ago, said the new tools would enable them to drop potentially unreliable workarounds. Apps will be able to focus on developing a simple interface for users and healthcare workers, with Apple and Google handling Bluetooth and privacy



issues, said Dana Lewis, a lead developer of contact tracing app CoEpi. However, Apple and Google plan to release software updates in the coming months so that users do not need a separate app to log nearby phones. Google said the tools and updates would not be available where its services are blocked, such as in China or on unofficial Android devices. Apple will distribute the technology as an update to its iPhone operating system.

A median of 76 percent of people in United States and other advanced economies have smartphones, according to a Pew Research Center study last year, compared with a median of 45 percent in emerging economies. Governments worldwide have been scrambling to adopt software meant to improve the normally labor-intensive process of contact tracing, in which health officials go to recent contacts of an infected person and ask them to self-quarantine or get tested.

"It's very interesting, but a lot of people worry

about it in terms of a person's freedom. We're going to take a look at that, a very strong look at that." US President Donald Trump said at a press briefing when asked about Apple and Google's efforts. Health experts have credited extensive testing and contact tracing with slowing the spread of the virus in nations such as South Korea, but limited testing has held back contact tracing in the United States. For instance, New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene told Reuters on Friday that tracing will not be helpful until the virus is controlled, with apps potentially proving expedient when someone has crossed paths with many people.

"This isn't a substitute for testing - you need to know who has it - but it produces actionable results so people can act responsibly, self-isolate and reduce anxiety in the community as a whole," said Al-Gidari, a Stanford University law school lecturer and previously long-time external counsel to Google. — Reuters

## Great Depression: 1930s economic nightmare

PARIS: The Great Depression, whose spectre hovers amid the economic turbulence caused by the coronavirus pandemic, started with an unprecedented stock market crash in the United States in 1929. The October 1929 crash plunged the world into a decade-long economic and financial crisis, which caused years of mass unemployment and misery across capitalist economies. The depression also saw the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, where Adolf Hitler was elected in 1933, which heralded the onset of World War II.

### Wall Street crash

The 1929 crisis, symbolized by the Wall Street crash, was caused by a slowdown in American growth, protectionist measures by the main world powers and tensions in Europe following World War I. The 1929 crash followed a speculative bubble during which millions of ordinary Americans had been persuaded to buy shares, often in property investments, that turned out to be worthless.

On Thursday, October 24 the New York stock exchange went into free fall as the number of traders seeking to dump the dud shares was so great, and the day became known as "Black Thursday." Panic set in and the Dow Jones lost 22.6 percent of its value over several hours, and thousands of investors were ruined.

Overall, between \$7-9 billion went up in thin air in a single day. The stock exchange collapsed 30 percent in October and 50 percent in November. In the following years it sank even further. Countless Americans saw most or all of their wealth evaporate. The "Roaring Twenties", as the period had come to be called, screeched to an abrupt end.

"Black Thursday" had a domino effect in financial markets around the world, starting with London. Europe was badly hit, as American banks demanded the immediate repayment of loans given for post World War I reconstruction.

### Recession, mass unemployment

What had started with bad days on the stock markets quickly turned into an intense international economic crisis, the worst the capitalist world has ever seen. In the spring of 1930, the United States entered recession. Industrial production dropped by half from 1929 to 1932 and the jobless rate shot up to 24 percent from 3.1 percent. By March 1933, half of the US working population was out of a job — 15 million people.

Due to the economic power of the United States, the Great Depression infected the rest of the western economy. In France, industrial production fell from the benchmark of 100 in 1929 to 89 in 1932 and only recovered in 1939. The number of jobless went from 12,000 in late 1930 to nearly 175,000 six years later. With the United States mired in crisis for nearly four years, new Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt put forward a "New Deal", aimed at boosting the economy to counter the collapsing income of farmers, falling prices and industrial production and unemployment. —AFP

## Uber to provide 'tens of millions' of masks in safety move

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber said Thursday it planned to give out "tens of millions" of masks to drivers worldwide as part of its efforts to boost safety amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The global ridesharing giant said it shipped its first order of masks to drivers in New York City, which is the current US epicenter of the outbreak, and expects another half-million that will go to other US cities. The move follows updated guidance from health authorities in the US

and elsewhere to use face coverings as an added protection against spreading the virus.

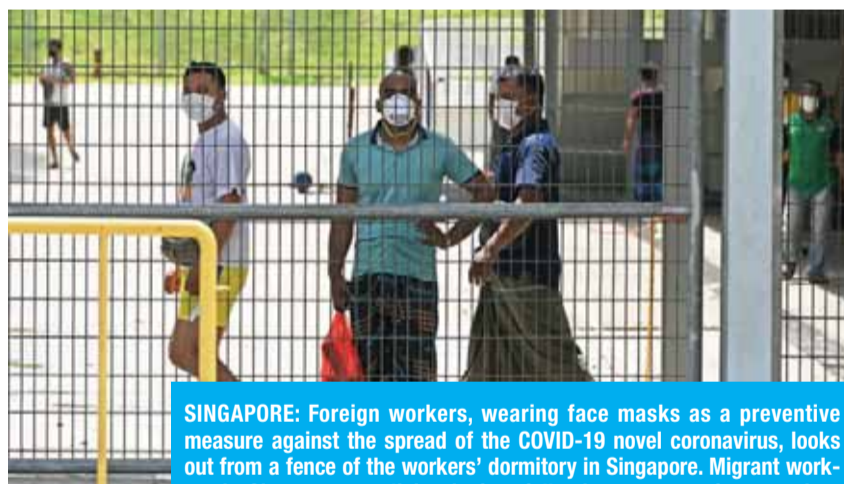
"We've ordered tens of millions more masks and expect them to arrive in other cities and regions around the world in the coming weeks," Uber safety vice president Gus Fuldner said in a statement.

"Supplies are limited and healthcare needs will always take priority, so global shipments will take time," Uber, which has seen a massive drop in ridership due to lockdowns around the world, said it was obtaining the masks "from outside of the traditional healthcare supply chains" including from one company normally produces electronics. The company said it was donating all of its N95 respirator masks, which offer extra filtering for medical personnel, to hospitals. Uber last week began sending bottles of disinfectant to drivers to clean cars, prioritizing those handling high-levels

of activity in a handful of cities including New York. The first shipment wave amounted to 30,000 quart-sized bottles, according to a tweet by Uber senior vice president of global rides Andrew MacDonald. "Healthcare orders take precedence, but we're working to secure more supplies as they become available," MacDonald said.

Uber this week will launch a COVID-19 resources hub in its application to provide updated information about safety and resources for drivers and delivery people. The hub will be available globally and is intended to be a "go-to spot" for safety tips, help with applying for financial relief from your local government, and information on additional earning opportunities.

Last week, Uber announced 10 million rides and food deliveries to healthcare workers, seniors, and people in need, free of charge around the world. — AFP



SINGAPORE: Foreign workers, wearing face masks as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, look out from a fence of the workers' dormitory in Singapore. Migrant workers in Singapore are living in fear following a surge of coronavirus infections in their dormitories where they say cramped and filthy conditions make social distancing impossible. — AFP

## Singapore moves migrant workers out of dorms

SINGAPORE: Thousands of migrant workers are being moved out of crowded dormitories in Singapore after a surge in new coronavirus cases linked to the sites, authorities said Thursday.

A sharp jump in cases in the massive dormitories had already prompted authorities to quarantine four complexes housing tens of thousands of people this week. Fears had been growing among the workers, many of whom are construction labourers from South Asia, that they were highly vulnerable to infection in the cramped dorms where social distancing is difficult. Singapore health officials Thursday reported a record daily increase of 287 new virus cases—over 200 of which were linked to the dorms.

In a bid to reduce the risk of infection, many migrant workers are now being moved from dormitories to other sites including military barracks, vacant apartment blocks and a massive exhibition site where the Singapore Airshow takes place, authorities said. About 5,000 who work in services deemed essential have already been transferred, and thousands more will be transferred in the coming days with the help of the armed forces and the police, they said.

"We are sparing no effort to contain the spread of the virus in the foreign worker dormitories," said Lawrence

Wong, a cabinet minister who is a key figure in Singapore's fight against the COVID-19 outbreak. But he warned that "despite our best efforts at containing the situation, all of us have to be mentally prepared that the numbers in the foreign worker dormitories will continue to rise in the coming days, and perhaps even in the coming week".

### Social distancing 'impossible'

The focus will be on moving healthy migrant workers who work in essential services—such as construction, cleaning and public transport—out of the dorms. Officials did not say how many in total would be moved. The government will also step in to help run the dorms, which are usually privately operated. There are some 200,000 workers living in 43 dorms in the city-state. The sprawling complexes are usually self-contained, have shops and other facilities on-site, and are often located in less desirable parts of the city. Construction workers typically toil for long hours, earning in the region of \$400 to \$500 a month building the city-state's glittering skyscrapers and shopping malls. One worker from Bangladesh, who lives in a dorm where there are several known infections, earlier told AFP that social distancing to fight the virus was "impossible". —AFP

## Boeing enlists banks to advise on US support

NEW YORK: Boeing has enlisted investment banks Lazard and Evercore to advise it on talks with Washington on potential federal aid in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, sources told AFP Friday.

The talks with the US Treasury Department, which is managing a \$2.2 trillion US emergency aid package, could begin towards the end of April, said a source on condition of anonymity.

Boeing, the biggest US exporter, had sought \$60 billion in federal support for itself and the 17,000 suppliers and contractors in its supply chain. The sector employs around 2.5 million people in the US, according to the aerospace giant. Around 17 billion dollars aimed at Boeing was included in the giant federal relief bill approved in March. Boeing had \$27.3 billion in debt at the end of December as it works to complete the purchase of Brazilian company Embraer's commercial plane operation.

President Donald Trump again offered strong support for the company Friday.

"We can't let anything happen to Boeing," Trump said at a White House briefing. "It's got so much potential." Later in the briefing, Trump said that he

thought Boeing "probably" will seek federal support.

"This isn't a great time to sell airplanes, let's not kid ourselves," Trump said. "We'll do whatever's necessary to do." A stumbling block has been the question of what Washington will get in return for the support. Boeing chief executive David Calhoun has balked at the idea that taxpayers would receive shares in Boeing, a proposal floated by some congressional Democrats.

In talks with major airlines, Treasury officials have demanded that carriers maintain their staff until at least September 30. But Boeing is targeting a reduction of 10 percent of its workforce in the commercial plane business, the Wall Street Journal reported. The company's factories have been shuttered due to COVID-19.

In anticipation of complex negotiations with the Treasury, Boeing has also asked Lazard and Evercore to explore private sources of funds, said a different source, confirming a report in the Wall Street Journal. Boeing declined to comment. Boeing also continues to be embroiled in a complex process with the Federal Aviation Administration over efforts to win approval to resume flights on the 737 MAX, which has been grounded since March 2019 following two deadly crashes. A key test flight of the Boeing 737 MAX has been pushed back by a month to May due to the upheaval of the coronavirus crisis, sources told AFP earlier this week. — AFP



This file photo shows grounded Air France airplanes at the Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport in Roissy-en-France, north of Paris, on the eighth day of a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) in France. — AFP

## Business

# When to reopen US economy 'biggest decision' of presidency, says Trump

## US 6-month deficit rises to \$744bn ahead of virus budget storm

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Friday said his decision on when to reopen the US economy, shuttered due to the coronavirus pandemic, will be the toughest he has ever taken.

"I'm going to have to make a decision and I only hope to God that it's the right decision. But I would say without question, it's the biggest decision I've ever had to make," Trump told a press conference. Trump, who faces a tight reelection in November, is keen to get the US economy back open after weeks of tough measures that shut down businesses and dramatically cut down on transport across the country to slow the virus's spread. The previously strong economy was the biggest selling point in his campaign platform.



### Revenues wither amid pandemic

However, he also faces warnings that a premature opening would put lives at risk by allowing the virus to take a new hold. "I have to make the biggest decision of my life," he said.

With current federal guidelines on social distancing set to expire at the end of the month, expectations are growing that Trump will tell Americans they can start resuming normal activity from May—at least in parts of the country. The decision will be partly based on medical data, but also heavily swayed by political considerations and advice from the business community which has been devastated by the shutdown, with an abrupt drop in revenues and mass unemployment claims.

In what will mark an important step in the process, Trump says he will be announcing members of a new task force on Tuesday. "I call it the opening our country task force or opening our country council," he said. The

group will include "very great doctors and business people," as well as probably governors of states.

In a sign that Trump will seek broad support for what could be a politically dangerous decision, he said he wanted bipartisan representation from politicians on the council.

"I want to put on both parties," he said.

Reassuring critics who say he risks rushing, Trump insisted medical opinion will be key. "We're looking at a date, we hope we'll be able to fulfill a certain date, but we're not doing anything until we know this country is going to be healthy," he said. "We don't want to go back and start doing it over again."

