



3 15-member Indian medical team, supplies in Kuwait



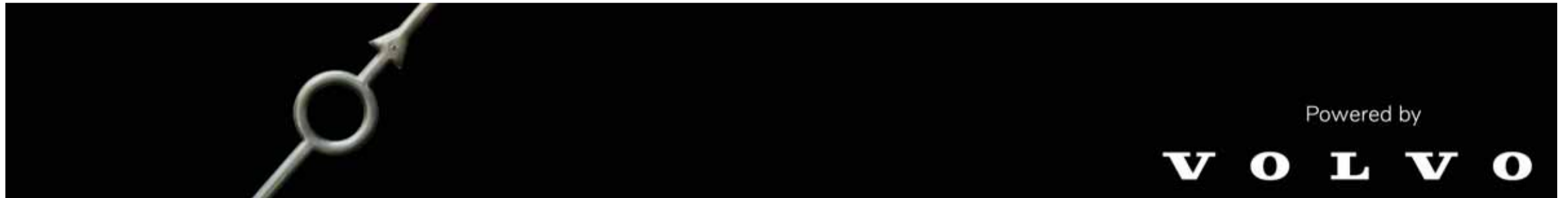
7 Traditional Japan seal system hampers telework for some



12 Amid pandemic, turning point for telemedicine



20 Football sponsors worry that they are paying for nothing



Govt says it's ready for total curfew, but no decision yet

80 new virus cases • Crackdown on visa traders • Saudi extends curfew indefinitely

Sun. 12/04/2020

Updates on COVID 19

Total cases	New cases	Active cases	ICU	Recovered	Deaths
1234	80	1091	29	142	1

Related to travel **1**

1 case of Kuwaiti national related to travel to United Kingdom .

Cases in contact **71**

2 cases of Kuwaiti nationals, 42 cases of Indian residents, 9 cases of Bangladeshi residents, 6 cases of Iranian residents, 4 cases of Egyptian residents, 2 cases of Nepali residents, 2 cases of Pakistani residents, 2 cases of Filipino resident, 1 case of Syrian resident, 1 case of Portuguese resident.

Under investigation **8**

3 cases of Kuwaiti national, 3 cases of Indian resident, 2 cases of Egyptian residents.

KUWAIT MOH
www.moh.gov.kw

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

مكتب الإعلام الصحي
Health Media Office

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government said yesterday it is ready and prepared for imposing a total curfew in the country, but reiterated that no decision has been taken yet. Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh said that total curfew remains an option for the health authorities based on public interest and the protection of the health system in the country. The minister however said security agencies are ready and prepared to impose the curfew as soon as the decision is issued. Saleh made the remarks as he inspected Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, which is under a lockdown, and a number of shelters and quarantines for expat workers.

The ministry of health yesterday reported 80 new coronavirus cases, raising the total number to 1,234, of whom 142 cases have recovered and one died. Of the new cases, 45 are Indians, raising their number close to 700, in addition to nine Bangladeshis, six Kuwaitis, six Egyptians and six Iranians, while the remaining are of various other nationalities.

Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said no decision has been taken to impose a total curfew, and all government agencies have been making preparations, arrangements and plans in case the total cur-

few decision is taken. He added that what is being circulated about a total curfew in untrue and baseless. Local and social media have been rife with expectations that the government is on the brink of imposing a total curfew in the face of a steep rise in the number of coronavirus cases, which on Saturday jumped to 161 cases, the largest single-day toll so far.

As the government placed Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula under lockdown, where more than half a million expat workers live, authorities have stepped up their fight against visa traders. The public prosecutor has ordered the detention of a Kuwaiti officer along with his six Egyptian partners and charged them of trafficking in persons and selling residence permits for money.

The main suspect is a colonel in the interior ministry, who was sacked last week by the interior minister. He is accused of bringing some 1,300 Egyptian workers for amounts reaching up to KD 2,000 per person and leaving them without jobs. His company also used to charge several hundred dinars for annual renewal of residences.

MPs have also pressed the government to repatriate thousands of Kuwaitis stranded overseas. The lawmakers want the repatria-

tion to happen before the start of the holy month of Ramadan on April 24. Reports said the government will operate within days an air bridge to bring back more than 10,000 citizens from several countries, and most of them will pledge to stay in home quarantine as there is no space to keep them in health ministry quarantines.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's King Salman extended a nationwide curfew until further notice due to the spread of the new coronavirus, the interior ministry said yesterday, after the kingdom reported more than 300 new infections on each of the last four days. Last week Saudi Arabia placed its capital Riyadh and other big cities under a 24-hour curfew, locking down much of the population to stem the spread of the virus. Elsewhere, the curfew which began on March 23 runs from 3 pm to 6 am.

The country of some 30 million has recorded 4,033 infections with 52 deaths, the highest among the six Gulf Arab states where the total count has surpassed 13,200 with 88 deaths despite strict measures to curb transmissions. The kingdom has halted international flights, suspended the year-round umrah pilgrimage, and closed most public places. Other Gulf states have taken similar precautions.

Easter celebrations muted as US virus deaths top 20,000



JERUSALEM: Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, walks past garbage collectors yesterday as he makes his way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre before the start of the Easter Sunday service amid the coronavirus disease outbreak. — AFP

ROME: Christians celebrated Easter Sunday under coronavirus lockdown in many countries with church pews empty and the pope on live stream, as the US death toll from the disease passed 20,000. At the climax of Holy Week for the planet's two billion-plus Christians, congregations were shuttered at home to avoid spreading the pathogen that has infected at least 1.7 million worldwide. Pope Francis was set to break with centuries of tradition by taking his Easter mass online, with Saint Peter's Square - packed every year with worshippers - left deserted.

The United States, with around a fifth of the more than 100,000 total COVID-19 deaths, topped the list for both fatalities and numbers of declared cases, according to a tally maintained by Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins University. Italy, the hardest-hit country in Europe, has recorded more than 19,000 confirmed virus deaths - second only to the US, which has a population five times its size.

But hopes began to rise in Western Europe and heavily infected parts of America that the pandemic was peaking. Many were looking to China's Wuhan, where the disease first emerged late last year, as life began to return to normal while officials lifted stay-inside restrictions. However for much of the world, from India to France, strict lockdowns were still in force.

A handful of US priests and pastors risked arrest by announcing they would hold public services in their churches yesterday, snubbing rules and medical advice. But most were putting services online, and some were innovating with "drive-in" blessings. President Donald Trump will be among those following Easter services online, tweeting he would log on Sunday morning to watch Robert Jeffress, the leader of a Southern Baptist megachurch in Texas and an ardent supporter of the US leader.

Continued on Page 16

Oil prices, virus, instability put Algeria on edge

ALGIERS: Algeria faces economic and social turmoil if crude prices continue to collapse, experts have warned, with the oil-dependent country reeling from a year

of popular protests, political turmoil and now, coronavirus. The North African country is an example of how hydrocarbon economies are likely to face unrest if oil prices remain at near two-decade lows due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a price war between key players Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Oil cartel OPEC announced that major producers had proposed to cut output between May and June by 10 million barrels per day. But G20 countries failed to

agree on cuts at a virtual summit Friday. Even if a deal is reached, Algeria will not be out of the woods, oil expert Nazim Zouiouche told official news agency APS, as any impact would be "temporary" due to the worldwide pandemic.

In Algeria, the price collapse has destroyed revenue projections, with President Abdelmadjid Tebboune acknowledging the "vulnerability" of the country's oil-dependent economy.

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Local

Kuwait Audit Bureau approves contracts for 12 quarantine sites

Various airliners to operate expatriates' outbound flights

KUWAIT: The State Audit Bureau (SAB) approved Saturday 12 contracts for sites to be used as quarantine for Kuwaitis returning from abroad. Speaking to the press, SAB's undersecretary and head of the bureau's emergency team Suleiman Al-Busairi said that they were in contact with officials from several locally based and international-brand hotels to discuss using their facilities for quarantine. The contracts varied in daily expenses and services from KD 4,000 (\$12,000) to KD 45 (\$144), he indicated. The approval are within the state's laws, Busairi affirmed, indicating that a number of hotels agreed to the deals, while others declined.

Expat flights

In other news, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said Saturday that airliners could operate outbound flights for members of the expatriate community in Kuwait wishing to travel back to their home countries. All airliners will schedule flights for several destinations in accordance with the cabinet decision made on April 9, affirmed the directorate. The DGCA will co-

ordinate with airway companies to schedule the flights for expatriates eager to travel back to their respective home countries.

Stores closed

Separately, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced yesterday the closure of 17 commercial stores that did not abide by preventive measures laws as part of combating the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In a statement to the press, the ministry said that two stores were reopened as well, adding that ministry inspectors monitored 279 cooperative societies, markets, commercial stores, and vegetable stand-alone shops to determine the extent of their commitment to new regulations and to maintain the stability of prices to products. The ministry noted that their teams also monitored 80 ration house branches to ensure their abiding by the measures and the selling of food rations to people. The ministry added that it received 184 compliant calls on its emergency hotline, through their number 135, and 12 of those calls were received through their monitoring centers. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Volunteers help Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh residents change their cooking gas cylinders during a total lockdown imposed there as part of efforts to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



KUWAIT: A vehicle collided with a dump truck near Al-Zoor fuel station. Firemen cut the vehicle open to free two persons who were trapped inside, then handed them to paramedics. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

Pandemic Diaries

The power of memory



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

I'm standing beneath a massive Scots pine in the middle of Lake Abant Park, a nature reserve in Bolu province, Turkey. The view is magnificent: The sun glimmers off the gentle waves of the lake, which serves as the focal point for the park. A two-lane blacktop road encircles the lake but is shrouded on nearly all sides by the canopy of trees, pines, beeches, tamarisks, juniper, willows and hornbeams that cover the slow, rolling hills up to a clear and cloudless blue sky.

I've gone for an early morning walk, before the children are awake and it is time for breakfast, swimming and all the fun we've planned for the day. The air is fresh and clean, the scent of pine and tree bark combines with the smell of fresh grass and the sound of my feet crunch on the bed of pine needles and leaves that carpet the forest floor.