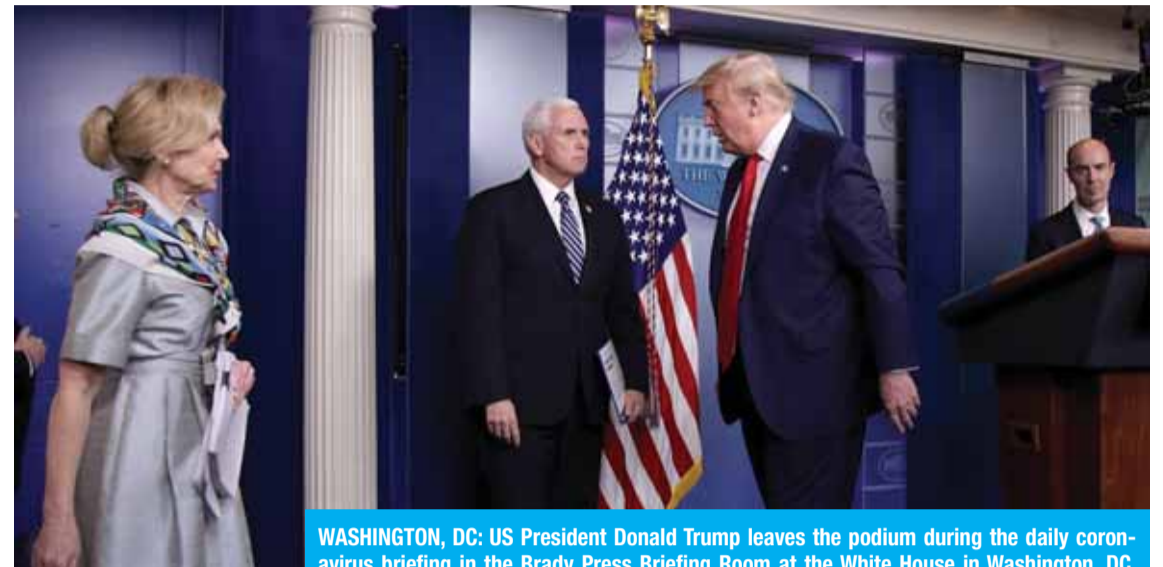
### Deficit impasse

The United States racked up a \$744 billion budget deficit in the first half of fiscal 2020, up 8 percent from a year earlier, the Treasury said on Friday, ahead of an expected April spending explosion and withering of revenues amid the coronavirus pandemic. The Treasury said the budget deficit for March totaled \$119 billion, down 19 percent on slightly higher revenues and lower outlays altered by calendar shifts, but the data did not show significant effects from virus-prompted business shutdowns. The U.S. fiscal year started in October 2019. Outlays from a \$2.2 trillion rescue package passed on March 27 are only just beginning. Tax payments due on April 15 have been delayed until July 15. "We will certainly see a significant impact to receipts in the April results," a US Treasury official told reporters. "On outlays there will be a significant impact as well, as some of the stimulus programs will have begun to be paid."

Oxford Economics said in a research note that the second-half deficit will likely double to \$1.5 trillion, bringing the full year gap to a record \$2.2 trillion.

"If additional stimulus measures are passed, the deficit will be larger," they wrote.

About \$283 billion in non-withheld individual income taxes were paid in April 2019, according to Treasury data. The filing and payment delay will likely



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Donald Trump leaves the podium during the daily coronavirus briefing in the Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, DC. More than 16 million Americans have filed unemployment claims over the past three weeks as a result of the economic impacts on the US economy. — AFP

reduce such receipts in April 2020, the Treasury official said. Receipts for taxes withheld from worker paychecks, which totaled \$114 billion in April 2019, are expected to be reduced by rising unemployment.

The \$744 billion six-month deficit fell well short of the record billion first-half budget gap in 2009, a period reflecting the worst months of the 2008-2009 financial crisis and the start of a deep recession.

The full-year 2009 deficit also was a record that still stands, at \$1.41 trillion, with \$1-trillion plus deficits following for the next three years. International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday that the coronavirus pandemic had already caused a recession that will be deeper than 2009 - the worst since the 1930s Great Depression - with a partial rebound expected in 2021.

The Congressional Budget Office forecast in

January, well before the extent of the coronavirus outbreak became apparent, that fiscal 2020 full year deficit would hit \$1.02 trillion after reaching \$984 billion in fiscal 2019. Receipts for the first six months of 2020 totaled \$1.6 trillion, a first-half record that was up 6 percent from a year earlier, while outlays totaled \$2.35 trillion, also a record that was 7 percent higher than a year ago.

In March, receipts totaled \$237 billion, up 3 percent from a year earlier, while outlays fell 5 percent to \$356 billion. But significant March benefit payments were pushed into February, reducing outlays by \$51 billion. Accounting for calendar effects, March had an adjusted deficit of \$170 billion, compared with an adjusted deficit of \$136 billion in March 2019. For the fiscal year, the adjusted deficit was \$744 billion compared with \$690 billion in the same period the prior year. — Reuters

## Furloughed staff in Sweden retrain to help hospitals

STOCKHOLM: Furloughed because of the coronavirus pandemic, airline and hotel employees in Sweden are retraining to work as hospital and nursing home assistants as the death toll nears 900 in the Scandinavian country.

The initiative offers cabin crew—mostly from SAS Scandinavian airlines which said last month it would place 10,000 crew on furlough—courses to qualify to assist in hospitals and training for hotel workers to work in nursing homes.

"I never could have imagined when we started the new year 2020 that I would end up working here," said Leena Engblom, a member of SAS's cabin crew who signed up to train at Sophiahemmet University, a nursing school and also a private hospital.

After a three-day crash course in communicable diseases, hygiene and treating patients and one day of practical training, Engblom, 48, started working as a medical assistant at the redbrick hospital in Stockholm. Participants from the course have been sent to work at Sophiahemmet and other hospitals in the Stockholm region, which pay their salaries.

Engblom now does administrative tasks, helps to clean and welcomes patients.

### 'Good resource'

University president Johanna Adami said the crews' work experience meant they already had many of the necessary skills. "They are trained in first aid, the most common diseases, and also safety and how to care for people," Adami told AFP. The training started at Sophiahemmet University, but after Sweden decided to close higher education establishments it is now carried out remotely online.

The assistants' work allows other staff to focus on the rising number of COVID-19 patients.

More than 850 patients have died from the disease in Sweden and the country has registered around 9,600 confirmed cases—although authorities stress this figure is likely much higher.

Only severe cases, patients with symptoms seeking hospital care, health-care personnel and staff at retirement homes are being tested. Near to the building where Adami usually delivers her lectures, now empty of students, two yellow tents have been erected out-



STOCKHOLM: Women of the Mask and Costume Department at the Stockholm City Theatre (Kulturhuset Stadsteatern) work on producing personal protective equipment (PPE) instead of theatre costumes in order to help hospitals' and nursing homes' staff during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in Stockholm. — AFP

doors to test suspected COVID-19 cases, manned by doctors and nurses from the hospital who duck in and out in protective clothing.

Patients needing treatment are then taken to other hospitals in Stockholm. Doctor Hilmar Gerber said the scheme's graduates were proving useful.

"It's very helpful and a very good resource," he said. While his staff were working in the tent and treating their regular patients, the assistants had spent a day preparing protective clothing for the nurses and doctors carrying out the tests. The first round of training for 30 SAS cabin crew took place on March 31, and another 300 will be trained in the coming weeks.

SAS announced it was placing nearly 10,000 of its staff on furlough because of the drop in demand for flights amid the pandemic. The scheme—the Skill Shift Initiative—was launched shortly afterwards by recruitment agency Novare, SAS and the Wallenberg Foundations, whose director Oscar Stege Unger is also on the board of the Scandinavian airline.

Unger said it was a "tough decision" to furlough such a large number of staff.

One of the foundations provided seven million kronor (644,000 euros, \$705,000) for the program, and has since launched an initiative with Stockholm's Grand Hotel to retrain hospitality workers to care for the elderly. In a conference room in the exclusive waterfront hotel, some 25 hotel employees watched as nurses demonstrated how to lift frail patients, help them stand and make beds. The three-day course will land them in a care facility in the capital.—AFP

## WB's Malpass upbeat on debt relief

WASHINGTON: World Bank Group President David Malpass on Friday said he was confident of progress on his joint call with the International Monetary Fund for a temporary standstill in official bilateral debt payments by the world's poorest countries.

Malpass said the proposal would be discussed next week by finance officials of both the Group of Seven (G7) and Group of 20 (G20) economies, and he expected a "broad endorsement" by the 25-member joint Development Committee of the World Bank and IMF when it meets on Friday.

"The world's poor are looking to the international community to show decisive leadership on debt relief, and I am confident of progress," he said in a posting on LinkedIn.

The World Bank and the IMF first issued their call for debt relief on March 25. The initiative won significant backing over the past week, including from the Institute of International Finance, a group that represents over 450 global banks, hedge funds and other financial firms.

The proposal calls for China and other big creditors to suspend debt payments from International Development Association (IDA) countries beginning May 1, freeing up resources for them to fight against the pandemic. The IDA countries are home to a quarter of the world's population and two-thirds of the world's population living in extreme poverty. Malpass said the proposal was discussed twice this week during working-level meetings of the G20, and would be on the agenda during virtual ministerial level meetings next week. Two sources familiar with the discussions said G20 finance officials were likely to endorse the proposal when they meet online on April 15. The issue is particularly critical for G20 member China, which has sharply increased lending to developing countries over the past two decades.—Reuters

## Global business, workers join call for debt relief

WASHINGTON: The International Chamber of Commerce on Friday joined a global trade union and a major civil society group to urge immediate debt relief for the world's poorest countries to help them fight the coronavirus pandemic and mitigate its economic impact.

In an open letter to finance ministers, the groups also urged countries to contribute to the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, an International Monetary Fund instrument that provides debt service relief to its poorest members. The ICC, the International Trade Union Confederation and Global Citizen, a group pushing to end extreme poverty by 2030, warned that failure to address the debt and financing needs of developing countries could trigger a series of debt defaults that would have devastating and wide-ranging consequences.

"We are concerned that a failure to immediately address the debt and financing needs of developing countries during this unprecedented crisis will result in large-scale loss of lives and livelihoods - potentially resulting in a fundamental collapse of social and economic systems," the groups wrote.

The letter reflects increasing support for a push by the World Bank and IMF for official bilateral creditors to temporarily suspend debt payments for the poorest countries, which will be hit hardest by the pandemic.

Details of the IMF-World Bank proposal are still being finalized ahead of debate by finance officials at the virtual Spring Meetings of the Fund and the Bank next week. On Friday, the Institution of International Finance, which includes over 450 banks, hedge funds and other financial firms, also backed the call. Other backers include the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Jubilee USA Network alliance of faith groups. Nearly 140 campaign groups and charities, including Oxfam and Save the Children, have also urged the Group of 20 major economies and private creditors to cancel debt payments.

In their open letter, published Friday, the ICC, ITUC and Global Citizen warned that some developing countries now faced an "impossible choice" between servicing sovereign debt repayments or paying nurses and purchasing ventilators. "Without urgent action, we see a fundamental risk that a series of debt defaults will further exacerbate the unprecedented economic downturn already unfolding before us," the groups said.—Reuters



In this file photo taken on April 04, 2020, man wearing gloves and a face mask walks by a mural reading "Cancel Plans. Not Humanity." during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in Los Angeles, California.— AFP

## Crowdfunding fills gaps for virus displaced workers

SAN FRANCISCO: The coronavirus pandemic threatened game over for Endgame restaurant near Seattle. It shared its plight online at crowd support platform GoFundMe, where donations eclipsed the restaurant's \$5,500 goal to stay in business. "All donations will go to expenses until we are able to resume normal operations," Michael Lamere and Austin Sines said in an online plea for help.

Musicians, podcasters, writers, strippers and others denied income by the coronavirus pandemic are turning to the power of online community spirit to make ends meet. The health crisis and its massive economic impact have stirred increased interest in crowdfunding sites like GoFundMe and membership platforms such as Patreon.

"The generosity we are seeing is rather incredible and unprecedented," said

GoFundMe chief executive Tim Cadogan. The crowdfunding platform, which allows anyone to launch a campaign, has seen more than two million individual donations to coronavirus-related efforts, amounting to about \$120 million, according to Cadogan.

COVID-19 related GoFundMe campaigns reflect evolving needs, from raising money to get supplies for health care professionals to supporting local restaurants barred from seating diners to helping the jobless pay rent. A Coronavirus Rent Relief Fund launched about two weeks ago is raising money to help those left jobless avoid eviction.

"Coronavirus (COVID19) has created one of the most difficult moments in world history, a moment we will surely look back on," wrote the New York fund organizer, who raised some \$220,000.

A journalists' furlough fund raised some \$46,000 and a Miami campaign has collected \$11,000 for struggling restaurant workers. The platform has some more modest campaigns including a \$1,000 effort for dancers—the Burlesque Community COVID-19 Response Fund in Los Angeles.

"I felt it imperative to help my community of dancers who are already underpaid and have effectively lost any way to make income," said organizer Veronica Voss, who boasts being Miss Hollywood Burlesque 2019. Many campaigns however fall short, with demands rising and an estimated 17 million newly unemployed in the United States.

In one example, a campaign for the Just Oxtails Soul Food Restaurant in Texas raised just \$1,700 toward a goal of \$150,000.—AFP

# Cheap beef and wasted milk: US agriculture struggles with virus

## Pandemic hits aid work in sub-Saharan Africa

**LIBREVILLE:** Desperately needed aid for millions of people across sub-Saharan Africa is under threat as the deadly coronavirus pandemic sweeps a continent already facing a volley of crises. In some cases social distancing measures and border closures are preventing workers from distributing aid. In others, funding is under threat as agencies scramble to pool resources to fight the fast-ballooning COVID-19 outbreak on the continent.

Cameroon's polio vaccination campaign has been suspended, while in Chad a measles vaccination program has been postponed. In Niger and Burkina Faso, where hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced by jihadist violence, flights bringing in humanitarian aid have been put on hold. In the Central African Republic, where most of the territory is under the sway of armed groups, supplies of chlorine, needed to provide safe drinking water, are running low.

"Some programs have slowed down or been temporarily suspended, but most humanitarian operations are continuing," said Julie Belanger, head of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for West and Central Africa. "We are focusing on activities that are vital for survival, but we are also adapting our way of working," Belanger said. The United Nations says about 76 million people in sub-Saharan Africa need aid to survive and protect their health. The coronavirus pandemic could further threaten populations on the continent, which so far has at least 12,700 recorded cases and more than 650 deaths, according to an AFP tally Friday. Organizations are quickly learning to change

how they work to prevent the virus from spreading further. In Niger, for instance, food handouts are being distributed in small groups in order to keep social distancing, said Jean-Noel Gentile with the UN's World Food Program. "To reduce the frequency of food distribution, we are handing out two or three months of rations each time," he said.

One fear that NGOs and governments have is that aid workers travelling to isolated areas could bring the coronavirus with them. In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the first case of the virus registered in Goma was that of a Nigerian aid worker. Masks, gloves and protective clothing are required by some organizations-but the crucial gear is hard to find in many countries.

"This is already difficult enough in France-you can imagine how it is in the furthest reaches of the Central African Republic," said Isabelle Robin of the French charity Action Against Hunger (ACF). The closure of borders and restrictions on movement inside countries are additional obstacles to delivering aid. As a result, NGOs everywhere are attempting to negotiate with authorities in Africa to allow "humanitarian corridors" or exemptions for their personnel.

But of all the problems for humanitarian work right now, "the biggest is financial", said a UNICEF official in the DRC, pointing to the fact that donor attention lies elsewhere at the moment. The United Nations has launched a \$2 billion (1.83 billion euro) "global humanitarian response plan" on coronavirus, much of it earmarked for Africa. — AFP

**NEW YORK:** Milk dumped in fields and cattle prices plunging even as steaks stay expensive: the coronavirus pandemic is hitting American farmers hard. With industries from restaurants to department stores forced to close, farmers haven't stopped working, but are finding demand unpredictable and supply chains are struggling to adapt to the new conditions.

Dairy farmers often struggle to store excess production, and Brenda Cochran, who runs a 70-cow dairy farm in Pennsylvania along with her husband, said she was ordered twice recently to dump her milk. In line with environmental regulations, the couple loaded their excess milk into a manure spreader and dumped it on their fields. "Dumping our milk and seeing, at the same time, the images in the press of empty dairy shelves make us angry," Cochran said.

"We have the same COVID-19 anxiety everyone else has," and after years of very low dairy low prices, Cochran said the couple is also facing "this long-term anxiety every month of not being able to meet our bills." The country's main farmers union has warned that virus-induced trouble for agriculture in the world's largest economy will be widespread. "Shuttered schools, universities, restaurants, bars and cafeterias are no longer buying milk, meat, fruits, vegetables and other food, causing a downward spiral in crop and livestock prices," the American Farm Bureau said.

### Prime cuts, low prices

The beef industry is struggling with a paradox: prices for live cattle listed in Chicago have fallen by about 30 percent since mid-January, but steak prices have increased in stores. "On one side, you had the futures market that was worried about a drop in demand because of restaurants closing," Mike Zuzolo of Global Commodity Analytics said in explaining the discrepancy. "Meanwhile in the cash market, the

breaking of the supply chain has created perturbations all around and we started to see empty shelves."

The problem has grown so severe that the National Cattlemen's Beef Association has asked President Donald Trump to investigate. The president tweeted on Thursday that he has directed the Secretary of Agriculture "to expedite help to our farmers, especially to the smaller farmers who are hurting right now." "We will always be there for our Great Farmers, Cattlemen, Ranchers, and Producers!" said Trump, who is facing a tight re-election battle in November and counting on farmers to renew their support.

### Intermediaries struggling

Intermediaries are also struggling. Meat giant Tyson Foods has had to suspend operations at a pork factory in Iowa after detecting more than 20 cases of COVID-19 among its employees. Cereal farmers are preparing for planting season, hoping to benefit from a lull in the trade war between China and the United States after a truce signed in mid-January but instead they're facing tough times. Containment measures to stop the virus have led to a drop in gasoline demand, including biofuel made from ethanol. About a third of corn production in the US is used for ethanol and, as a result, corn prices have fallen by 15 percent since mid-January.

Cotton prices have meanwhile plunged to their lowest level in 11 years, which experts at Commerzbank blame on a drop in spending on new clothes, factory closures in garment-producing countries hit by the virus and a shift towards synthetic fibers that have grown cheaper with oil prices low. For Cochran, the only good thing that could come from all this is a re-organization of supply chains. "We have the right to fresh local foods," she said. "And not just in food, but also in other basics like... medical goods." — AFP

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# Tunisian island: Globetrotting family waits out lockdown



The caravan (left) belonging to the French Laurent family is pictured parked on the Tunisian island of Djerba after having to stop there to confine themselves amid the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic crisis. — AFP

As the novel coronavirus stops globetrotters and other adventure travelers in their tracks, one French family of nomads is waiting out the lockdown on a Tunisian island in the Mediterranean. Bastien and Audrey Laurent, together with their two children, aged seven and nine, sold up their possessions and have been on the road since 2017.

Now, they don't know when they'll be able to leave the southern Tunisian resort island of Djerba. The family rented a house a few days before Tunisia imposed travel restrictions on March 22 in a bid to slow the spread of the virus. Tourists have left Djerba and home comforts are basic, but to compensate the turquoise waters of the Mediterranean extend as far as the eye can see.

"It's magnificent. Honestly, there's nothing to complain about," Audrey said. As the novel coronavirus began to emerge in Europe,

the Laurents were visiting the North African country at their own pace, from the hot springs of the coastal town of Korbous to the wild beaches of the Kerkennah islands and the gateway to the Sahara. They arrived in Tunisia in mid-January after travelling through Italy. "It was still at the very start of the epidemic," Audrey said.

But as the virus spread, measures started to get stricter: Tunisian authorities halted maritime passenger arrivals, banned prayers in mosques and imposed a quarantine period on all those who had recently arrived from abroad. Tunisia has officially declared over 600 cases of the COVID-19 illness, including 25 deaths, since reporting its first case at the beginning of March. "We decided to stop (travelling) before the government imposed a lockdown," Audrey said, adding that the family didn't want to run the risk of being asymptomatic carriers of the virus and spreading it to remote areas.

"We are the first to extol the virtues of travel but you have to know (when) to stop," she added. They decided to go back to Djerba and wait it out there, even as thousands of foreigners in Tunisia took repatriation flights home. Others are still trying to leave. The adventure-hungry family is far from alone across the world, travelers who would usually be sharing updates on social media have seen their trips grind to a halt.

Some are trying to assist fellow nomads, with one pair in Europe helping travelers stranded in caravans find a place to settle temporarily. But for those like the Laurents, who earn money from the sale of photos, videos and articles from their journeys, the pandemic has disrupted more than just their itinerary. "The nomadic way of life is going to get complicated, including economically," Audrey said. — AFP



French man Bastien and wife Audrey pose with their two children near their bivouac after having to stop on the Tunisian island of Djerba, in the south of Tunisia, to confine themselves amid the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic crisis. — AFP



The skyline of the rich district of Sandton is seen as a group of homeless persons gather in Innesfree Park in Johannesburg where food rations will be distributed.



Pigeons fly around the origami style statue called Paper Pigeons, designed by Maja and Gerhard Marx, in Pigeon Square, Ferreirasdorp, Johannesburg. — AFP photos

## Las Vegas casino workers abandoned in 'ghost town'

Casino workers in Las Vegas voiced anger at being abandoned by their billionaire employers as the gambling Makkah becomes a "ghost town" due to coronavirus. Tens of thousands employed on the city's world-famous Strip of glitzy hotels and high-stakes betting lost their jobs when Nevada shuttered all non-essential businesses in mid-March.

While a few casinos including Wynn and Encore continue to support workers, most offered only two weeks' "closing pay" or less, forcing staff to file for unemployment, union workers told a web conference. "This is not going to sustain us—we need to feed our families, we need to put food on the table, we have bills mounting up," said Debra Jeffries, a cocktail waitress for four decades at a major Strip casino. "Hearing how our community has crumbled as Vegas turned into a ghost town was devastating," she added.

Las Vegas receives more than 40 million visitors each year. But US stay-at-home orders and foreign travel bans crippled tourism even before Las Vegas casinos closed, and hit at a time when workers were looking forward to greater earnings in peak season. If all US casinos remain closed until mid-May, \$43.5 billion in economic activity—including nearby restaurants and bars—will be wiped out, according to the American Gaming Association. But although casinos are eligible for federal aid during the coronavirus pandemic, many immediately laid off their staff, said Unite Here president D Taylor. In Las Vegas, casinos' reaction compared poorly with their responses to previous devastating events such as the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the 2017 Mandalay Bay shooting, he said. "(After) 9/11, when in one day 15,000 people got laid off in Las Vegas... the industry eventually stepped up," said Taylor. "We don't understand their behavior," he added.—AFP

## South Africa crime rate drops, thanks to virus booze ban

South African Police Minister Bheki Cele sports a dark hat and pinstriped suit, a style that escapes no one in its echo of Eliot Ness, the famed enforcer of Prohibition in 1920s America. The media-savvy police boss has been boasting of a dramatic fall in crime since South Africa imposed a 21-day coronavirus lockdown, along with a ban on the sale of booze. In the first nine days of nationwide confinement, the tally of murders plummeted to 94 from 326 over the same period last year. Reported rape cases fell to 101 from 699, while cases of grievous bodily harm declined eight-fold to 456 from 2,673. Cele made no secret of his conclusion for the big fall: enforced sobriety. "We attribute this to the non-availability of alcohol," he declared last weekend.

### Short-term benefit?

The pandemic appears indeed to have provided a respite for a country with one of the highest crime rates in the world. Rival gang members in Cape Town's notorious Cape Flats have even temporarily halted their turf wars to deliver food supplies to struggling households during the lockdown.

But experts sound a word of caution: the dip, they say, is unlikely to last and alcohol is a complex factor in the equation. A research consultant at the Pretoria-based Institute of Security Studies, Johan Burger, said more visible policing and fewer people on the streets have inevitably led to a reduction of some crimes, especially in public spaces. But those with access to alcohol and living in small cramped homes typical of South Africa could find themselves in a dangerous cocktail that could almost guarantee confrontation, Burger said.

Conversely, those who suddenly cannot get alcohol experience frustration—"and we know frustration is the phase before aggressive behaviour," Burger said. Shaun Shelly, founder of an awareness program called SA Drug Policy Week, said the alcohol ban was "purely a moral position" and there was insufficient evidence to prove it had the dampening effects on crime as claimed by Cele. A sudden cut in supply of alcohol causes physical and mental problems, the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence warns.

### Alcohol consumption

Wine, beer and homemade alcohol made from maize, also called corn, are readily knocked back in South Africa. The country ranks 30th in the world in terms of per capita alcohol consumption, according to 2010 figures by the World Health Organization (WHO). But Cele has made no secret of his dream of a South Africa where booze is banned permanently. "My first prize would be that we shut down alcohol," he said provocatively.

"I wish (the) alcohol ban could be extended beyond lockdown." For good measure, he has added tobacco to his blacklisted lockdown commodities, saying they are non-essential and dangerous for health. His zeal has unsurprisingly caused him to come under fire. Andrew Whitfield, the shadow police minister for South Africa's main opposition Democratic Alliance party, lashed Cele for his visionary talk. "I think the minister is overreaching and that the power has gone to (his) head," he said, warning against a drift towards an "authoritarian regime". —AFP



Kosovo hairdresser Driton Kameri wears a facemask as he cuts the hair of a client in his garden in Pristina during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

## Coronavirus: The hidden personal grooming crisis

It's not pretty but it's true. The first victim of the coronavirus has been personal grooming. With hairdressers, nail bars and beauty therapists shuttered by lockdowns, many people around the world are in danger of letting themselves go. That is the fear of stylists and colourists worried about having to salvage something from the havoc wreaked on eyebrows and hair by DIY plucking, waxing, dyeing and cutting.

"Don't touch your eyebrows above all," pleaded Olivier Echaudemaison, creative director of the French cosmetics brand Guerlain. "Let them grow—leave a virgin forest," said the man who once looked after makeup for screen legends Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren. Feel free to experiment with makeup,

Echaudemaison told AFP, because "if it doesn't work you just take a tissue and you start again". "But anything with hair is a lot more risky," he warned.

British makeup guru Sali Hughes, whose Beauty Banks charity has been giving donated cosmetics and toiletries to hard-pressed health staff since the pandemic started, also cautioned about some of the wackier homemade beauty tips circulating on social media.