I am determined to savor as much of the outdoors as possible, to walk each morning around the lake, to enjoy the coolness beneath the trees, to stop and notice the sedge grass shooting up from the edges of the lake, the daisies and sunflowers blooming in clumps along the path. I note the details, thanking God for the opportunity to visit this beautiful landscape and the quietude of nature.

It's 2018 - the global pandemic is still nearly two years into the future.

I've read that actively savoring a moment not only helps stretch your experience of that moment, but it also embeds it more deeply in your experience and can serve as a calming memory available for recall during times of stress or crisis.

In the days, weeks and months to come there will be many more moments when the fallout from this pandemic feels overwhelming, when the stress gets too much. There will be heart attacks and suicides, violence and despair. Not all of us have the resources to readily avoid what may be a lengthy economic recession. We will need to draw on our resilience, our creativity and steadfastness - and for that, any method or means of restoring calm and equilibrium can help.

In my apartment in Kuwait this morning, I close my eyes and recall that morning. I pause for a minute, remembering the clean fresh smell of unpolluted air and the sound of birds twittering in the branches of the sweet scented trees.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 1,234 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to one death. With the exception of 29 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, 142 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,091 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 supermarkets, restaurants and shops 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

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. 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. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to April 23, with work resuming on April 26, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.
- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures: 24970967 (24/7 hotline)

- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

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

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

Together in times of crises

By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com



It is amazing how people of all backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures and creeds come together during times of crises and hardships, even if a few may not follow suit. Even within the same society, classes disappear as all unite to help each other and keep the wheels rolling. Under our current circumstances, we see the government, NGOs and the well-to-do come together and start offering help - material or even meals without any other consideration or thought than just to help.

Back in 1990, when the invasion took place, my wife was pregnant and due any time. I was very worried, because of my citizenship, as the occupation authorities were giving one warning after the other. Anyhow, when it was time for her to deliver, we went to Mubarak Hospital, where we were received warmly. We told the doctor, may God bless her, about the situation, and she decided to deliver the baby at the hospital, which was not equipped for maternity issues. My son was born and I could not believe how helpful the doctors and nurses were, despite the presence of agents of the occupier. We went home very safely because of those amazing people.

Volunteers here in Kuwait are doing all types of things when needed, supporting government efforts to help people get through day-to-day work until the crisis is over. Cooperation with each other helps to exchange ideas and information among people, resulting in more creativity and getting to know new dimensions and various views over many issues, and this helps in achieving the most in life. It also helps to overcome various issues and crises in life, because no one can resolve problems by themselves, and this is why people should cooperate to be successful.

Cooperation contributes to the development of the economy, as the rich help the poor, and when the crisis is over the recovery of the economy to its full potential can be easier. It also help keep the place tidy, as when each person is keen to keep the place clean, they will help in maintaining a healthy environment around themselves. People get closer to each other and keep grudges and hatred out, so people can live in peace and stability.

Final word: "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression." Holy Quran Al-Maidah (verse 2)

Local

15-member Indian medical team arrives in Kuwait

More than 600 Indians tested positive



KUWAIT: Members of the Indian team seen on arrival at the airport.



Kuwait defense ministry personnel with members of the Indian team following their arrival.

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: A 15-member Indian medical team consisting of doctors and healthcare professionals arrived in Kuwait on Saturday. The rapid response team from India arrived here on a special Indian air force flight to offer support to Kuwait government's efforts in combating the spread of coronavirus in the country.

During its stay in Kuwait for a period of two weeks, the medical team will offer medical assistance to Kuwaiti healthcare professionals in testing suspected cases and treating novel coronavirus (COVID-19) patients, in addition to training them in managing the emerging situation.

The medical team has been dispatched by the Indian government following a recent telephone call between His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in

which both leaders reportedly agreed for joint and coordinated efforts to combat the global pandemic.

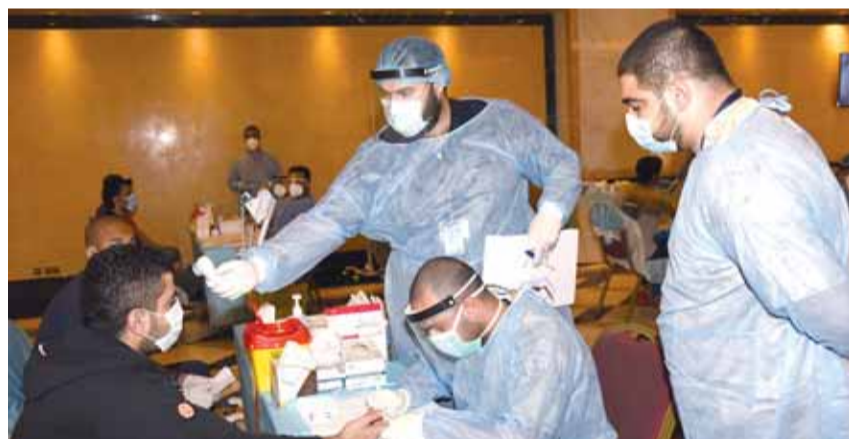
The Indian medical team arrives in Kuwait at a critical time, when the community is witnessing an alarming upsurge in the number of positive cases among Indians. As of Saturday, more than 600 Indians have tested positive for COVID-19 in Kuwait and the number is feared to rise in the coming days. Indians form the largest expat community in Kuwait, numbering more than 900,000.

The head of medical services at Kuwait's Defense Ministry Sheikh Dr Abdullah Meshal Al-Sabah, the deputy Indian ambassador Raj Gopal Singh, officers of the Kuwaiti Air Force and other Indian diplomats were present upon the Indian Air Force aircraft's touchdown at Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base, Kuwait's Defense Ministry's Moral Guidance Department said in a statement.



Equipment are being sterilized before being taken down from the plane.

107 Kuwaitis leave quarantine



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Defense announced Saturday that 107 Kuwaitis have left a quarantine site supervised by the ministry's medical services department, after they tested negative to the novel coronavirus

(COVID-19). The citizens have completed their mandated 14-day quarantine period after being evacuated on a special flight from Rome, Italy, the Defense Ministry's Moral Guidance Department said in a statement.

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Car repair shops shut down in Sharq as Kuwait City skyscrapers are seen in the background. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shalkh

Farm owners fined for housing company workers

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KUWAIT: Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources inspectors toured Abdali on Saturday and took action against agricultural landholders who failed to use their lands for agricultural purposes.

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri fined a number of agricultural landholders for housing company workers in farms used to provide food security, adding all violators will be held legally accountable.

Meanwhile, manpower authority director Ahmad Al-Moussa said inspectors have detected the transfer of some laborers from their accommodation to another site in Jahra to avoid the

lockdown likely to be imposed on some areas. Moussa added that on detecting the violation, the committee notified the Municipality and had Ministry of Electricity and Water disconnect power supplies at the residence involved in the violation. Moussa explained that the company violation involves transferring workers without notifying the manpower authority, accommodating bachelors in non-designated areas and not getting the authority's permission, which is usually granted after making sure the residence matches labor accommodation conditions.



Local

Interior Minister examines center for residency violators

Deputy premier tours Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh tours the center for harboring violators of residency law in Kabd. — Interior Ministry photos

Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh tours Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh toured on Saturday the center for harboring violators of residency law in Kabd. He examined precautionary and security precautions at the facility and conditions of the center occupants. The minister also visited the district of Jleeb

Al-Shuyoukh that has been placed under lockdown where he inspected security precautions in and around the region, a ministry statement said. It quoted him as saying that total lockdown throughout the country remained a possible option affirming readiness of the security personnel to ensure implementation of such measure. —KUNA

Bangladeshi nationals avail amnesty



KUWAIT: Bangladeshi nationals line up outside a school in Farwaniya which was turned into a center to receive applications wishing to avail the amnesty. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: Bangladeshi nationals headed yesterday 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. Bangladeshi applicants are received on April 11 - 15, followed by Indians on April 16 - 20, Sri Lankans on April 21 - 25, and other nationalities on April 26 - 30. Egyptian nationals were received on April 6 - 10, following a five-day period to receive applicants from the Philippines.

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 Naeem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.





US records highest COVID-19 death toll

Germany condemns anti-French insults in the border zone

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BOURTON ON THE WATER: A sign reads 'Village Closed' on the side of the road leading into the Cotswolds village of Bourton-on-the-Water, central England as life in Britain continues over the Easter break, during the nationwide lockdown to combat the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

UK death toll nears 10,000

Boris Johnson making 'good progress' in virus recovery

LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson was making "very good progress" in his recovery in hospital from coronavirus, officials said, as the country's deaths toll from the disease approached the grim milestone of 10,000. The 55-year-old leader was spending his second full day out of intensive care at London's St Thomas' Hospital, where he has been able to take short walks between periods of rest, according to Downing Street. "The Prime Minister continues to make very good progress," a No 10 spokeswoman said.

News of his improvement contrasted with the latest official statistics showing Britain recorded nearly 1,000 daily COVID-19 deaths for the second consecutive day - one of the worst rates globally. The health ministry announced another 917 coronavirus hospital patients had died in the latest 24-hour period, down from the toll on Friday but still the country's second highest yet. An 11-year-old was among the victims, according to England's National Health Service (NHS).

It brings the total number of COVID-19 fatalities in British hospitals to 9,875, while the number of confirmed cases in the country climbed by 5,234 to 78,991. That is thought to reflect only a fraction of

the actual number of people infected because not everyone has been tested for the virus. "The prime minister continues to make good progress, but these stark figures highlight the gravity of this national emergency," interior minister Priti Patel told reporters at a daily briefing.

'Keep others safe'

Despite the sobering statistics, Stephen Powis, NHS England's medical director, said there was a "leveling off" in the number of new cases and "the first signs of a plateauing of people who unfortunately need hospitalization". He credited a nationwide lockdown introduced on March 23 for halting the virus' spread, but added the mortality rate would be "the very final thing" to decrease. "We are confident that if everybody follows the instructions... then that will begin to translate in the next weeks into a reduction in the daily deaths," Powis said.