### Lady beards

"Professionals are also genuinely worried... and tell me they're bracing themselves for a plethora of complex color correction appointments when they finally reopen," she said. So be careful tackling those greying

roots with a beetroot recipe picked up on Facebook. Demand for some brands of hair color shot up six times in Britain after the first week of the lockdown there. Television presenter Stacey Solomon is unlikely to have been one of those battling for the last box of hair dye. She told her three million Instagram followers that she was letting nature run free during the confinement and putting her razor away. Let it grow, moustaches and all declared the woman who had previously joked how her children love to stroke her "beard" and "facial fur".—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Skiers take the sky lift at Malam Jabba, a ski resort in the Hindu Kush range of the Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. — AFP photos



Skiers take part in the closing ceremony of the Malam Jabba International Alpine Ski Cup 2020 in the winter sports resort Malam Jabba, a ski resort in the Hindu Kush range of the Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

# Pakistan hopes mountains could lure foreign skiers

It survived the dark days of Taleban rule, the destruction of its main hotel and a major flood. Now, the little Pakistani ski resort of Malam Jabba is facing a new challenge from the coronavirus pandemic, just as it had hoped to showcase its revamped facilities to the world. The ski season was brought to an abrupt end last month, with the resort closing as the scale of the coronavirus crisis became evident and much of Pakistan went into lockdown. "We hope it will be recovered in a couple of months," said Syed Adnan, a spokesman for the now-deserted Malam Jabba resort.

"Unluckily, it is not the first time here people have (faced challenges). First, the Taleban, then a flood, and now the coronavirus that is destroying their lives." Until its closure last month, Malam Jabba had been boasting of its renaissance and a lofty goal of bringing international skiers to Pakistan, a Himalayan country boasting epic peaks but which still struggles with tourism. "We want to be an international hub for people around the world," Jalal Bacha, Malam Jabba's chief technician, told AFP during a recent visit, shortly before the virus lockdown started.

Officials hope Malam Jabba can showcase the country's stated goal of changing international perception of Pakistan from "terrorism to tourism destination"—a phrase Prime Minister Imran Khan's political party has used. With a tree-lined piste, competitive slalomers swooshing through the snow and soaring peaks in the distance, it is hard to imagine Malam Jabba and the surrounding valley under the control of the Pakistani Taleban from 2007-2009.

Nestled in the stunning vistas of the Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan close to the Afghan border, development at Malam Jabba began in the 1980s with help



from the Austrian government, who paid for the chairlift. By the early 2000s, the resort and associated businesses were employing hundreds of people. That all stopped when the Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP, or Pakistani Taleban) gained control. The insurgents had grown as a force in the early years of America's "War on Terror" that started in 2001 and saw jihadist groups coalesce in the Afghan-Pakistan border region.

In 2008, the TTP destroyed the resort's hotel and dismantled the chairlift. "They cut the pillars to sell the steel," recalled Sayed Liaqat Ali, a 28-year-old driver who said his two aunts were murdered by the Taleban. "They were coming home after the curfew so they shot them." More than a decade since the days of public executions and Sharia law, as well as a flood in 2010, businesses and authorities have rebuilt Malam Jabba from the ground up, including its hotel and the main chairlift.

Skiers take part in the closing ceremony of the Malam Jabba International Alpine Ski Cup 2020 in the winter sports resort Malam Jabba, a ski resort in the Hindu Kush range of the Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

### Hippie hotspot

Impoverished Pakistan, which owes billions of dollars to the International Monetary Fund and China, is desperate for foreign cash and under Khan is trying to revive the neglected tourism sector. Last year, Islamabad introduced an electronic visa system, making it easier for visitors to come. International tourist numbers had increased steadily in recent years, though the coronavirus pandemic has all but stopped visits for now.

Once a favourite stop along the "hippie trail" that brought stoners and enlightenment-seekers overland from Europe to India in the 1960s, Pakistan's international image collapsed after the September 11, 2001 attacks that highlighted Islamabad's support for the

Afghan Taleban, who harboured Al-Qaeda. Coupled with an ensuing domestic insurgency that brought the Taleban to within striking distance of the Pakistani capital, international tourism dried up. In 2014, there were 5,575 foreigners arriving on tourist visas, according to government figures. By 2018, the most recent year full numbers were available, that had grown to 17,823.

Still, with its strict patriarchal society, an alcohol ban and a deeply conservative Islamic culture, Pakistan can be a tough sell. It nevertheless has more than its share of attractions, including the north's magnificent mountainscape. "The potential is gigantic," said French filmmaker Jerome Tanon, who shot an extreme ski film in the Karakoram mountain range. "All mountaineers agree: Pakistan is an unpolished diamond." Currently, Pakistan only has three official ski areas, two of which belong to the army and are off limits. Authorities want to build four new ones.

Elsewhere, one can glimpse Pakistan's untapped potential. About a day's bumpy drive from Islamabad, the village of Madaklasht lies at the bottom of a loose network of ski trails, some stretching on for about three miles. There are no hotels, with the only accommodation provided in locals' homes. Most of the skiing is done by kids with hand-made wooden skis. "With a little bit of grooming and infrastructure, this area could compete with any international resort," said Hasham Ul-Mulk, who recently organized a winter sports festival in Madaklasht. — AFP



The logo of mobile app Snapchat is displayed on a tablet. — AFP

## Sheltered-in cut off from Snapchat

The Snapchat application popular with young smartphone users went offline Wednesday for undetermined reasons, the company said. "We're aware many Snapchatters are having trouble using the app. Hang tight - we're looking into it," said a tweet from the application operated by parent Snap Inc.

The first reports of the outage came around 1330 GMT, according to the monitoring website Downtidetector. The outage came as sheltered-in people worldwide were turning to social media for information and entertainment amid the coronavirus pandemic. Snapchat said last week it saw huge jumps in engagement with the app as a result of the crisis, with real-time communication up 50 percent in March. To support the global COVID-19 relief efforts, Snapchat has launched a new augmented reality donation effort allowing users to donate to relief effort through its "Snapchat Lenses," glasses designed for the app. — AFP

## Run for your money: Scottish jogger raises thousands for workers

A Scottish filmmaker has raised more than 200,000 euros for Britain's frontline healthcare staff through a running campaign inspired by strict coronavirus lockdown rules. What started as a local initiative to raise funds for the state-run National Health Service (NHS) quickly ballooned to include runners around the world—and huge sums of money.

"It started as family and friends participating but that snowballed into thousands of runners worldwide participating," said Olivia Strong, 27, a documentary producer in Edinburgh. Strong was sparked into action while on her regular jog near her home and noticing how many others were also out exercising. An hour's exer-

cise is one of only four permissible reasons to leave home under British lockdown rules, and Strong saw it as an opportunity to help the country's stretched doctors and nurses battling the coronavirus outbreak.

She asked participants to run five kilometers, raise £5 and nominate five others to do the same for her "Run for Heroes" campaign. Never in her "wildest dreams" did she imagine the level it would reach. In just a few days, the campaign has raised more than £180,000 (\$225,000, 205,000 euros) - and running. Despite being just a little more than a week old, around 30,000 participants from as far afield as Sydney, the Cayman Islands, Hong Kong and Toronto have already con-

tributed. "We don't know what is going to happen about the future of going outside and being able to go on these runs," Strong added. "But while the NHS say that it is still a good thing to do for mental health and for our immune system, I think that we should really make full use of our one form of exercise a day." The money raised will be given to NHS Charities Together—a national appeal to protect the welfare of staff by providing food packages, accommodation, transport and protective equipment. — AFP



Sara (right), the owner of a local bread shop, delivers fresh bread and Easter cakes at the end of her working day to a nun of a charity house in Vitriola, near Modena. — AFP

## In Italy, virus good samaritans deliver foods, Easter cheer

Bread, vegetables, medicines, even Easter lamb-in-remote areas of Italy, food and essential supplies are being delivered to villagers in need during the coronavirus crisis. In the northern village of Palagano, nestled in the Appennine mountains an hour's drive from Modena, some of the 2,000 residents have come to rely on others for help in challenging times.

Onelio, 85, who is recovering from a broken rib, receives regular visits from Laura and Sara, two volunteers from local association Avap. The volunteers—fitted out head to toe in protective gear—not only check on Onelio's health, but deliver supplies and help with light housework. Of course, there is always enough time for a chat too. Mayor Fabio Braglia, who has organized the home visits by Avap, has also found volunteers to prepare envelopes stuffed with protective masks, which are

later delivered to each Palagano resident by local police. Village businesses are also getting involved. Baker Sara brings Easter bread and pastries to the Carmelite nuns who run the House of Charity in the town of Vitriola, about 15 kilometers from Palagano.

Other nuns from the Franciscan convent in the heart of Palagano receive boxes overflowing with vegetables from the small supermarket in town. Michele Ferrari, the store's manager, makes sure that those who can't venture forth much are at the top of his list for deliveries of basic necessities, whether fresh produce, meat or even the newspaper. Because of the Easter weekend, the village butcher, Olimpio, has also prepared trays of lamb with Palagano's young people doing the deliveries. — AFP

## Virus gives Easter a bitter taste for chocolatiers

In a normal year, Easter is boom time for Belgium's famed chocolatiers who churn out eggs, bunnies and gift boxes for tourists and locals alike. But 2020 is not a normal year. The coronavirus and the resulting public lockdown have melted away their hopes. "Normally, it's all hands on deck," says Laurent Gerbaud, working alone in his Brussels workshop to pack boxes of treats for home delivery. "As a food business, I could have kept the shop open. I tried for three days, it was a catastrophe," he tells AFP at his premises in the heart of Belgium's capital.

Gerbaud's boutique is well-placed near Brussels' touristic museum quarter and in ordinary times his dis-

play of wares catch the greedy eyes of passers-by. Not so now—Easter sales are down 90 percent, with the world in the grip of a deadly pandemic. Belgians ordered to remain at home aside from essential errands and Europe's borders closed. In better days, the businessman employs six full-time staff and 25 students, but he says he can no longer cover their salaries.

### 'Getting complicated'

The drop in sales reminds him of the localised lockdown imposed after the 2015 bomb and gun attacks in Paris were linked to Belgium-based suspects—but this is much more severe. "In terms of cash flow I can keep

going until the middle of May," he says, describing how he's relying on online orders. "After that, it will get very complicated, but you've got to be optimistic."

Gerbaud managed to sell his Easter eggs, and is trying to shift his extra chocolate bars and candied fruits. Treats filled with creamy ganache will not keep fresh, so he has donated them to health workers. According to the chocolate-makers' guild Choprabisco, Belgium's confectioners have handed over 13 million eggs, rabbits and sweet biscuits to the country's hospitals so far during the outbreak. — AFP



A picture shows rolls of toilet paper and a sign reading '1 roll given for every chocolate purchase' in the Laurent Gerbaudshop in Brussels during a lockdown in Belgium to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

# War-torn Yemen reports first case of coronavirus

**DUBAI:** Yemen reported its first case of coronavirus Friday in a southern government-controlled province, raising fears of an outbreak in the war-torn country as air strikes blamed on the Saudi-led coalition tested a unilateral truce. The announcement came on the second day of the two-week ceasefire declared by the military coalition supporting the government in what it said was a move to help fight the pandemic.

"The first confirmed case of coronavirus has been reported in Hadramawt province," Yemen's supreme national emergency committee for COVID-19 said on Twitter. The committee, run by the internationally recognized government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, said the infected patient was in stable condition and receiving care. "The case is in isolation and treatment, all known contacts are being traced and quarantined," the World Health Organization said on Twitter. "WHO is working closely with (the health ministry) to ensure further rapid containment measures are taken."

Aid groups have warned that when the coronavirus hits Yemen's broken healthcare system, the impact is likely to be catastrophic for a country already in the grip of what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. "What's facing Yemen is frightening," said Lise Grande, the UN coordinator for Yemen. "More people who become infected are likely to become severely ill than anywhere else."

## 'Critically under-equipped'

Yemen is "critically under-equipped" to face the pandemic, said Xavier Joubert, country director for Save the Children in Yemen. "Only half of Yemen's health facilities are still fully functional," said Joubert. "There are 700 intensive care unit beds, including 60 for children, and 500 ventilators for a population of about 30 million." Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed over the past five years in the war between the coalition and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who control large parts of Yemen including the capital Sanaa.

Millions have also been displaced and diseases including cholera are widespread due to the scarcity of clean water. The UN envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths said Friday he had sent revised proposals to the warring parties to secure a nationwide ceasefire and the "urgent resumption" of political dialogue. The confirmation of Yemen's first coronavirus case "makes it even more imperative to stop the fighting immediately", Griffiths said in a statement.

## Renewed clashes

Members of the UN Security Council on Friday welcomed the Saudi-led coalition's unilateral ceasefire, which began on Thursday, and the Yemen government's "positive response". They called on the Houthi rebels to make "similar commitments without delay". The pleas appeared to fall on deaf ears. Yemeni pro-



**SANAA:** A man wearing a protective mask and gloves amid the coronavirus pandemic sells bread at his stall in the old city market of the Yemeni capital Sanaa late Friday. — AFP

government forces and Houthi rebels reported several air raids in the northern districts of Al-Jawf and Hajjah.

The coalition raids "targeted Houthi vehicles after they rejected the ceasefire and were attempting to attack government positions", a pro-government source told AFP. The source also reported ongoing clashes between pro-government loyalists and the rebels in Al-Jawf and the Marib, northern regions which have seen intense fighting since the beginning of the year. There was no immediate comment from the coalition.

The military alliance said its ceasefire was aimed at helping efforts to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak in Yemen. The move was welcomed by the United States

but dismissed by the Houthi rebels, who charged that the continued coalition air strikes showed the announcement was a public relations stunt. "We consider the ceasefire a political and media maneuver," Houthi spokesman Mohamed Abdelsalam told Al Jazeera news network.

The United Arab Emirates, a key Saudi ally, said that the battle against the coronavirus trumped all other concerns. "The COVID-19 crisis eclipses everything - the international community must step up efforts & work together to protect the Yemeni people," UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash tweeted. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has repeatedly appealed for ceasefires in

conflicts around the world to facilitate the battle against the coronavirus.

Saudi Arabia is also scrambling to limit the spread of the disease at home. Its health ministry has reported more than 3,200 coronavirus infections and 44 deaths from the illness. Despite two decades of air and drone strikes by the United States, Yemen also still hosts a significant militant presence, with a longstanding Al-Qaeda network challenged in recent years by militants loyal to the Islamic State group. Control of Hadramawt province, where the first coronavirus case was reported, has long been divided. Coalition-backed government forces control the coastal towns but parts of the interior remain in the hands of Al-Qaeda. — AFP

## Coronavirus found in air samples up...

Continued from Page 1

They found that the virus was most heavily concentrated on the floors of the wards, "perhaps because of gravity and air flow causing most virus droplets to float to the ground". High levels were also found on frequently touched surfaces like computer mice, trashcans, bed rails and door knobs. "Furthermore, half of the samples from the soles of the ICU medical staff shoes tested positive," the team wrote. "Therefore, the soles of medical staff shoes might function as carriers."

The team also looked at so-called aerosol transmission - when the droplets of the virus are so fine they become suspended and remain airborne for

several hours, unlike cough or sneeze droplets that fall to the ground within seconds. They found that virus-laden aerosols were mainly concentrated near and downstream from patients at up to 13 feet - though smaller quantities were found upstream, up to eight feet.

Encouragingly, no members of the hospital staff were infected, "indicating that appropriate precautions could effectively prevent infection," the authors wrote. They also offered advice that bucks orthodox guidelines: "Our findings suggest that home isolation of persons with suspected COVID-19 might not be a good control strategy" given the levels of environmental contamination.

Aerosolization of the coronavirus is a contentious area for scientists who study it, because it is not clear how infectious the disease is in the tiny quantities found in ultrafine mist. The World Health Organization has so far downplayed the risk. US health authorities have adopted a more cautious line and urged people to cover their faces when out in public in case the virus can be transmitted through normal breathing and speaking. — AFP

in service in Dusseldorf. "It was a sad feeling at first," Catholic priest Frank Heidkamp told AFP, as hundreds gathered in a parking lot. In Muslim-majority Pakistan, the Christian underclass is facing unemployment because of the pandemic this Easter, and many are wondering how they will survive. "My kids asked me for new Easter dresses and shoes but I have told them we are not going to have Easter this year," said Aamir Gill, a cleaner who was fired without severance days after the virus crisis took hold in Pakistan.

More than four billion people are confined to their homes as governments worldwide have imposed never-before-seen measures to halt the virus, which first emerged late last year in central China. Like Trump, governments in Europe are under pressure to strike a balance between keeping people safe and keeping already battered economies stable. "Lifting restrictions too quickly could lead to a deadly resurgence," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Friday.

Some countries, especially in Asia, are worried about a possible second wave of infections imported from travellers as life creeps back to normal. And while Trump has discussed a rapid return to economic stability, the US government's top infectious disease specialist Anthony Fauci said that despite signs of progress, "this is not the time... to be pulling back at all" on social distancing efforts.

Glimmers of hope may be emerging in some countries. Spain, the third-hardest-hit country, saw its lowest 24-hour toll in 17 days, after Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the "fire started by the pandemic is starting to come under control". And the daily rises in new infections in hardest-hit Italy have slowed dramatically. Still, the Italian government said it would extend lockdown orders until May 3.

In Britain - where the government has resisted calls to ease lockdown measures - spirits were lifted

## False negatives are complicating COVID-19 tests

**WASHINGTON:** As COVID-19 tests become more widely available across the US, scientists have warned about a growing concern: Many people with negative results might actually have the virus. That could have devastating implications as a global recession looms and governments wrangle with the question of when to reopen economies shuttered as billions of people were ordered to stay home in an effort to break transmission of the deadly disease.

The majority of tests around the world use a technology called PCR, which detects pieces of the coronavirus in mucus samples. But "there are a lot of things that impact whether or not the test actually picks up the virus," Priya Sampathkumar, an infectious diseases specialist at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota said. "It depends on how much virus the person is shedding (through sneezing, coughing and

other bodily functions), how the test was collected and whether it was done appropriately by someone used to collecting these swabs, and then how long it sat in transport," she said.

The virus has only been spreading among humans for four months and therefore studies about test reliability are still considered preliminary. Early reports from China suggest its sensitivity, meaning how well it is able to return positive results when the virus is present, is somewhere around 60 to 70 percent. Different companies around the world are now producing slightly different tests, so it's hard to have a precise overall figure.

But even if it were possible to increase the sensitivity to 90 percent, the magnitude of risk remains substantial as the number of people tested grows. Sampathkumar argued in a paper published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings. "In California, estimates say the rate of COVID-19 infection may exceed 50 percent by mid-May 2020," she said.

With 40 million people, "even if only one percent of the population was tested, 20,000 false-negative results would be expected." This makes it critical for clinicians to base their diagnosis on more than just the test: they must also examine a patient's symptoms, their potential exposure history, imaging and other lab work. — AFP

## 161 new virus cases in Kuwait; deaths...

Continued from Page 1

fatalities - currently the highest national figure. With more than half a million reported infections, the United States already has more coronavirus cases than anywhere else in the world. President Donald Trump, however, said that with the US infection trajectory "near the peak" and social distancing working well, he was considering ways to re-open the world's biggest economy as soon as possible. He acknowledged the risk of higher death tolls if businesses restart too soon.

"But you know what? Staying at home leads to death also," Trump added, pointing to the massive economic suffering for millions of Americans. It is unclear when that will be possible, with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo saying millions in the state - the hardest hit in the country - will have to be tested before it can reopen. The World Health Organization has warned that prematurely lifting lockdown restrictions - affecting more than half the planet's population - could spark a dangerous resurgence of the disease.

Easter celebrations that would normally see churches packed with parishioners were replaced by an eerie emptiness on Friday. Even hallowed traditions have been revamped - Pope Francis will livestream his Easter message from the seclusion of his private library. "We have to respond to our confinement with all our creativity," the pontiff said. "We can either get depressed and alienated... or we can get creative."

Worshippers in Germany embraced social distancing orders to celebrate Good Friday at a drive-

on Friday when virus-stricken Prime Minister Boris Johnson showed signs of recovery after three days in intensive care. "The prime minister has been able to do short walks, between periods of rest," a Downing Street spokesman said.

The pandemic has shaken the global economy, and the International Monetary Fund - which has \$1 trillion in lending capacity - said it was responding to calls from 90 countries for emergency financing. G20 energy ministers, meanwhile, pledged to work together to ensure oil market stability after major oil producers agreed to cut output. A dramatic slump in oil demand, worsened by a Saudi-Russia price war, has sent prices crashing to near two-decade lows in recent weeks. In much of the developing world, there are fears the worst is still to come.

War-torn Yemen, already suffering one of the world's most acute humanitarian crises, reported its first case. The announcement came on the second day of the two-week ceasefire declared by the military coalition supporting the government in what it said was a move to help fight the pandemic. "The first confirmed case of coronavirus has been reported in Hadramawt province," Yemen's supreme national emergency committee for COVID-19 said on Twitter. In Brazil, authorities confirmed the first deaths in Rio de Janeiro's slums, where overcrowding and poor sanitation have raised fears of a catastrophe.

In all, at least 100,859 people have died from coronavirus, according to an AFP tally at 1900 GMT on Friday, using official figures. More than 1.6 million declared cases have been registered in 193 countries, of which at least 335,900 are considered recovered. In the last eight days, more deaths were registered than in the preceding 84 days. The tallies, using data collected by AFP from national authorities and information from the WHO, probably reflect only a fraction of the actual

number of infections. Many countries are only testing the most serious cases. Others do not have a policy of large-scale testing when resources are severely lacking, as in Africa.

In France, for example, deaths in nursing homes were not counted until April 2 and the daily number of deaths in these establishments prior to that date would have to be reconstructed. Some countries, such as Spain, have also questioned whether their tolls might be higher, as people dying at home are generally not taken into account.

With 70,270 deaths out of 857,822 cases - equivalent to 70 percent and 52 percent of the global totals respectively - Europe remains the hardest-hit region by the pandemic. On March 22, it had registered fewer than 10,000 deaths. The spread has accelerated in recent weeks - in 11 days, the number of deaths has doubled. Almost everywhere in Europe, morgues are overwhelmed, with coffins lined up in churches in Bergamo, an ice rink in Madrid and a market hall in Rungis in France. Italy and Spain are the two European countries hardest hit, with 18,849 and 15,843 deaths respectively.

The disease is now spreading fastest in the United States, and New York state in particular, where the number of registered cases has surpassed Italy's, with more than 160,000 for the state and 93,000 for New York City alone. More than 28 percent of the global number of cases have been registered in the US - 486,490 as of 1900 GMT on Friday. Even if the number of people who have been hospitalized has stabilized in a number of states, with 18,002 deaths, the US has the second highest death toll in the world after Italy. After Italy, the United States and Spain, the countries most affected in terms of the number of deaths are France with 13,197 deaths, Britain with 8,958, Iran with 4,232 and mainland China with 3,336. — Agencies



Stars

**Daily SuDoku**

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

hard

**Friday's Solution**

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

easy

STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**

You like to feel needed, Aries, but today you might throw up your hands and say, "Enough!" You've given so much of yourself for so long that friends and loved ones tend to think of your largesse as a right rather than a privilege. Today, remind them of their error. Take a day off from indentured servitude. Go to a fancy restaurant and enjoy being waited on. Don't forget to leave a big tip.

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**

Today's planetary aspects indicate that this is likely to be a day of excess, Libra, some of it good, some of it not so good. Take care not to overindulge in food and drink. You could be merely acting out your stress with such behavior. You'd be better served to meditate and get to the root of the problem. On the other hand, money could come your way, possibly a lot of it!

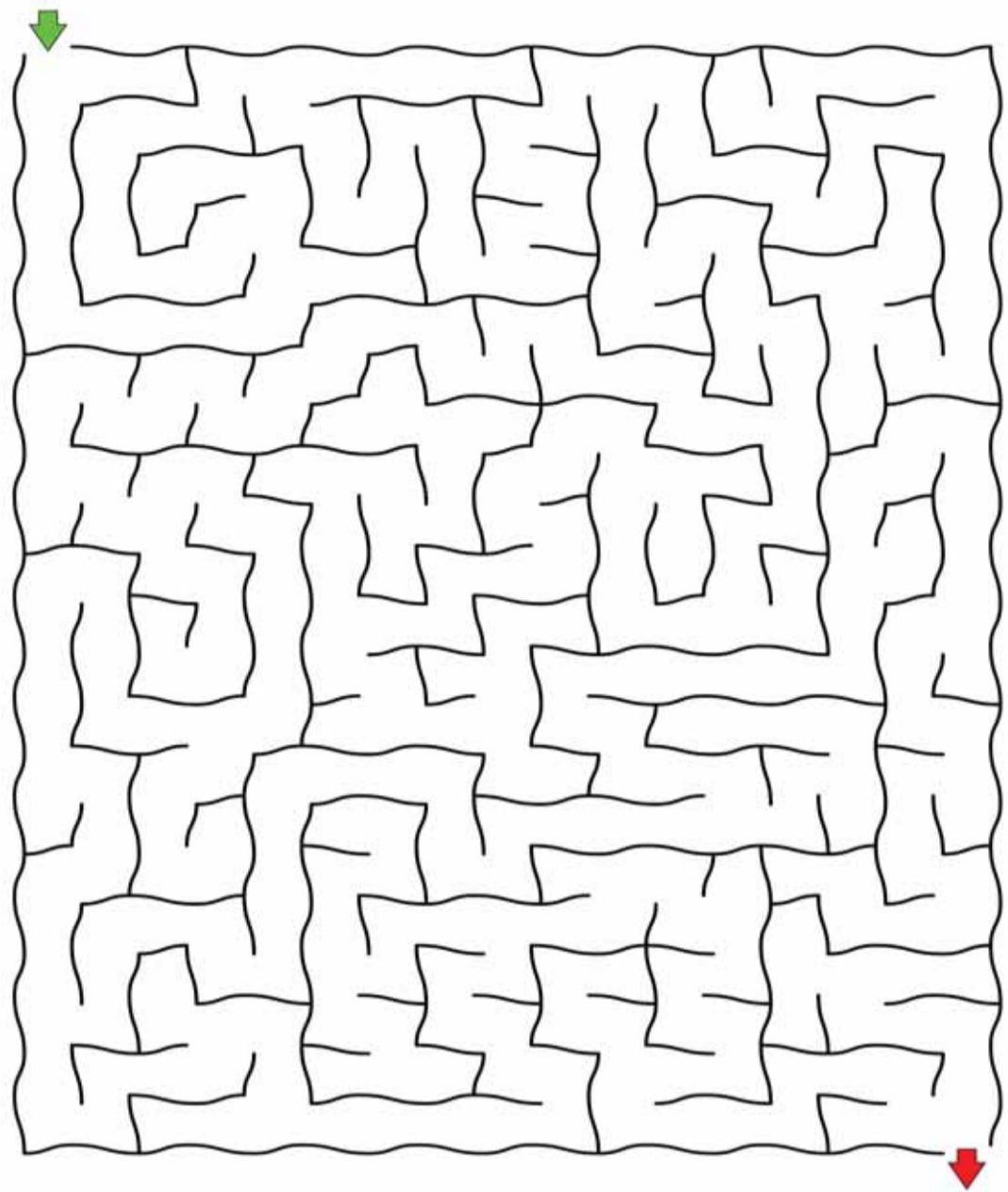
**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

You could be overwhelmed with information today, Taurus, as you receive more phone calls and email messages than you can possibly answer. Be clear about your priorities and stick with them. Otherwise, you're likely to spend the day being batted around the court like a tennis ball. Take a lot of deep breaths throughout the day and make an effort to keep your temper in check.