917 die in the last 24 hours

"I'm afraid this year it has to be for all of us a stay-at-home Easter." Queen Elizabeth II echoed that in what is believed to be her first pre-recorded Easter address, released by Buckingham Palace on Saturday evening. "By keeping apart we keep others safe," the 93-year-old monarch said. "We know that coronavirus will not overcome us." Her resolute comments came a week after a rare televised address to the nation in which she told people to unite to beat COVID-19.

Spirits lifted

Johnson is the most high-profile leader to suffer from the coronavirus, and his hospitalization is unprecedented for a British prime minister during a national emergency in modern times. He was admitted Sunday for a persistent cough and high temperature 10 days after self-isolating with the virus. A day later he was transferred to the intensive care unit as his condition deteriorated.

The Conservative leader left the unit Thursday evening in "extremely good spirits" and waving at staff "in gratitude", his spokesman has said. The Mail on Sunday newspaper reported Johnson's friends had revealed he came close to death while in intensive care and said he owed his life to the hospital's medical team.

It remains unclear when he might be discharged from hospital and how quickly he would return to work once out. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has been deputizing for Johnson. The prime minister's spokesman stressed Friday that his recovery was "at an early stage" and he would act only "on the advice of his medical team". The Sun tabloid reported that Johnson's spirits had been lifted this week by his pregnant fiancée Carrie Symonds, who sent him "love letters" and scans of their unborn child.

Symonds, who has also suffered from coronavirus symptoms in recent weeks, and the British leader have reportedly not seen each other for nearly a month. Their baby is due this summer. Meanwhile, it is also uncertain when Britain might be able to lift the stringent social distancing regime. Implemented for an initial three weeks, the measures are set for a formal review next week and likely to remain in place until at least the end of the month. — AFP

Africans targeted in China virus crackdown

BEIJING: Africans in southern China's largest city say they have become targets of suspicion and subjected to forced evictions, arbitrary quarantines and mass coronavirus testing as Beijing steps up its fight against imported infections, drawing US accusations of xenophobia. China says it has largely curbed its COVID-19 outbreak but a recent cluster of cases linked to the Nigerian community in Guangzhou sparked the alleged discrimination by locals and virus prevention officials. Local authorities in the industrial centre of 15 million said at least eight people diagnosed with the illness had spent time in the city's Yuexiu district, known as "Little Africa".

Five were Nigerian nationals who faced widespread anger after reports surfaced that they had broken a mandatory quarantine and been to eight restaurants and other public places instead of staying home. As a result, nearly 2,000 people they came into contact with had to be tested for COVID-19 or undergo quarantine, state media said. Guangzhou had confirmed 114 imported coronavirus cases as of Thursday — 16 of which were Africans. The rest were returning Chinese nationals.

The tense situation has made Africans targets of suspicion, distrust and racism in China - and brought a stinging rebuke Saturday from Washington. Several Africans told AFP they had been forcibly evicted from their homes and turned away by hotels. "I've been sleeping under the bridge for four days with no food to eat... I cannot buy food anywhere, no shops or restaurants will serve me," said Tony Mathias, an exchange



GUANGZHOU: People gather on a street in the 'Little Africa' district in Guangzhou, the capital of southern China's Guangdong province. — AFP

student from Uganda who was forced from his apartment on Monday.

"We're like beggars on the street," the 24-year-old said. Mathias added that police had given him no information about testing or quarantine but instead told him "to go to another city". Police in Guangzhou declined to comment when contacted by AFP. A Nigerian businessman said he was evicted from his apartment this week. "Everywhere the police see us, they will come and pursue us and tell us to go home. But where can we go?" he said.

Growing tensions

Other Africans said the community had been subject to mass COVID-19 testing even though many had not left China recently, and people had been placed under arbitrary quarantine at home or in hotels. China has banned foreign nationals from entering the country, and many travelers are

being sent into 14-day quarantines either in their own accommodation or at centralized facilities. Thiam, an exchange student from Guinea, said police ordered him to stay home on Tuesday even after he tested negative for COVID-19 and told officers he had not left China in almost four years.

He believes the measures are specifically and unfairly targeting Africans. "All the people I've seen tested are Africans. Chinese are walking around freely but if you're black you can't go out," he said. The US State Department has issued an alert advising African Americans, or those with potential contact with African nationals, to avoid Guangzhou. Then on Saturday the department issued a sharp criticism of China over how it treats Africans. "It's unfortunate but not surprising to see this kind of xenophobia towards Africans by Chinese authorities," a State Department spokesman said. — AFP

Coronavirus: Burial of doctor sparks protest

CAIRO: Egyptian police fired tear gas on Saturday to disperse a crowd of people who gathered in a village near the Nile Delta to prevent the burial of a doctor who died of coronavirus, according to local newspapers and footage on social media. The interior ministry said 23 people were arrested, and the public prosecutor said his office will investigate the incident.

Footage posted online showed dozens of people gathered in front of an ambulance to stop it from entering the village's burial grounds over fears that the body could spread the virus. They scattered as police fired canisters of tear gas. Egypt's Dar al-Ifta, the central authority in charge of issuing religious edicts or fatwas, said on

Saturday that all those who die due to the coronavirus must be afforded their full religious burial rites and "honored in death."

The bodies of those killed by COVID-19 are washed carefully and placed in a sealed body bag so as not to spread infection, a health ministry spokesman, Khaled Megahed, told the Saudi-owned Egyptian broadcaster MBC Masr. Egypt on Saturday registered 145 new cases of the coronavirus, bringing the total to 1939 cases including 146 deaths.

Its doctor's syndicate said earlier that to date 43 doctors had contracted the disease and three had died. The Arab world's most populous country has enforced a nightly curfew, banned large public gatherings, and closed schools and universities in a bid to curb the spread of the virus. While the government has placed several villages on lockdown after cases of the coronavirus were detected, it has said it would not be possible to do so for large metropolitan areas. — Reuters



CAIRO: Egyptian men wearing masks wait outside a centre of non-governmental organization Egyptian Food Bank to receive cartons with foodstuffs as the charity distributes aid to people who lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic crisis. — AFP

International

Pandemic spells death sentence for India's non-COVID-19 patients

Cancer patients take shelter in a grimy pedestrian subway

NEW DELHI: Liver patient Shahjahan's family feared the worst when a New Delhi public hospital told her to leave because her bed was needed in a coronavirus unit. The 40-year-old mother had been on a ventilator with an acute infection for almost two weeks when she left Lok Nayak hospital on Tuesday night. She died at her family home in Delhi the next morning. Other hospitals had turned her away because of the pandemic. "The authorities just left her to die. Even when they referred us to another hospital, they refused to give us an ambulance," said Mohammad Khalid, a relative of Shahjahan.

The capacity of medical facilities around the world has been stretched by the surge of COVID-19 patients as outbreaks worsen in many countries. It can cause people with other life-threatening diseases to miss out on vital care - especially in places like India, where health-care systems are shakier. Dozens of people with serious medical conditions are camped outside India's national medical institute in tents set up by the Delhi government.

Many of them had travelled from other cities for now-cancelled appointments and can't go back due to transport restrictions under the nationwide lockdown that began on March 25. Outpatient departments at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) closed, forcing cancer patients and others with deadly ailments to take shelter in a grimy pedestrian subway and under canvas. Though aid groups have provided some food and medicines, it had been 12 hours since Saryu Das had eaten when AFP met him.

Subway death

His son, who had mouth cancer, lay on a thin mattress with his face covered by a scarf. Flies hovered around him. Four days later, he died.

Waste littered the subway floor that is now home to more than 10 families unable to get back to their hometowns, with the mattresses so close that social distancing was impossible. The AIIMS did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the death and the patients outside. But hospitals across the vast country of 1.3 billion people have been put on alert and its virus death toll is now above 280.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the lockdown, he gave millions of Indians taking life-saving drugs only four hours' notice. Amulya Nidhi, a health activist based in Madhya Pradesh state, told AFP the government knew that vulnerable patients - including those with silicosis and tuberculosis, which kills tens of thousands each year in India, as well as pregnant women - were at risk. "I'm getting distress calls from across India over access to basic medicines and treatment," said Nidhi.

Hospitals turning sick people away

Shut out

"It is important to expand healthcare facilities to fight COVID-19. At the same time, hospitals and ambulances have to be available for patients with other problems," he said. In February, 39-year-old Maitri Lakra was found to be in the initial stages of tongue cancer. Being HIV-positive only added to her woes. Doctors at AIIMS referred her to their campus in Haryana state for pre-surgery tests, which started mid-March. But 10 days later, she was told that all radiology appointments were postponed.

As her condition deteriorated - bleeding from the tongue and in unbearable pain - she filed a petition with the Delhi High Court and has finally been admitted to AIIMS. "Her cancer is at stage three now. Had she received treatment on time, this would not have happened," her son Debashish Dag

said. Vinay Shetty, from the Mumbai-based Think Foundation that works with people with the blood disease thalassaemia and organizes blood donation camps, said those needing transfusions are among the most vulnerable.



NEW DELHI: A rickshaw driver carries a load along a deserted road during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

those needing drugs may not have a problem, but anybody needing blood will," Shetty said, adding the government had to encourage blood donors. Public health expert Anant Bhan said India's focus on COVID-19 could lead to other diseases such as tuberculosis spreading. "Family members in lockdown with tuberculosis patients are at risk. After the lockdown is removed and people start social interactions, it could spread the

infection the same way COVID-19 patients could spread infection," Bhan said.

"Deaths because of COVID-19 and not directly of it is something that we need to worry about. We need to ensure those who need essential services have it," he said. And time is already running out for Shahjahan's fellow patients in the subway and tents outside AIIMS. "The doctors told me they could not do my chemotherapy session now and that they'll call me when the lockdown is lifted. That call may take weeks," said 25-year old Rampur resident Mohammed Shan-e-Alam. "Now I can't go home and I can't go to the hospital." —AFP

Teachers drop Zoom after online class gatecrashed

SINGAPORE: Singapore's teachers have stopped using controversial video-conferencing app Zoom for remote education during the coronavirus lockdown, officials said Friday, after intruders reportedly made lewd comments in a virtual class. The city-state's schools were closed this week as part of tough curbs to tackle a worsening virus outbreak, but students are still being taught via so-called "home-based learning".

During a geography lesson involving teenage girls conducted on Zoom, two men intruded into the livestream, showed obscene images and made lewd remarks, Singapore's Straits Times newspaper reported. Zoom has exploded in popularity as governments worldwide order people to stay home to fight the spread of the virus, but it faces growing security and privacy concerns.

Singapore's education ministry is investigating

the "very serious incidents" and teachers have suspended use of the app while security issues are ironed out, said Aaron Loh, from the ministry's educational technology division. "We are already working with Zoom to enhance its security settings and make these security measures clear and easy to follow," he said in a statement. Home-based learning will continue despite the app's suspension, he added.

Zoom said in a statement that it "strongly condemns" such behavior, adding it was "committed to providing educators with the tools and resources they need on a safe and secure platform". The app has become a go-to service for everything from remote education, to exercise classes and happy hour celebrations as more and more people are stuck at home. But it has been scrambling to make improvements as security concerns mount, and earlier this week announced an update to its features.

This included adding an icon called "Security" to its meeting controls. This provides easy access for hosts to features allowing them to lock a meeting; remove participants; and restrict participants' ability to do things including share their screens and chat in a meeting. After initially keeping its virus outbreak in check, Singapore

virus. "I feel unspoken pressure to be in the office," she added.

'Conservative culture'

Most Japanese adults have a personal seal, carved with their name in Chinese characters, and used in place of a signature to authenticate documents in every aspect of life - from opening a bank account, or acknowledging receipt of registered mail. Some major companies, including big banks, have begun phasing out their use. But they remain popular, along with other practices seen as outdated in other major economies, including the use of fax machines and a focus on paper rather than digital documents.

A recent survey by the Japan Association for Chief Financial Officers (JACFO) showed 40 percent of companies that introduced telework said workers ended up going to the office, primarily because they had to handle paper documents and stamp things with hanko. "There is a conservative culture where companies don't want to change how they work," said Hiroshi Yaguchi of JACFO.

Although the number of companies that digitize documents is increasing, more of them should follow suit and introduce web conferences to allow telework, he said. Japanese authorities this week declared a state of emergency in seven regions, including the capital, with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe saying people should reduce their social contact by 70-80 percent to curb the spread of the virus.

The measure falls short of a lockdown, but comes as medical experts warn of explosive growth in infec-

Quebec," said a visibly moved Legault during a press conference, saying he feared "gross negligence" at the private residence. The care home, called the Herron and located in the Montreal suburb of Dorval, has 150 residents.

Of the 31 deaths, at least five are due to coronavirus but the cause for the 26 others is still unknown, Legault said. The first resident was taken to hospital on March 26. There he tested positive for coronavirus and died. Three days later health officials went to the residence. There they found "serious problems" and that "a good number of the staff had left the center," Legault said, noting that authorities had sent staff to care for the residents.



ARLINGTON: A woman enjoys a virtual happy hour during the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis in Arlington, Virginia. With bars closing across the United States, people have started meeting online via Houseparty - one of several group video apps doing a roaring trade during the pandemic. —AFP

has seen a surge in cases this month. On Thursday, it reported its biggest daily increase in infections, 287, and now has a total of 1,910 cases and six deaths. —AFP



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on March 13, 2004, a consumer chooses a "hanko" or personal seal. —AFP

tions in the country, which has recorded over 6,000 cases and 94 deaths.

Digital seals

The number of commuters on Tokyo's notoriously crowded transport system has dropped significantly, but people like Yumi, an employee at a Tokyo insurance company, said telework simply isn't possible for her and her colleagues. "At my company, everyone comes in... our customers fill in paper applications for insurance so it's difficult for us to do business at home," she said, declining to give her family name. —AFP

Legault said there was "no co-operation" from the facility's management, and it was only on Friday night that health services were able to access the residents' files and find out how many deaths had occurred. "I want to tell Quebecers that what happened at the Herron residence was appalling," he said. "We will start by managing the crisis, but when it is under control I want us to review all our practices in seniors' residences. We owe it to our seniors to treat them with dignity." On Saturday, there were 12,292 cases of coronavirus in the province of Quebec and 289 deaths, 48 more than the day before. —AFP

Traditional Japanese seal system hampers telework for some

TOKYO: Some Japanese office workers are facing a small, but insurmountable hurdle to staying home under the state of emergency declared in parts of the country over the virus: personal signature stamps. A reliance on paper filing systems in parts of Japan's business world is forcing employees to go into work to put their unique seal on documents. To do this they use tiny traditional stamps known as hanko or inkan - tools that date back centuries, but are still popular nationwide.

Usually cylindrical with a surface no larger than a fingernail, the tiny stamps are used with red ink to sign contracts, approve proposals and verify who has viewed what. "I need to physically be in the office because I need to submit paper documents and stamp them," Mizuho, who works at an IT firm in Tokyo said. Even though her company is tech-savvy in other ways, hanko are still the norm there, said Mizuho, who asked to be identified by her first name only.

"We use Microsoft software as a communication tool... but I cannot work from home as long as the paper and hanko culture exists," she said. She worries that her firm isn't taking the pandemic seriously - despite an employee in their building contracting the

Quebec authorities investigate seniors' home after 31 deaths

MONTREAL: Quebec authorities are investigating a seniors' home where 31 people have died since March 13, Quebec Premier Francois Legault announced Saturday, calling the situation "appalling". "I find it unacceptable the way we treat our seniors in

Kim Jong Un's sister rises in North Korea hierarchy

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful younger sister has been reinstated to a key decision-making body, state media reported yesterday, marking her rise in the isolated nation. Long one of her brother's closest advisers, Kim Yo Jong was reappointed an alternate member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in a reshuffle of top officials Saturday, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

The meeting to decide on the appointment was presided over by Kim Jong Un, it added. Analysts say Kim Yo Jong is believed to have been removed from the position last year after the collapse of a second summit between her brother and US President Donald Trump in Hanoi. "The restoration is part of Kim Yo Jong's recent rise within the North's hierarchy," Ahn Chan-il, a North Korean defector and researcher in Seoul, told AFP. Kim Yo Jong acted as her brother's envoy to the South at the time of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in 2018, which ushered in a rapid diplomatic rapprochement on the divided peninsula. She has frequently been pictured alongside him at summits with Trump or the South's President Moon Jae-in.

But she only began issuing statements of direct political significance under her own name last month, which analysts said highlights her central role in the North's political ranking. It followed her appointment as first vice-department director of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party - her main role in the totalitarian state. Ri Son Gwon, who was named the North's top diplomat in January, was also elected as an alternate member of the Political Bureau alongside Kim's sister.

Stronger virus measures

In another development, North Korea has called for stronger measures against the rapidly spreading coronavirus pandemic at a meeting presided by leader Kim Jong Un, state media reported yesterday, without acknowledging whether the country had reported any infections. The already isolated, nuclear-armed North quickly shut down its borders after the virus was first detected in neighboring China in January, and imposed strict containment measures.

Officials in Pyongyang and its state media have repeatedly insisted that the North remains totally free of the virus, but yesterday's report did not make that assertion. The coronavirus epidemic - which has infected more than 1.7 million worldwide - had become "a great disaster threatening the whole mankind, regardless of borders and continents", the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported. "Such environment can become a condition creating some obstacles to our struggle and progress," it said, adding Pyongyang maintained "very stable anti-epidemic situation".

The meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea on Saturday discussed changing policy tasks in the wake of the epidemic, KCNA reported, as officials called for strict and thorough check of the infiltration of the virus. A joint resolution was adopted "on more thoroughly taking national measures for protecting the life and safety of our people to cope with the worldwide epidemic disease", it added. —Agencies

International

In grim milestone, US records highest COVID-19 death toll

US' coronavirus death toll passes over 20,000

NEW YORK: The United States surpassed Italy on Saturday as the country with the highest reported coronavirus death toll, recording more than 20,000 deaths since the outbreak began, according to a Reuters tally. The grim milestone was reached as President Donald Trump mulled over when the country, which has registered more than half a million infections, might begin to see a return to normality.

The United States has seen its highest death tolls to date in the epidemic with roughly 2,000 deaths a day reported for the last four days in a row, the largest number in and around New York City. Even that is viewed as understated, as New York is still figuring out how best to include a surge in deaths at home in its official statistics. Public health experts have warned the US death toll could reach 200,000 over the summer if unprecedented stay-at-home orders that have closed businesses and kept most Americans indoors are lifted when they expire at the end of the month.

Most of the curbs, however, including school closures and emergency orders keeping non-essential workers largely confined to home, flow from powers vested in state governors, not the president. Nonetheless, Trump has said he wants life to return to normal as soon as possible and that the measures aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 disease caused by the novel coronavirus carry their own economic and public-health cost.

Speaking by telephone with Fox News on Saturday evening, Trump said he would make a decision "reasonably soon," based on the advice of "a lot of very smart people, a lot of professionals, doctors and business leaders." He said "instinct" would also play a role. "People want to get back, they want to get back to work. We have to bring our country back," he said. Trump's trade adviser, Peter Navarro, told Fox News that "purist medical professionals" who took the position that the only way to minimize

loss of life was to shut down the economy and society until the virus was "vanquished" were "half right."

He said, "That will minimize the deaths from the virus directly," but added that economic shocks also killed people, through higher depression and suicide rates and drug abuse. "So that very tough decision this president is going to be making is to have to weigh the balance and figure out which path does more damage."