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**

You should make an effort to be patient and tolerant, especially at the office, even though you might not feel like it, Scorpio. You'll likely take a lot of deep breaths as projects get delayed and meetings drag on. There isn't much you can do about it. Stay focused and trust that everything will be resolved by day's end. In the meantime, don't step on anyone's toes. Your colleagues' nerves are raw.

Find the way



**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**

Your mind is like a sponge today, Gemini, eager to absorb all sorts of information. Take care that the information you're absorbing is accurate. There's a high likelihood that the fascinating news you hear is mostly a mix of fantasy and fiction. Go to the source and get the facts before acting on this information. If necessary, do your own research online or in the library.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**

This could be a day of inner turmoil, Sagittarius. You'll rethink some of your fundamental values, unsure if they're still relevant to your life. It's clear that some soul searching is needed. There are no right or wrong answers, only what is in your heart. If your goal is to live authentically, then you'll need to make some big changes in your life. Don't act rashly. Think things through before taking steps.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**

If you aren't careful, there's a strong possibility that you'll overindulge today, Cancer. Your career frustrations may manifest in the form of overeating, excess drinking, or reckless spending. These are just symptoms masking the real problem. If you can take some time to meditate, you'll calm your nerves and reveal the root of your frustration. Once you have the facts, it will be easier to devise an effective solution.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**

You need to pull yourself up by the bootstraps, Capricorn. Why not take a few steps back and try to look at your life more objectively? Regardless of what you might be thinking at the moment, you do have a terrific life. Stop and count your blessings. Make a list and keep it in your wallet to refer to at low moments. Force yourself to be festive tonight. It will do you good to get out.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**

You're too hard on yourself, Leo. If things haven't gone exactly as planned over the last few days, there's no sense in berating yourself over it. As long as you did the best that you could, what's the problem? It's likely you've experienced a delay and not a cancellation. All signs indicate that your goals will come to fruition even though it might take longer than you'd anticipated.

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**

A particularly tricky situation could occur at work. If you aren't careful, you could lose your cool. Make a concerted effort to keep your wits about you, Aquarius. It could be that a colleague is baiting you, but that's no reason to take it. Keep to yourself as much as possible today. Close your office door. At home, go to bed early. Relax with a good book. All will be calmer tomorrow.

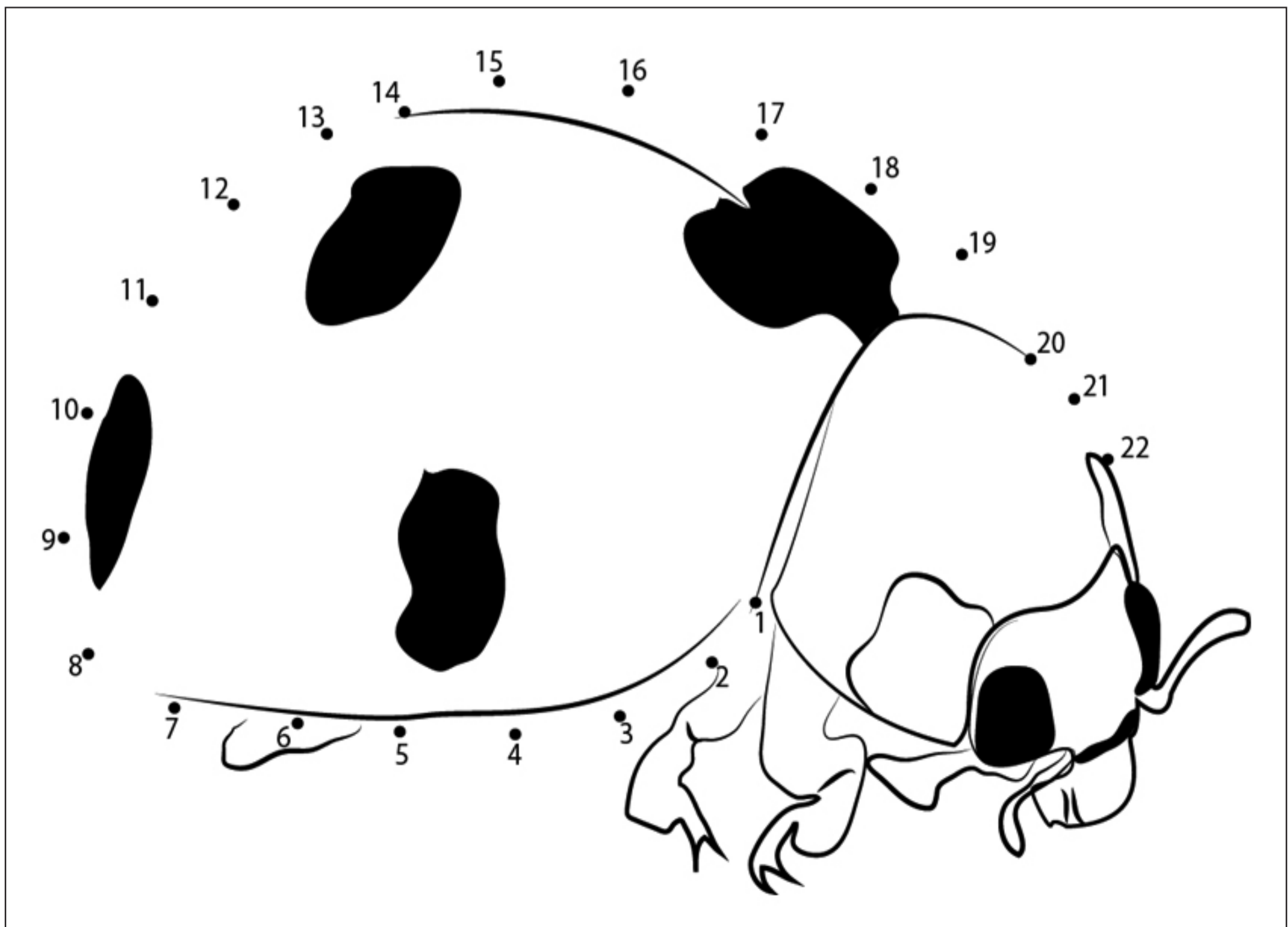
**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

You're especially intuitive today, Virgo. If this is a fairly new occurrence for you, you could be at a loss as to how to make the most of this gift. Only you can know for sure, but one suggestion is to reflect on changes that you'd like to make at work. Pitch them to your boss. With today's keen insight, you'll almost be able to read his or her mind and anticipate any objections.

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**

Boy, your life seems seriously out of balance, doesn't it, Pisces? Today provides an opportunity to rethink what is truly important. Consider exercise as one way to improve your health and manage your stress level. Once you get started with a healthy regimen, you'll see how it helps you gain perspective. It's likely that the cause of all this stress can be eliminated when viewed through a different lens.

Join the dots and color It



## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Mansour Al Safran performs at the Kuwait Towers. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Italian rugby bosses cut salaries to support clubs

**MILAN:** Italian rugby bosses on Friday agreed to voluntary cuts in salaries and payments for senior federation members while setting up a 1.65 million euros (\$1.8 million) fund to help clubs in financial difficulty as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

All rugby in Italy has been cancelled this season as a result of the virus which has killed over 18,000 people in the country. The FIR Council met on Friday using video conference and unanimously approved the 2020 budget, promising to support "home rugby" with a fund to be used from grassroots level up.

"The governing body of Italian rugby has unanimously approved the 2020 budget, while deliberating at the same time the setting up a fund to support the movement, for a minimum share of 1.650 million euros, the criteria and methods of access of which will be communicate as soon as possible," FIR said in a statement.

Money will also be freed up from voluntary salary cuts by FIR management, with senior federation members agreeing to have their participation fees reduced. "The approval of the 2020 budget represents the first formal step taken to allow the movement to cope with the complex historical moment we are going through," said FIR president Alfredo Gavazzi.

FIR will also evaluate the use, where possible, of social safety nets provided for federal employees by the government during the Covid-19 emergency, adding they would "guarantee any wage differentials", in addition to respecting the normal payment times. — AFP

# Travelling fans fear being victims of greed after Olympic postponement

## Delay to also affect Japanese hotel industry

**LAUSANNE:** Thousands of fans planning to travel to the Olympics in Tokyo face uncertainty over flight refunds and reimbursements from hotels, after the 2020 Games were postponed until next year due to the coronavirus pandemic and fear they may become victims of greed.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) last month made the decision to delay the Games because of the disease which has now claimed over 100,000 lives worldwide. The IOC has said that tickets for sporting events will be refunded if people cannot attend in 2021, but admitted that it could "not comment on hotel or flight bookings which were done through third parties".

An American professor of sport management at the University of Washington had reserved 31 rooms for her students for 26 days at a cost of \$90,000 (82,300 euros). She says that if she does not ask for the ticket reimbursement, hoping that her students can make the new dates from July 23 to August 8 next year, there is "no guarantee" that the hotel and plane reservations will be postponed accordingly.

"We are still waiting on both the hotel and the airline," Lisa Delpy Neirotti told AFP. "They said it would take a while to let us know. I truly believe that if hoteliers and airlines start to be greedy and not work with Olympic fans or organisations, the government will need to step in, as it will not look good for Japan tourism, but for Japan as a country."

In 2018, the Japanese ministry of tourism said that it was counting on 600,000 foreign spectators at-

tending the Games, providing a significant economic windfall.

But many of those prospective visitors remain at an impasse, three weeks after the postponement was announced. "I made a reservation two years ago for six nights at the Sakura Cross Hotel in Tokyo, for around 60,000 yen (\$553) via booking.com," a Frenchman, who wanted to remain anonymous, said.

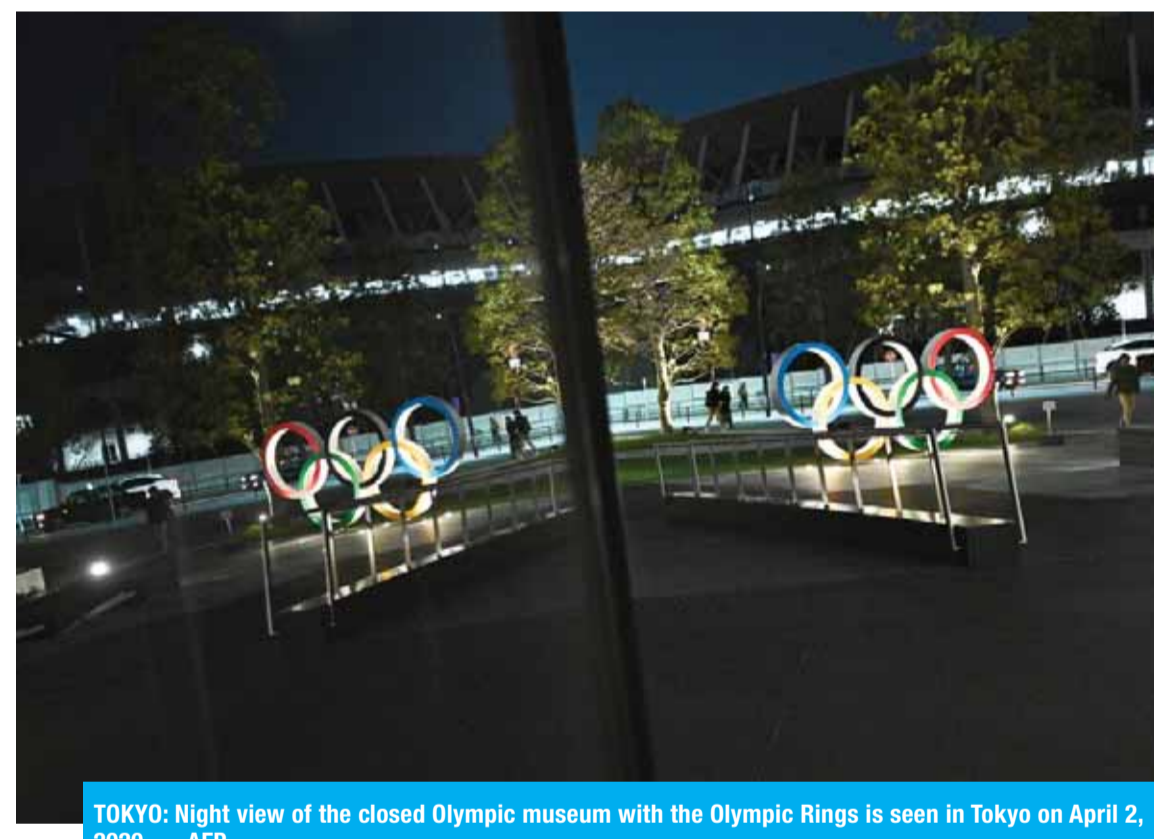
"I am not asking to recover this amount but just to transfer the reservation to 2021." But the hotel refused, saying that it "couldn't take into account the specific circumstances". "I had taken out insurance at the same time as the plane ticket," he added.