In New York, the state's governor and New York City's mayor engaged in a fresh squabble over their efforts to combat the virus in what is now the global epicenter, in this instance over how long schools might stay closed. The state was sometimes slower to impose social-distancing curbs than elsewhere, notably California, while New York's two most powerful officials, both Democrats, sometimes disagreed over matters of jurisdiction and the best terminology for certain measures. They have not appeared in public together since March 2. On Saturday morning, Mayor Bill de Blasio declared that New York City's public schools would no longer reopen on April 20 but stay closed for the rest of the academic year, saying it was "the right

More than half a million infected

thing to do."

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, however, later used his widely watched daily news conference to dismiss the mayor's edict as merely an "opinion," and say he would make his own decision on school closures. The current federal guidelines advocating widespread social-distancing measures run until April 30. Trump, who is seeking re-election in November, will then have to decide whether to extend them or start encouraging people to go back to work and a more normal way of life.

Trump has said he will unveil a new advisory council, possibly on Tuesday, that will include some state governors and will focus on the process of reopening the economy. The number of Americans



NEW YORK: Hart Island in Long Island Sound is viewed in New York. Unclaimed victims of the new coronavirus are being buried in unmarked mass graves by contract laborers on an island in New York. —AFP

seeking unemployment benefits in the last three weeks surpassed 16 million, as weekly new claims topped 6 million for a second straight time last week. The government has said the economy shed 701,000 jobs in March. That was the most job losses since the Great Recession and ended the longest employment boom in US history from late 2010.

Empty churches

With more than 90% of the country under stay-at-home orders, the Christian calendar's holiest weekend has mostly featured services livestreamed or broadcast to worshippers at home. With many churches already short of funds, untouched collection plates at a usually busy time of the year add

pressure on their finances. A handful of holdout US churches planned to hold in-person services on Easter Sunday, saying their right to worship outweighed public health warnings.

But there have been glimmers of hope. Dr Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, and other health officials have pointed to falling rates of virus hospitalizations and admissions to intensive care units, particularly in New York state, as signs that social distancing measures are paying off. The stay-at-home orders imposed in recent weeks across 42 states have taken a huge toll on commerce and raised questions over how long business closures and travel curbs can be sustained. —Reuters

Anne Frank's diary more relevant than ever, 75 years on

AMSTERDAM: A lifetime ago, a Jewish girl confided in her diary as she spent two years in isolation from the outside world in a doomed attempt to escape mortal danger. Anne Frank, a teenager from Amsterdam, wrote of her hopes, fears and dreams as she and her family hid from the Nazis in a secret annexe behind a canal-side house. Seventy-five years ago this year, after their hiding place was discovered, Anne died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, aged 15.

But the diary that her father published after World War II won a worldwide audience as a reminder of the horrors of the Holocaust, and remains more relevant than ever. "The most important part of the diary is that it offers some insight into what it means to be human," Ronald Leopold, executive director of the Anne Frank House museum in Amsterdam said. "That is exactly why it has remained relevant during the 75 years after the Second World War and why it will remain relevant, I am absolutely convinced, for generations to come."

The "Diary of a Young Girl" has become one of the world's most-read books, selling 30 million copies and being translated into more than 70 languages. But it had humble beginnings, as a birthday present for the 13-year-old Anne. Born in Frankfurt, she moved to the Netherlands aged three with her parents Otto and Edith and her older sister Margot to escape rising anti-Semitism in Hitler's Germany. But in 1940, the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, and then stepped up their persecution of the Jews there too.

'She's their peer'

Anne began writing shortly before the family went into hiding in 1942 in the secret annexe that Otto Frank had built behind his business premises on Prinsengracht, one of Amsterdam's most beautiful canals. Addressing her diary as "Dear Kitty", over the next two years she described her thoughts and feelings about life in isolation with her family and the four other Jewish people they lived in hiding there with. Life in the annexe was hard. Anne wrote with searing honesty about her feelings towards its other occupants, in particular her difficult relationship with her mother.

She also harbored serious ambitions of being a writer, penning stories and starting her own book about her experiences. Through it all, there remains the voice of a schoolgirl examining her place in the world - just like today's young people, says Leopold. "She's their peer. They recognise her voice, what she was thinking of, what she was doing when she was struggling with her relationship with her mother," he said. The last entry was on August 1, 1944. Three days later, German agents raided the house.

There are several theories about why, including that the Franks were betrayed by neighbours or because of black market activities in the warehouse below, but as Leopold says "it's all unsubstantiated, so we don't know." The Franks were transported by train to the Auschwitz concentration camp - but were split up and Anne and Margot were sent to Belsen. Both sisters contracted typhus and Anne is believed to have died some time in February 1945, two months before Allied troops liberated Belsen on April 15. —AFP

Joe Biden wins Alaska primary

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, was declared winner of the Alaska primary late Saturday after the state shifted to postal voting due to the coronavirus pandemic. The state's ballots were sent out before Biden's rival Bernie Sanders pulled out of the race last week, meaning the Vermont senator also took a proportion of the vote.

However Biden emerged as the clear winner with 55.3 percent of the vote and nine of the state's 15 dele-

gates. Alaska Democrats tweeted from the party's official account. Sanders took 44.7 percent of the votes and eight delegates, according to the tweet. He has stressed he will remain on the ballot and seek to gain as many delegates as possible in order to "exert significant influence" over the direction of the party.

Biden, like most Americans, is under stay-at-home orders due to the global coronavirus pandemic, and has marked becoming the de facto 2020 nominee with press releases and comments broadcast online from his basement. He has urged Sanders supporters to join his campaign, which already has the backing of nearly all other ex-rivals in the race including senators Kamala Harris and Amy Klobuchar, and former Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg. —AFP

Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen out of solitary confinement

WASHINGTON: Michael Cohen, the former personal attorney to US President Donald Trump, has been removed from solitary confinement in a federal prison where he is serving time for violating campaign finance laws, his attorney told Reuters on Saturday. Cohen was transferred on Wednesday to a Special Housing Unit at the Otisville Federal Correctional Institution in New York state, a disciplinary section of the prison, Reuters reported this week.

Germany condemns anti-French insults in the border zone

BERLIN: German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on Saturday condemned aggression towards French people travelling into border areas, which has flared amid the coronavirus pandemic. "Coronavirus knows nothing of nationality. It's the same for human dignity. It hurts to see some of our French friends have been insulted and attacked because of COVID-19," Maas posted on Twitter.

"Such behavior is completely unacceptable. And besides: we are in the same boat," he added. Maas' tweet came in response to a similarly apologetic post from Anke Rehlinger, economy minister in Saarland state which borders France's Grand Est region. "Our heart bleeds for the closed borders to France and Luxembourg," Rehlinger said on April 8.

"We have heard that French people have been insulted and had eggs thrown at them. People doing such things are sinning against the friendship between our nations," she added. "I apologize to our French friends for these isolated incidents." Some days before, the mayor of a small town on the border complained of "a certain hostility to our

French friends" in his district.

"Some have been insulted or stopped on the street" while others "no longer dare come here," Gersheim mayor Michael Clivot told news site t-online. The situation in Gersheim became so bad that Clivot posted a video directly addressing the townspeople on Facebook. Some French people had reported being spat on while out walking or queuing at the supermarket, he said. One had been told to "go back to your corona-ridden country," Clivot added.

'Joint action needed'

The French consul in Saarland, Catherine Robinet, confirmed that 'isolated' incidents targeting French nationals had taken place in the region. But Robinet urged against "generalizing" the anti-French sentiment, adding that she had also received numerous messages of support. Some people in France also have reacted poorly to Germans in the country, she added. For the Gersheim mayor Clivot, the incidents showed that a decision by Berlin to close the frontier in mid-March in a bid to slow the pandemic's spread had been mistaken. "What we needed (at the time) was joint action with France," he said. On March 16, Germany introduced tough border controls with neighboring nations including France. Since then, only goods deliveries and cross-border commuters have been waved through by police, while officers have turned back other travel-



CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA: Supporters check their phones as they wait for Democratic presidential hopeful former Vice President Joe Biden to arrive at a town hall event in Charleston, South Carolina. —AFP

avirus pandemic, which has hammered New York state and surfaced in prisons around the country. The Bureau of Prisons said that as of Friday, 318 federal inmates and 163 staffers had tested positive for COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus.

Five inmates and four staffers at Otisville have tested positive, according to the bureau. Adler said he is concerned that inmates and corrections officers are not routinely tested for the virus and said the bureau "may well be underreporting the incidence of the pandemic." Cohen was placed in solitary after another inmate complained about his internet use, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters this week. He is eligible for release in November 2021. —Reuters



BERLIN: People sit on the banks of the Landwehr canal in Berlin's Kreuzberg district as the sun shines amid the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

ers. Grand Est on the German border has suffered France's most deadly COVID-19 outbreak with more than 2,000 confirmed deaths. Across the border in Saarland, only 41 fatal cases have been registered by the Robert Koch Institute, responsible for disease control.

Germany's nationwide death rate from the disease is also well below that in France, with 2,544 of 118,000 infected people succumbing while in France over 13,800 have died out of some 125,000 cases. —AFP

Business

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SINGAPORE: A floating accommodation facilities, which will be used as temporary housing for healthy foreign workers as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, is docked at Tanjong Pagar terminal port in Singapore yesterday. 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. — AFP

Pandemic a 'perfect storm' for South Asia

Region to record worst economic performance in 40 years: World Bank

NEW DELHI: South Asia is on course for its worst economic performance in 40 years, with decades of progress in the battle against poverty at risk, because of coronavirus, the World Bank said yesterday. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other smaller nations, which have 1.8 billion people and some of the planet's most densely populated cities, have so far reported relatively few coronavirus cases but experts fear they could be the next hotspots.

The dire economic effects are already much in evidence, with widespread lockdowns freezing most normal activity, Western factory orders cancelled and vast numbers of poor workers suddenly jobless.

"South Asia finds itself in a perfect storm of adverse effects. Tourism has dried up, supply chains have been disrupted, demand for garments has collapsed and consumer and investor sentiments have deteriorated," said a World Bank report. It slashed its growth forecast for the region this year to 1.8-2.8

percent from its pre-pandemic projection of 6.3 percent, with at least half the countries falling into "deep recession".

Worst hit will be the Maldives where the collapse of tourism will result in gross domestic output contracting by as much as 13 percent, while Afghanistan could shrink by as much as 5.9 percent and Pakistan by up to 2.2 percent. Regional heavy-weight India, where the fiscal year began on April 1, will see growth of just 1.5-2.8 percent in its current financial year, down from an expected 4.8-5.0 percent for the year just ended, the bank predicted.



Factory orders cancelled, poor workers lose jobs

Inequality

The report also warned that the pandemic will reinforce inequality in the region, with the pandemic hitting informal workers with limited or no access to healthcare or social safety the hardest. In India for instance, the world's biggest lockdown has prompted hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to return to their home villages, many on foot.

Governments need to "ramp up action to curb the health emergency, protect their people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and set the stage now for fast economic recovery," the World

Bank said. In the short term this means preparing weak healthcare systems, providing safety nets and securing access to food, medical supplies and necessities for the most vulnerable, it advised.

It recommended temporary work programs for migrant workers, debt relief for business and individuals and cutting red tape on imports and exports of essential goods.

And once the crisis is over, governments need urgently to pursue "innovative policies" and jumpstart economies. "Failure to do so can lead to long-term growth disruptions and reverse hard-won progress in reducing poverty," the bank's Hartwig Schafer said.

The World Bank is taking "broad, fast action", deploying up to \$160 billion in financial support over the next 15 months to help countries protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery. — AFP

Overtime for French coffin industry as virus deaths surge

JUSSEY, France: It's a grim truth that times are good for the coffin business when they're bad for people, and the coronavirus pandemic is no exception. At a factory belonging to Europe's largest coffin maker, OGF, in eastern France, workers are doing overtime to meet demand from families parting with their loved ones.

"Due to the epidemic, we decided to manufacture just four models of coffins that are top sellers with families" compared to the 15 types usually on offer, said factory director Emmanuel Garret.

The change "allowed us to optimize production", he added. Output has risen to 410 coffins per day, compared to 370 normally. Workers are putting in nearly an extra hour per day.

"People have been forewarned and are ready to come in and work on Saturdays," said Didier Pidancet, who heads up the team that selects the wood for the coffins. France has been one of the country's worst hit by the coronavirus. "We're proud to be participating in this national effort, we're doing our best to ensure that victims can have their final overcoat, as we say," added Pidancet.

No shortages

Founded in 1910, the factory in the town of Jussey originally produced wood charcoal and flooring. At the outset of World War II it began to specialize in making coffins. It is now part of the OGF Group, which has two factories including the one at Jussey, and makes one in four coffins used in France.

The 10 hectare (25 acre) site is responsible for the entire process of producing coffins. It strips the logs, cuts then dries the wood, which is eventually crafted and assembled into coffins. The wood, mostly oak, comes from local forests. While temporarily cutting back on the number of models, the factory has made another adjustment: it has been making more larger coffins. "Orders for larger sizes are up a bit," said Garret, although he declined to draw a link to reports that COVID-19 mortality rates are higher for overweight people. While many manufacturers have encountered problems as lockdown restrictions complicate deliveries, the Jussey factory is well stocked. "We're OK, we have three months of stocks of wood, glue, nails and varnish," said Garret.

'Play our part'

Some of the factory's workers are no strangers to previous surges in deaths. "During the 2003 heatwave we increased production to 500 caskets a day," said David Theurez, a 30-year veteran at the site. The heatwave, which claimed nearly 15,000 lives in France, was in some ways more difficult for the factory as they had no warning and had to call workers back from vacation.



JUSSEY, France: At a factory belonging to Europe's largest coffin maker, OGF, in eastern France, workers are doing overtime to meet demand from families parting with their loved ones. —AFP

"But today, it's a bit different, you have to protect yourself as well with masks and gloves," said Theurez. "It's a collective crisis, we all have to make an effort and play our part," he added.

The factory's workers themselves haven't gone unscathed: three have come down with COVID-19. Fifteen others are at home, forced into isolation by existing serious health issues, or because they have to mind their children as school has been cancelled.

Like many other French companies, the factory has had difficulty obtaining protective gear for all of its employees. It had a local seamstress make masks for employees and work stations are disinfected regularly. The factory's director thinks that the rapid adoption of social distancing measures and protective gear has helped them avoid more cases as eastern France has been hard hit with coronavirus infections. "Fingers crossed," said Garret. — AFP

Business

Rising joblessness from virus fight threatens China's poverty targets

Millions lose jobs in economic fallout

BEIJING: Although China is claiming success in its battle against the coronavirus, millions have lost their jobs in the economic fallout, throwing into jeopardy an ambitious target to eradicate poverty this year. Beijing has been working to fire up the economy again after bringing it to a near standstill to curb the spread of COVID-19, but many firms have had a bumpy restart and workers are bearing the brunt of the pain.

Despite being a country of skyscrapers and high-tech innovations, China still has millions of people on meager incomes. About 5.5 million rural Chinese live in poverty, defined by the government as surviving on less than 2,300 yuan (\$326) a year.

A slowing economy puts pressure on a key Communist Party goal to become a "moderately prosperous society" by the end of 2020, an ambition in place long before the virus emerged. It also threatens a long-held tacit agreement between people and party that freedoms can be sacrificed in return for economic progress, an understanding that largely forms the basis of the authoritarian government's legitimacy in the absence of elections.

China has little in the way of social security benefits and workers who lose their jobs have an inadequate safety net, meaning mass unemployment often brings a fear of unrest. Official statistics show jobless numbers have soared, with roughly five million more people out of work between December and February.



Many firms experience a bumpy restart

Data firm Caixin said its services purchasing managers' index, a key indicator of activity in the services sector, showed companies cut staff at the quickest pace on record in March. Hu Fangdi, 23, lost her job as a saleswoman at an airport retail store two weeks ago and has had no luck finding a new role.

"No one was buying things during the outbreak and the company laid us off," she said. Lily Han, who lost her sales job at a tech firm last month, said she needs a new job within two months just to make ends meet. The 24-year-old has applied for over 300 positions but has come up empty handed.

'Constant anxiety'

With much of the world still locked in all-consuming battles against the virus, the pandemic is expected to heavily weigh on demand for Chinese goods. Analysts at financial services firm Nomura said the nation could lose around 18 million jobs in the export sector—nearly a third of the industry's workforce. This growing unemployment will be a major blow to consumption—a key driver of China's growth, said Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics.

Workers and businesses are beginning to feel the squeeze as cash flow dries up. One worker in construction management surnamed Zhao, 28, told AFP his employer stopped paying salaries in February. "I have housing and credit loans to pay... My family is now covering my housing loan and I work part-time



SHENYANG: A customer (right) buys fruits at a market in Shenyang in China's northeastern Liaoning province. Inflation in China slowed in March after a record increase the earlier month, driven by a fall in food prices as the country gradually lifts travel lockdowns due to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

to cover my daily expenses," he said.

'I feel constant anxiety'

Some businesses still can't reopen amid lingering lockdowns. Eric Liu, owner of Maomaochong Bar and Pizza in one of Beijing's ageing hutong neighborhoods, says business is paltry as the narrow alleyways remain sealed off. Relying on his home delivery customers,

sales are barely 10 percent of pre-virus levels and Liu has cut salaries. Some firms have taken dramatic measures to stay solvent, including paying just a minimal living allowance. And Beijing authorities have allowed companies to waive some social security payments, including contributions to pension, unemployment and work injury funds—measures that could further hit vulnerable workers. — AFP

Wet markets in Wuhan struggle to survive blow

WUHAN: Fish and vegetable merchants are reopening stalls at wet markets in China's central city of Wuhan as it lifts a months-long lockdown against the coronavirus pandemic, but their future looks uncertain with few customers as the virus stigma persists.

The virus, which has infected 1.6 million people and killed 106,000 in 214 countries, is believed to have originated late last year among wild animals on sale in a seafood market in Wuhan that has been closed and boarded up since January. That has prompted heavy scrutiny for wet markets, a key facet of China's daily life, even though only a few sell wildlife. Some US officials have called for them, and others across Asia, to be closed.

"This is a person-to-person virus, no matter where you are," said Jin Qinzhi, a vegetable and meat vendor at a wet market, when asked what she thought about demands for their closure.

"Even the supermarket is full of people. Here people are more scattered. As long as we take precautionary measures, and we pay attention to disinfecting, it should be fine." A common sight across Asia, wet markets traditionally sell fresh produce and live



WUHAN: Fish and vegetable merchants are reopening stalls at wet markets in China's central city of Wuhan as it lifts a months-long lockdown against the coronavirus pandemic, but their future looks uncertain with few customers as the virus stigma persists.

animals, such as fish, in the open air. They tend to be popular with shoppers who believe the items on sale are cheaper and fresher than in supermarkets.

Stall owners in Wuhan said they were not optimistic after their business was badly hurt by the strict shutdowns in China, which ordered a temporary ban on trade and consumption of wildlife in January.

"There is no business and no one is coming," said a worker chopping fish who only gave her surname, Zhang. "Everywhere is blocked and people cannot come in. Everyone is scared to go out and contract the virus." Wuhan will spend 200 million

yuan (\$28 million) to upgrade its 425 farmers' markets, in a campaign to improve hygiene, city officials said on Friday. Still, some worry they may not stay around long enough to see it.

"We don't have any income and business," said Jin. "If it goes on like this, it will be very difficult for us to survive." Many stores remain shut and some curbs continue, even though a sharp drop in new local cases prompted lifting of the lockdown.

China reported 99 new virus infections on Saturday, taking its tally to 82,052, with a death toll of 3,339. Globally, the virus has reached 214 countries. — Reuters

Brazil deficit jumps to 7% of GDP

BRASILIA: Brazil's 2020 deficit is approaching 500 billion reais (\$96 billion), or 7% of gross domestic product, even before a state aid proposal of up to 222 billion reais to tackle the coronavirus is factored in, the economy ministry said on Saturday. In 2019, the deficit was 61 billion reais, or 0.9 percent of GDP, the ministry said.