"But the exact conditions of insurance do not say clearly if the pandemic is covered." The delay will also affect the Japanese hotel industry, which had already seen hotel bookings fall in March compared to last year.

"This is an enormous shock for us, with sales in many of our member hotels already down by half because of plunging demand for tourism, not only from abroad but also inside Japan due to the coronavirus," said Shigemi Sudo, secretary general of the Tokyo Hotels and Ryokans Association.

Faced with bad publicity and growing discontent, some Japanese hotels are keen to be understanding. "Normally we'd be able to collect cancellation fees, but in this case it isn't the fault of our customers, so we can't request that," a spokesman for hotel chain Via Inn said.

"I don't know if we can negotiate with Olympic officials about compensation or not." An official



TOKYO: Night view of the closed Olympic museum with the Olympic Rings is seen in Tokyo on April 2, 2020. — AFP

with the Tokyo organising committee said the issue surrounding hotel reservations was "under consideration".

"Like everybody else, it is a setback. We will struggle for a while," said Greg Harney, a consultant for Cartan Global, an American company selling

packages for the Games. "I've heard of very few people having asked for a refund, probably a couple, it's encouraging."

"When the crisis is over, I have the feeling that people will want to travel even more than before. The interest for the Games will be even bigger." — AFP

## Americans won't attend future sporting events

**LOS ANGELES:** A large majority of Americans would be reluctant to attend future sporting events unless a vaccine for the coronavirus is developed, a survey by Seton Hall University has found.

With every major sport across North America in shutdown for the past month since the COVID-19 crisis erupted, professional leagues are already exploring the practicalities of how and when competition may resume.

But the results of the Seton Hall Sports Poll revealed deep unease among Americans about returning to stadiums before a vaccine had been developed.

The survey of 762 people carried out between April 6-8 found that 72% would not feel safe attending a sports event without a vaccine. Among identified sports fans, 61% said they would

not feel safe. Twelve percent of Americans polled said they would feel safe only if social distancing measures were in force while only 13% said they would feel safe.

"This virus has the attention and respect of the nation," said Rick Gentile, director of the Seton Hall Sports Poll, which is sponsored by the Sharkey Institute within the Stillman School of Business. "Those who identify as sports fans, at all levels of interest, line up closely with the general population in regard to their own safety and that of the players."

### Support for shutdown

While 40% of those surveyed believed no sports should be played through the remainder of 2020, some 76% said they would have the same level of interest if competitions resumed and were broadcast with no spectators present.

Meanwhile, the survey revealed support for the decisions of professional sports leagues in the timing of their shutdown.

Some 76% percent said the shutdown came at the right time.

Eighty-four percent also backed the International Olympic Committee's de-

cision to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by one year.

The United States has more COVID-19 cases than any other country, with more than 473,000 infections and over 17,800 fatalities.

The National Basketball Association, National Hockey League and Major League Soccer all suspended their respective seasons in mid-March while Major League Baseball also postponed the start of the 2020 season.

Golf, tennis, combat sports and motor racing have also been suspended because of the coronavirus.

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he hoped sports would resume "sooner rather than later" following a call with league commissioners but regional authorities have cast doubt on a swift reopening of stadiums.

"I want fans back in the arenas... whenever we're ready," Trump said.

However, California Governor Gavin Newsom, whose state is home to more than a dozen baseball, soccer, basketball, ice hockey and NFL teams, doubted stadiums would be open by September.

"I'm not anticipating that happening in this state," Newsom said. — AFP

## US PGA Tour exploring return without fans

**LOS ANGELES:** The US PGA Tour is considering various scenarios to a return to competition in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, including playing some events without fans, Golf Digest reported Friday.

The tour told players in a memo sent Thursday, and obtained by Golf Digest, that it was targeting a return for the Charles Schwab Challenge on May 21 at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas.

The tour suspended its season after the first round of the Players Championship last month and has since called off tournaments through the Byron Nelson Championship scheduled for May 7-10. ESPN reported that the tour is expected to announce more cancellations next week.

Players were told in the tour memo that officials hope to "preserve the maximum number of events we can while giving us more time as the crisis evolves."

Officials told players they will rely on guidance from health and government authorities before deciding on a resumption of play.

If a May resumption of play is not possible as shelter-in-place directives remain in effect, a re-start at Colonial could be moved to June 11-14, taking the dates originally set for the Canadian Open, which is expected to be cancelled.

The tour told players they would have three to four weeks' notice before the season resumes.

"We understand many of you may be impacted by travel restrictions and/or the inability to practice in your area, thus we want to be able to give you as much time as possible to allow you to come back fully prepared," the memo said.

The tour announced on Monday that it was rescheduling its season finale, the Wyndham Championship, for August 13-16, with the season-ending tour playoffs to follow over the next three weeks.

Those dates were worked out with the rescheduling of three of the year's four major championships, the US PGA Championship moving to September to be followed by the Ryder Cup and the US Open with the Masters to be held in November. The British Open, originally scheduled for July, has been cancelled. — AFP

## Sports

# Australia did not go 'easy' on Kohli, says Tim Paine

## IPL has pushed back to April 15 because of coronavirus pandemic

**SYDNEY:** Australia captain Tim Paine has dismissed the suggestion of his predecessor Michael Clarke that his players went soft on India skipper Virat Kohli in their 2018-19 series for fear of losing lucrative Indian Premier League contracts.

Kohli led India to their first Test series triumph in Australia on the tour, which came a few months after Steve Smith and David Warner were banned for their parts in the Newlands ball-tampering scandal.

Clarke told a local radio station this week he thought Australian cricket, reeling from that scandal, had "sucked up" to India and that some players did not "sledge" the opposition because they wanted to play with them in the IPL.

"I certainly didn't notice too many people being that nice to Virat or not trying to get him out or anything like that," Paine, who took over from Smith after Newlands and captained Australia throughout the India series, told ESPN Cricinfo.

"I thought everyone who had the ball in their hand or when we were batting were trying their absolute best to win the game for Australia.

"I'm not sure who was going easy on him. We certainly had a thing where we didn't want to provoke any fight with him because we think that's when he plays at his best. "I certainly wasn't holding back, but again the IPL's not a huge draw for me at the moment, so I had nothing to lose.

"But anytime our guys go out and play a Test match for Australia, they'll be giving their absolute all and I'm pretty sure they're not thinking about an IPL contract when they're running in, bowling to Virat."

IPL contracts are extremely lucrative with Australia fast bowler Pat Cummins becoming the most expensive overseas buy in December when Kolkata Knight Riders paid \$2.18 million for him.

The start of this year's IPL has already been pushed back to April 15 because of the coronavirus pandemic, with further postponements looking likely. India are scheduled to play another four-test series in Australia at the end of the year, although a significant relaxation of government measures currently in place to control the virus would be required for the tour to go ahead. — Reuters



India and Australia captains Virat Kohli and Tim Paine engaged in verbal joust.

**IPL's not a huge draw for me**



## Bobby Moore, England's soccer icon

**LONDON:** Bobby Moore being held aloft by team mates Geoff Hurst and Ray Wilson at the old Wembley Stadium on July 1966, a gleaming Jules Rimet trophy held high in his right hand, is an image imprinted indelibly on the psyche of English sports fans.

To this day Hurst is rightly lauded for his hat-trick in the World Cup final victory over Germany, but it was captain Moore, the epitome of the concept that 'nice guys can come first', who stole the nation's hearts.

It is Moore's statue that commands a prominent position outside the new Wembley — a permanent reminder of the day England ruled the world, and just how long the wait has been for the national team to scale such heights again.

Regally composed with his arms crossed, left foot resting on the ball, quiet determination etched on his face, the statue also offers a reminder of the immaculate standards of professionalism Moore set on and off the pitch.

Born not far from London's docklands in Barking during the Blitz in 1941, Moore joined local club West Ham United in 1956 and made his first-team debut in 1958 against Manchester United.

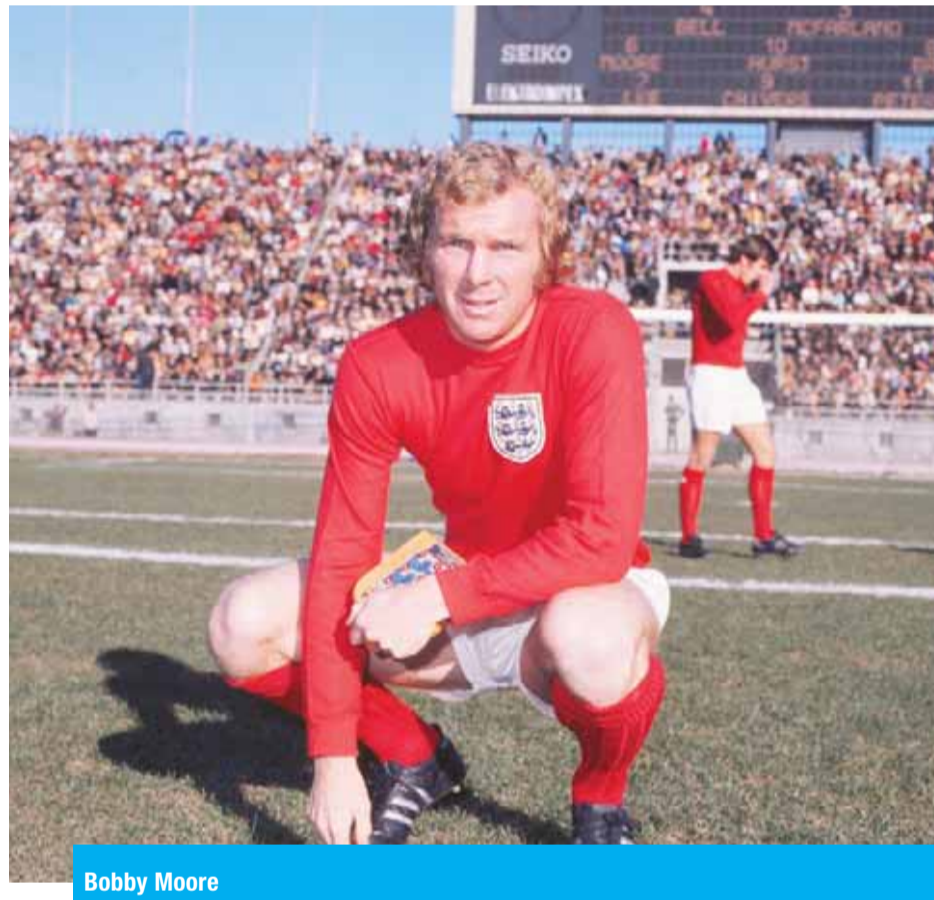
He immortalised the No.6 shirt for the Hammers, making 647 appearances before joining Fulham in 1974. West Ham won the FA Cup in 1964 and Cup Winners' Cup in 1965 as Moore established himself as one of the world's best defenders.

Moore, handed his England debut by Walter Winterbottom in 1962, was not blessed with speed, muscularity or even heading prowess but he ripped up the blueprint of how to defend.

In an era when defenders were chiefly 'stoppers' Moore was a thinking man's defender, refining the discipline into an art.

### UNSHAKEABLE REVERENCE

He tackled with the precision of a surgeon, read the game like a book and was a cultured passer.



Bobby Moore

His unshakeable reverence for the beautiful game earned him the admiration of team mates and opponents alike.

"Bobby was my football idol. I looked up to him. I was so proud to have played against him," German great Franz Beckenbauer once said of Moore.

Moore will always be linked to that summer afternoon at Wembley, but perhaps the match that cemented his legacy came four years later in Mexico when England were beaten 1-0 in a group game by a sensational Brazil side inspired by Pele.

Time and again Moore's well-timed interventions held back the yellow wave. The affectionate embrace at full-time between Pele and the England skipper spoke volumes.

"The shirt he wore against me in that 1970 match is my prize possession, the world has lost one of its greatest football players and a great gentleman," Pele said

after Moore's all-too-short life was ended by cancer in 1993, at the age of 51.

Moore was the first of England's 1966 heroes to die. A few months later a memorial service was held at Westminster Abbey. "My captain, my leader, my right-hand man. He was the spirit and the heartbeat of the team," World Cup winning manager Alf Ramsey, who gave Moore the captain's arm-band in 1964, said.

Moore had his ups and downs after his playing days ended in the US in 1983. He dabbled without much success as a manager of Southend, appeared in the hit movie *Escape to Victory*, was divorced from wife Tina in 1986, and had some ill-fated business ventures.