"It is important that any new fiscal impact be discussed carefully to avoid an excessive growth of the primary deficit and public debt of the public sector beyond what is strictly necessary to reduce the economic and social impacts of the coronavirus crisis," the ministry said in a statement.

Separately, Brazilian Treasury Secretary Mansueto Almeida said that the government is studying a Treasury-backed scheme to help smaller companies as many banks are not lending due to the risk of default during the coron-

East Africa's female flower workers lose jobs

NAIROBI/ADDIS ABABA: Emma Wanjiru had been packing roses at the flower farm in Kenya's Rift Valley town of Naivasha for six months when she was told not to come back two weeks ago.

The mother-of-two was devastated to lose the monthly wage of 7,200 Kenyan shillings (\$72) in a nation where unemployment is high and her husband's wage as a mason too meagre to support their family of four. "I didn't understand when my supervisor first told me I was losing my job because of the coronavirus," Wanjiru, 37, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Naivasha, 100 km (60 miles) north of the capital, Nairobi.

"She said the flower orders were not coming anymore and there was not enough work for us all. I hope to go back to work when this coronavirus is over ... but I don't know when that it is and how my family will survive until then." With overseas demand for fresh-cut flowers plummeting due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of women in flower farms in Kenya and Ethiopia have lost their jobs and are at risk of being pushed into poverty, warned labor rights campaigners. The coronavirus crisis, they add, has spotlighted long-standing problems in global supply chains, such as East Africa's flower industry which employs mostly female workers growing bouquets of roses and carnations for western supermarkets.

"We're already hearing reports of tens of thousands of workers who've been sent home on compulsory leave or that temporary contracts ended earlier,"

avirus crisis. Brazil has already announced a measure to support companies with annual sales of 360,000 reais to 10 million reais. Now, the government is looking at proposals to target smaller companies.

"In all of them there is ... the Treasury will be behind it because the risk is very high," said Mansueto. "Soon we will define which scheme will be chosen from the three or four that are under discussion." He did not give further details. For the second consecutive day, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro took to the streets on Saturday. A far-right former army captain, Bolsonaro has chafed at social distancing measures imposed by state governors and even his own health officials.

He wants to see the economy restarted, arguing that extended shutdowns pose a greater risk than a disease he calls a "little cold." On Saturday, Bolsonaro visited a field hospital being built near the capital Brasilia, and greeted supporters who flocked to see him.

Brazil is the worst-hit country in Latin America by the coronavirus outbreak. On Saturday, Brazil's health ministry said 1,124 people had died as a result of the outbreak, with 20,727 confirmed cases. — Reuters

said Anna Barker, Fairtrade Foundation's senior supply chain manager for flowers. "Flower workers don't always earn a lot of money to have savings. We're really concerned that they won't have enough food on their table."

Exports wither, workers laid off

Floriculture is a key economic pillar for Africa's top flower exporters, Kenya and Ethiopia. The sector — which cultivates flowers for largely European markets such as the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Britain — generates over \$1 billion annually and employs hundreds of thousands of people across the two east African nations. In Kenya, flower exports are among the top foreign exchange earners, along with tourism and remittances. While in Ethiopia, the sector earned \$280 million in the last fiscal year, according to the Ethiopian Horticulture Producers Exports Association.

But lockdowns across many European countries, coupled with the cancellation of international flights, has led to flower exports in both nations plunging by up to 80 percent, forcing farm owners to trash tons of their high-quality blooms. "Because of the lockdowns in our main markets, flowers are not seen as a necessity, but more of a luxury. The concentration has been on health and safety products, and food," said Clement Tulezi, chief executive of the Kenya Flower Council.

"Cash flows have become an issue and we had to look at how to remain afloat. The first thing to look at was the workers because wages take up 45 percent of any flower farm operation."

Around 10,000 casual workers have been laid off, and about 50 percent of permanent workers given compulsory annual leave, said Tulezi, adding this was done in agreement with workers' unions. In neighboring Ethiopia, industry officials estimate about 50,000 workers could lose their jobs in the coming weeks. — Reuters

Kenyan farmers battle fruit-fly menace

KIRWIRE VILLAGE, Kenya: Gideon Gitonga inspected his avocado orchard in central Kenya with military precision, revealing that some of the fruit were tinged with a worryingly familiar yellow colour.

Yet again, it was the same culprits attacking his crop on the farm in Kirwire village in Meru County: fruit flies. "Most of the fruits you see with a ripening colour are not ripe," he said. "(They) have been punctured by fruit flies and are in the process of rotting and eventually falling off."

As the planet's climate heats up, rising temperatures have driven a massive increase in Kenya's fruit fly population, say agricultural experts. Farmers in fruit fly-infested areas are losing on average up to half their crops each year to the tiny pests, said Onesmus Mwaura, a research assistant at the Nairobi-based International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE).

Fruit-fly damage costs farmers an estimated 50 billion Kenyan shillings (\$472 million) every year, according to the government's Horticultural Crops Directorate. The fruit fly population in Gitonga's two-acre (0.8-hectare) orchard was "minimal" when he first started commercial avocado farming eight years ago. It has since turned into an infestation, destroying up to three-quarters of his crop each year since 2017, he said.

Even when the affected avocados survive, their quality is so degraded it is difficult to find anyone willing to buy them. "The



Gideon Gitonga holds a container of trapped fruit flies at his farm in the Kenyan village of Kirwire, in Meru County. — Reuters

damage by the fruit flies is quite devastating," Gitonga told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Heat-loving pests

Paul Thiuki, an agricultural extension officer who has been working in Meru for 20 years, said the region's warming climate has turned it into a perfect breeding ground for fruit flies. Average temperatures in Kenya have risen by 0.3 degrees Celsius (0.54 degrees Fahrenheit) per decade since 1985, according to the U.S. development agency USAID.

In 2011, when farmers in Meru first started noticing more fruit flies, the county's central ward had about 10,000 of the insects — a manageable number at the time, Thiuki said. ICIPE researchers calculate the number of fruit flies by laying monitoring traps, counting how many are caught after two months, and then extrapolating the fig-

ure for the whole area.

Mwaura said warmer weather speeds up a fruit fly's development, giving it more time as an adult to lay eggs and produce more offspring. "The body activity increases with the rise in temperature, hence feeding and reproduction is highly increased, leading to population build-up," Mwaura explained in an email interview.

Higher temperatures also cause fruit to ripen faster and release more of the compound that attracts fruit flies, encouraging their feeding and egg-laying, he added. Adult flies burrow into the fruit's flesh to lay their eggs, introducing bacteria that causes the fruit to rot. When the eggs hatch, the larvae eat the fruit from the inside out. An adult fly can lay between 100 and 500 eggs in its lifetime, Mwaura explained. "Fruit flies (are) denying farmers a chance to generate any substantial income," he said. — Reuters

Business

NBK mobile banking, the first destination for its customers

Providing ease in completing transactions around the clock especially under current circumstances

KUWAIT: Under the present circumstances that are facing Kuwait and the world following the novel Coronavirus outbreak and the precautionary and preventive measures that were imposed subsequently, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has ensured that it remains at the service of its customers by providing them with uninterrupted banking services and enabling them to complete their transactions quickly and easily around the clock and from the comfort of their homes through NBK Mobile Banking App.

ing experience from home. NBK has therefore continued to introduce new services, including 17 new features and updates last year alone to enable customers to complete transactions without the need to visit their nearest branch. These services have proven their significance to customers under the current circumstances as the number of new subscribers for NBK Mobile Banking has increased by 14 percent. The number of transfers through the app has also increased by 12 percent, while the amount

order to encourage customers to avoid using cash during this period, NBK increased the limit of paying without entering a PIN code up to KD 25 when paying with NBK Tap and Pay. For that purpose, the bank is currently updating all POS machines that are NFC-enabled and which cover 86 percent of the POS network, the largest in Kuwait.

Commenting on the services available to customers, Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We have made sure to take every precautionary and preventive measure since the beginning of the health crisis, following strictly guidelines provided by the Government of Kuwait and Central Bank of Kuwait. The protection and safety of our customers and employees is our priority and NBK has therefore reduced its operating branches to nine while encouraging customers to use NBK Mobile Banking to complete their banking transactions. We have indeed seen a great response from our customers with a surge in the number of subscribers to the service, as well as an increase in the number of transactions completed with NBK Quick Pay or e-Payments."

Al-Othman added: "We are constantly developing our NBK Mobile Banking App to provide customers with an uninterrupted, easy and convenient banking service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, without having to visit a branch in light of limited branch operations that aim to safeguard our customers and employees. To ensure our customers are able to use the services and features they need during the current period, we have provided them with tutorial videos on how to use the services and complete their transactions safely. These videos are available on our social media channels as well as on the bank's website nbk.com."



Mohammed Al-Othman

He continued: "Since the beginning of the crisis, we have formed a specialized team to follow the developments of the situation and ensure we provide the best service to customers while complying to the decisions of the Government and regulatory authorities. We are also providing our customers with guidelines about the current situation on our social media platforms and have seen a remarkable increase of up to 50 percent in the number of interactions on both NBK Social Media Channels and WhatsApp, while we continue to respond to our customers' questions 24/7".

He continued: "I take this opportunity to extend our deepest gratitude and sincerest appreciation to every NBK employee, especially those working in the front rows. They are the soldiers who work continuously to provide the best service to our customers, whether at our operating branches or through our call center, and social media platforms, as well as different departments who are committed to ensuring the comfort and safety of our customers in these circumstances."

Al-Othman said: "The current health cri-

sis has imposed significant changes on the global banking industry, leading it to move to digital channels, limiting the exchange of cash money, and encouraging our customers to rely on NBK Mobile Banking to complete their banking transactions for its ease, safety and security. We promise our customers to continue investing in new digital features and services."

Al-Othman concluded that NBK is always ready to support customers and provide them with services that enable them to complete their transactions from the comfort of their home so they can stay safe in light of the current circumstances. He said: "We hope everyone remains safe and that the crisis ends soon and may God protect Kuwait and its people from all harm."