But his dignity endured, as did his love of the game. He became a popular radio pundit on Capital Gold, working on an England game just days before his death. — Reuters

## Dalglish tests positive for coronavirus

**LONDON:** Liverpool legend Kenny Dalglish has tested positive for coronavirus but is not showing symptoms of the disease, his family said Friday.

The 69-year-old former Scottish international striker, who started his career at Celtic, was admitted to hospital on Wednesday for treatment for an infection which required intravenous antibiotics.

"He was subsequently tested for COVID-19 despite having previously displayed no symptoms of the illness," said a family statement. "Unexpectedly, the test result was positive but he remains asymptomatic.

"Prior to his admission to hospital, he had chosen to voluntarily self isolate for longer than the advised period together with his family.

"He would urge everyone to follow the relevant government and expert guidance in the days and weeks ahead." Dalglish won the Scottish league title with Celtic as a player on four occasions before signing for Liverpool in 1977.

At Anfield, he captured eight English league titles, three FA Cups and three European Cups during a glittering 13-year stint as a player and in two managerial spells.

In his Liverpool playing career, he

scored 172 goals in 515 games. As well as his role in Liverpool's golden era in the 1970s and 1980s, Dalglish received plaudits for supporting victims' families after 96 fans died in the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster.

He also went on to coach Blackburn Rovers to the Premier League title in 1995. Former Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard, now manager of Glasgow Rangers in Scotland, posted a picture to his Instagram page of Dalglish with one of his daughters, with the message: "Get well soon king."

Former team-mate Terry McDermott tweeted: "Thinking of my big pal @kennethdalglish - hoping he makes a speedy recovery from this awful virus". Dalglish, who also made more than 100 international appearances for Scotland, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2018.

"Kenny would like to take this opportunity to thank the brilliant NHS staff, whose dedication, bravery and sacrifice should be the focus of the nation's attention at this extraordinary time," added the family statement on Friday.

"He would also ask that they are given the space to do their jobs during what is an extremely challenging time for them and that his own family's privacy is respected. "He looks forward to being home soon. We will provide further updates as and when it is appropriate."

The coronavirus has claimed the lives of nearly 9,000 people in Britain, while the number of confirmed cases in the country climbed Friday close to 74,000. —AFP

## West Ham players agree to defer part of salaries

**LONDON:** Players at English Premier League side West Ham on Friday agreed to defer part of their wages during the coronavirus suspension while manager David Moyes will take a 30% pay cut.

The move comes just a day after top-flight rivals Southampton struck a similar deal with their players as clubs wrestle with the financial fallout of the virus which has shut down the sport for a month.

"The savings created by the measures will support the entire infrastructure of the club and enable us to retain jobs and continue to pay 100 per cent of staff salaries," said a West Ham statement.

Joint-chairmen David Sullivan and David Gold as well as fellow shareholders also agreed to inject £30million into the club.

Vice-chairman Karren Brady and finance director Andy Mollett are taking a 30% cut, just like Moyes.

West Ham skipper Mark Noble, who is playing a key role in the recently-launched #PlayersTogether initiative aimed at generating funds for Britain's National Health Service, said he was glad an agreement on wages had been reached.

"As players we have been in constant dialogue with the club since the situation around COVID-19 emerged and I am proud that our entire squad have made clear their strong desire to play our part in helping to support others through this situation," he said.

"At West Ham United, we are one team and our priority reflects the club's aim to help ensure the staff get 100 per cent of their salaries while we are unable to play our matches.

"We continue to do all we can, collectively and individually, throughout this period for the benefit of those around us, our colleagues, our supporters and our community."

Brady added: "I would like to say a big thank you to David Moyes and his backroom team, our captain Mark Noble and our fantastic squad of players for the commitment and determination they have shown to offer their help and support."

On Wednesday, Southampton's players, manager Ralph Hasenhuttl, his staff and the club's directors agreed to defer their salaries for April, May and June.

Southampton also said they would not be using public money to pay employees.

The decision came amid a row about whether Premier League players — with an average salary of three million pounds (\$3.7 million) — should be forced to give up some of their salary to help the nation.

Bobby Barnes, deputy chief executive of the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), said his members were being unfairly "demonised". — AFP

## Most athletes concerned at reduced drug testing

**NEW YORK:** An overwhelming majority of elite track and field athletes are concerned about the reduction of testing for banned substances during the coronavirus pandemic, according to results of a survey released on Friday.

The Athletics Association, which bills itself as the unified voice of professional athletes, said on its Twitter feed that of 685 athletes polled globally, 78% were concerned about the validity of results due to reduced testing. "Further clarity is needed on the confidence that athletes, and the public, can have in the results achieved during this period," it says.

With the Tokyo 2020 summer Olympic Games postponed for 12 months, the survey also found that 82% of athletes continue to train, and that 86% want to return to competition at some stage this year if it is safe to do so. But there was less consensus over how qualifying for the Olympics should be determined. While 60% want successful Olympic qualifying marks achieved before December to count, 56% also think this might be unfair given that lockdown policies vary from place to place.

"In terms of Olympic qualification, 81% of athletes surveyed think that the world rankings system needs to be reconsidered," it says. "These results together demonstrate the myriad of complex issues thrown up by the new rankings system in determining who qualifies for the Olympics, magnified for everyone involved at this uncertain time." — AFP

## No-width: How Broad tamed Warner during last year's Ashes

**LONDON:** England quick Stuart Broad reckons his total domination of Australia opener David Warner in last year's Ashes series was down to his strategy of denying the batsman any width to play his fierce cut shots and square drives. Broad dismissed Warner seven times in 10 innings as the subdued left-hander finished the drawn series with only 95 runs.

"He is such a dangerous player and one of the best third-innings opening batsmen in the world," Broad said in a Sky Cricket podcast. "Having played against him a lot over the last eight or nine years, I found that, as I am a taller bowler, when he sat back in the crease he was cutting and square driving me a lot to the boundary.

"I decided I was just going to try and hit his stumps every ball. I was not going to try and swing it away from it as I felt that gave him width, I was just going to scramble the seam." Broad said he kept attacking the stumps and did not mind the occasional straight drives. "Once I got him at Lord's, the third time in a row, I just got that feeling like I was getting a bit of a competitive edge over him," said Broad, who has 485 wickets from 138 tests.

The lanky right-arm bowler has forged a formidable new-ball partnership with Jimmy Anderson, test cricket's most prolific seam bowler, and he attributed their success to their complimentary approaches. "I love the competitive side of cricket, the moment of winning, working a batsman out, getting a wicket, but he just loves any sort of bowling and is at his happiest just trucking in," Broad added. — Reuters

## 18 Travelling fans fear being victims of greed after Olympic postponement



## 19 Australia did not go 'easy' on Kohli, says Tim Paine



## 19 Bobby Moore, England's soccer icon



WASHINGTON: File photo of Tiger Woods of the United States plays a shot from the 12th tee during the final round of the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club. — AFP

# Virus doomed Tiger's 18-major bid?

WASHINGTON: One year after Tiger Woods reignited his chase for golf's record 18 major wins with an amazing Masters victory, the coronavirus pandemic has become the latest obstacle to his historic chase. Woods would have been defending his 15th career major title and seeking a record-tying sixth green jacket this week at Augusta National had the deadly virus outbreak not halted sports worldwide. "Somehow it all came together for one magical week," Woods said in February. "Just an amazing week."

But this year's 84th Masters was postponed to November 12-15, the British Open was canceled, the US Open was delayed from June to September and the PGA Championship was moved from May to August. "There are a lot more important things in life than a golf tournament right now," Woods tweeted last month. "We need to be safe, smart and do what is best for ourselves, our loved ones and our community."

Woods electrified Augusta last April with his first final-round comeback major triumph, his first major title since 2008 putting him three shy of the all-time record set by Jack Nicklaus. "He's got me shaking in my boots," Nicklaus said last April. Woods, 44, will have plenty of rest time for his surgically repaired back before a November Masters and even a bit more

rest from the PGA Championship to the US Open if both are played as now scheduled. "I have to listen to my body and properly rest when needed," Woods tweeted in March.

But Father Time is a growing factor. Only eight men have won a major beyond their 44th birthday, none more than once. Nicklaus is the most recent with his 1986 Masters triumph at 46 while the late Julius Boros was the oldest major winner at 48 at the 1968 PGA. "One of the hardest things to accept as an older athlete is that you're not going to be as consistent as you were at 23," Woods said in July. "I'm going to have my hot weeks. I'm going to be there in contention with a chance to win and I will win. But there are times when I'm just not going to be there."

### TIGER YEARS FOR TOKYO

Meanwhile, a host of rivals are in their prime, including Rory McIlroy, who can complete a career

Grand Slam at an autumn Masters. "I think this scheduling will be to Rory's favor," Nicklaus told Golf Channel. "He seems to play better in the fall. He has won the Tour Championship a couple times, played in (nearby) Atlanta, very similar conditions."

Woods is 11th in the world golf rankings, and just seventh among Americans. Only the top four will qualify for the US 2021 Tokyo Olympics squad. "Olympic gold medal would be a hell of a feat," Woods has said. "First I need to qualify. It would be exciting if I got a chance to represent the United States in the Olympic Games." In coming years, Woods would see courses besides Augusta National where he has won majors before, including the 2021 US Open at Torrey Pines, a layout where his eight titles include the 2008 US Open, and the British Open in 2022 at St. Andrews, where Woods has twice won the Claret Jug.

His first chance to pass Boros as the oldest major winner could be the 2024 PGA Championship at

Valhalla, where Woods won the 2000 PGA. Woods's fifth Masters green jacket completed a fairy-tale comeback for the superstar who underwent spinal fusion surgery in April of 2017. "I could barely walk. I couldn't sit. Couldn't lay down. I really couldn't do much of anything," Woods said of the decision to have surgery. "I had the procedure on my back, which gave me a chance at having a normal life. Then all of a sudden, I realized I could actually swing a golf club again."

### 'TOOK A LOT OUT OF ME'

But after his Masters win Woods missed the cut at the PGA and British and was 21st at the US Open. "Getting myself into position to win the Masters, it took a lot out of me," Woods acknowledged. By November, Woods was on form again, winning the Zozo Championship in Japan for his 82nd career US PGA Tour title, matching Sam Snead's all-time record. In December, player-captain Woods led a US victory at the Presidents Cup in Australia. A month later he shared ninth at Torrey Pines. But he slid to 68th at Riviera in February in his most recent start, back pain preventing him from playing in the Players Championship, which was halted after 18 holes by virus concerns. — AFP

“ Just an amazing week ”

## 'Test all players for virus' before season restart

LONDON: League Managers Association chief executive Richard Bevan said Friday that the English season can only be restarted if all footballers are tested for coronavirus. "Tests must be made available first to National Health Service (NHS) workers and patients," Bevan told the BBC. "Once that's happened, by all means let's access it in sport." Football has already been shelved for a month due to the virus which has killed nearly 9,000 people in Britain.

Football League chiefs believe they can finish the season in 56 days once it is safe to resume. "We're not really going to see more accurate forecasting about when we can get on the pitch until the end of April," added Bevan. "In Germany, if you look at discussions about coming

back in May, that's probably a direct result of some very clear thinking from their government because they're doing 50,000 tests a day.

"In this country we're doing 10,000 per day, although the government are targeting 100,000 each day by the end of the month. "Our managers do not want to be back on the pitch unless the players have been tested." Clubs in the Championship, League One and League Two were sent a letter by the Football League this week revealing that the governing body hope to complete the season this summer despite the on-going pandemic.

But Bevan insists bosses should have been consulted. "You're going to have to get the goodwill of the players because you're going to have at least three weeks of training to get back on the pitch at least. "The most important thing guiding every principle is health, and getting back on the pitch without ensuring fully-fit players is a very big call to make." — AFP

## Swiss to drop investigation against Blatter

PARIS: The Swiss Public Prosecutor's Office (MPC) has decided to close one of two investigations into former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, reports claimed Friday. According to French newspaper Le Monde and German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung, the disgraced 84-year-old will not be prosecuted over a charge relating to TV rights sold to the Caribbean Football Union (CFU).

That was one of two criminal cases opened against Blatter in 2015 for "suspicion of unfair management and breach of trust". Blatter told AFP on Friday that he had "not personally received the document of the MPC. I will ask my lawyer to forward it to me." It relates to the contract over TV rights. Swiss prosecutors suspected Blatter of having signed a "con-



Sepp Blatter

tract unfavourable to FIFA" with the CFU, then under the control of Jack Warner, who was banned from football for life and indicted for corruption by American justice officials.

The contract granted television rights for the 2010 and 2014 World Cups to the CFU for 600,000 dollars, an amount deemed to be below market price. Blatter, however, still faces a second criminal investigation over the controversial payment of two million Swiss francs (1.89 million euros) to Michel Platini, the former

president of UEFA, in February 2011.

"Once the case concerning the payment of 2 million Swiss francs to Platini is also closed, I will ask FIFA for my rehabilitation. ".... because my suspension by the FIFA ethics committee was made on the basis of accusations by the Swiss justice," Blatter, who was ousted from office in 2015 and is serving a six-year ban from FIFA activities said. Platini was banned from football for four years by FIFA, where he was then vice-president, in 2015. — AFP