NBK customers can enjoy many banking services with ease and convenience through NBK Mobile Banking. The services include:

- Transfers funds locally and internationally
- NBK Quick Pay
- e-Payments
- Adding beneficiaries
- Increase the monthly transfer limit
- Access banking transactions history
- Make credit card payments

NBK has been fully prepared and ready to provide services to customers through its various channels, starting with nine operating branches to serve customers, ATMs and CDMs located throughout Kuwait, direct communication with the bank through its NBK Contact Center at 1801801, NBK WhatsApp and even on the bank's social media platforms where all queries are answered. The bank is also committed to providing information and instructions on matters affected by the current health situation on its social media platforms at nbkgroup where interaction with customers has been remarkable.

- The current situation imposed significant changes in global banking services, including a move to digital channels as well as reducing the exchange of cash money
- Since the beginning of the crisis, we've taken the necessary precautions to protect customers as well as preventive measures in compliance with the decisions of the Council of Ministers and Central Bank of Kuwait
- We are committed to advancing NBK Mobile Banking to offer customers with uninterrupted banking services
- We have developed explanatory videos to guide customers on how to use NBK Mobile Banking and complete transactions with ease

NBK has since before the current crisis committed to providing its customers with top-notch digital solutions through NBK Mobile Banking and NBK Online Banking, in addition to many other services available around the clock like NBK Contact Center. The bank's contact center officers are available around the clock to support customers and respond to their queries, while the NBK WhatsApp and social media channels are also available to respond to customers' queries at record speed.

NBK Mobile Banking comes at the forefront of these services by enabling customers to enjoy a fast and easy bank-

transferred for NBK Quick Pay increased by 29 percent and e-Payments increased by 24 percent. NBK has also ensured increasing the amount limit on transfers for the NBK Quick Pay to KD 5,000 per day and a total of 10 transactions, and up to KD 10,000 per month. The step comes in an aim to facilitate sending and receiving money.

There is no doubt that today's difficult circumstances have imposed a change in banking transactions, making them less dependent on cash exchange and more dependent on payments by debit or credit cards, and especially cards supporting the contactless technology. Therefore, and in

NBK donates KD 1 million to KRCS

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced that it is donating KD 1 million to Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) as part of its humanitarian and social role to support in Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic response.

NBK's donation will be directed to support Kuwait Red Crescent Society's efforts to purchase ventilators and the deployment of fully equipped mobile clinics to quarantined areas. This initiative highlights NBK's commitment towards cementing its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) vision in supporting the efforts geared towards combating the novel Coronavirus, as it maintains its continued collaboration with various volunteer programs and relief efforts.

Meanwhile, NBK commended Kuwait Red Crescent Society's relief and humanitarian efforts provided to the internally displaced persons in Kuwait, as well as its outstanding initiatives to providing humanitarian relief overseas, especially in certain countries where refugees have been impacted by wars and conflicts. NBK also expressed its appreciation for the tireless efforts undertaken by KRCS as one of the most prestigious and deep-rooted societies working in the humanitarian and charitable field, as well as its vital role in providing relief efforts to many countries across the world, further highlighting Kuwait's prominent international role and reflecting the spirit of human solidarity exhibited by all Kuwaitis.

NBK has long been engaging in a strategic partnership with Kuwait Red Crescent Society, as they both join hands in launching and managing numerous charitable campaigns and social development initiatives, including the "Winter Supplies Campaign" and "Donate to their Education Campaign" to assist children of low-income families, in addition to participating in various social welfare programs supporting children. NBK has an unwavering commitment to contribute to humanitarian organizations and social initiatives that support children welfare, in addition to its participation in various social welfare programs in cooperation with numerous institutions, as part of the bank's leading CSR role. NBK has become the biggest contributor to CSR and is at the forefront of all private institutions that have introduced various initiatives across a wide range of sectors including health care and child welfare, in addition to social, environmental, sports and educational development.

African economies hard hit by pandemic

ABIDJAN: Sub-Saharan Africa has not been as badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic as some other parts of the world, but the economy is being pummeled. Here's a look at the main issues.

For the first time in 25 years sub-Saharan Africa is about to go into recession, according to World Bank estimates. Following 2.4 percent growth last year, the estimate for 2020 is between -2.1 and -5.1 percent as the economy contracts. This is in part a knock-on effect from the economic hits being taken by Africa's main trading partners: China, the EU and the United States.

Add to that the slump in the key markets of raw materials and tourism as well as the effect of measures to confine populations at home and you have the perfect economic storm for the continent. The African Development Bank remains less pessimistic but still sees a fall into recession of between -0.7 and -2.8 percent.

Tens of millions of jobs in danger

The African Union estimates that around 20 million jobs, in formal and informal sectors, are under threat. The United Nations puts the figure much higher, at up to 50 million.

Money transfers from diaspora drop

High unemployment and economic slowdown are also hitting African workers abroad, and therefore their money transfers back home, which are often a vital part of the economy. The transfers to Mali in 2018 represented 5.5 percent, according to Bloomfield Investment analysts. The figure for Senegal was 10 percent. These cash transfers are expected to fall significantly with more than half the world's population in some kind of lockdown.

Canada approves vast pandemic financial program

MONTREAL: Canadian lawmakers passed a wage subsidy program Saturday heralded as the largest economic measure in the country since World War II, to help businesses and their employees get through the coronavirus crisis. Parliament is suspended but held an exceptional session in the middle of Easter weekend to adopt the Can\$73 billion (US\$52 billion) program, which aims to pay companies 75 percent of their employees' salaries to avoid massive layoffs.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau attended the session. He had been in isolation in his home for a month after his wife contracted the virus.

Apart from leaders of the main parties, only about 30 MPs out of 338 sat in order to comply with social distancing orders. The House of Commons passed the bill in the after-



ABIDJAN: Sub-Saharan Africa has not been as badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic as some other parts of the world, but the economy is being pummeled.

Price of raw materials plummets

Sub-Saharan Africa's two biggest economies, South Africa and Nigeria are heading for deep recessions, according to the World Bank, as demand drops from developed nations for raw materials such as oil and precious metals. The same goes for Angola, Africa's second biggest oil exporter.

Oil prices have fallen to between \$20 and \$30 a barrel, nearing the cost of production in Nigeria. Even gold, a traditional safe haven for investors, is not immune. The reduction in air transport and the closure of some refineries is limiting gold exports, according to Bloomfield Investment. And the cotton market is down sharply, a matter highlighted on Friday by President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali, where around a quarter of the workforce is linked to the sector.

Tourism and air traffic down

Sub-Saharan Africa's important tourism sector is practically non-existent under the current bans on travel. South Africa, the biggest draw on the continent for holiday-makers, has already been negatively impacted and that is set to continue, warned tourism minister Hlengiwe Mkhabela. A total of 1.5 million jobs are at stake.

The crisis in the sector will have wider repercussions, affecting "agriculture, fisheries, banks, insurance, transport, culture and entertainment", she added. "We've stopped everything because there are no clients. We have had to let two thirds of our employees go, that's 20 people," said Sidiki Dramane Konate who runs Le Bambou hotel in Burkina Faso. The African Airlines Association warns that with 95 percent of flights grounded carriers

noon, following in the evening by the Senate.

Trudeau, referring to Canada's sacrifices in both world wars, stressed that the fight against the virus "is not a war," but "that doesn't make this fight any less destructive."

"The front line is everywhere, in our homes, in our hospitals and care centers, in our grocery stores and pharmacies, at our truck stops and gas stations.

"And the people who work in these places are our modern day heroes," he said.

This was the second financial assistance bill proposed by Trudeau's government since the beginning of the crisis. Its purpose is to "enable Canadians to keep their jobs and get a paycheck," the prime minister said, adding it is "the largest Canadian economic policy since World War II."

The 75 percent wage subsidy, which is for three months and retroactive to March 15, is for businesses that have suffered or will suffer a 15 per cent drop in revenues in March or 30 percent in April and May, finance minister Bill Morneau said. The Canadian economy lost more than one million jobs last month. Canada had 23,197 cases of coronavirus and 678 deaths due to the disease as of Saturday. — AFP

are in danger of folding without financial aid.

Coffee and cocoa markets threatened

In Ethiopia, Africa's largest coffee producer, exporters are already experiencing a "devastating shock", according to Gizat Worku, head of the country's Coffee Exporters Association. Business from the main importers in Europe and the US is at a standstill. Coffee brings in five percent of the country's GDP and directly employs 25 million people, out of a population of 110 million.

In the short term the crisis is unlikely to have a major impact on the cocoa market, according to the Michel Arrión, head of the International Cocoa Organization, because the main importers have around 1.8 million tonnes of stock, equal to four or five months production. But "there is a real fear among planters of a long-term drop in prices," said Moussa Kone, president of the growers union in Ivory Coast which produces 40 percent of the world market in "brown gold" and employs up to six million people.

Stemming the crisis

Several African nations have announced economic and social support plans. But with less than 20 percent of the population formally employed, with social security systems non-existent in the informal sector and with national coffers in a poor state before even before the current crisis, "the situation is particularly critical for Africa", according to the Finactu accountancy firm which operates in 30 African countries. It will take some kind of African "Marshall Plan" from the international community and a significant debt write-off to get Africa back on its feet, says Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou. — AFP

Honeywell renews \$1.5bn revolving credit agreement

WASHINGTON: Honeywell International Inc said it had renewed a revolving credit agreement for \$1.5 billion, to be used for general corporate purposes when needed. The 364-day Credit Agreement was signed with Citibank and JPMorgan Chase, Honeywell said in a filing, adding that the loan does not restrict its ability to pay dividend.

Money that Honeywell draws against the revolving credit agreement should be repaid no later than April 9, 2021, the company said. The agreement comes after the industrial conglomerate entered into a \$6 billion loan agreement last month to bolster liquidity as the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic wreaks havoc on the global economy. — Reuters

Amid pandemic, a turning point for telemedicine

WASHINGTON: For a follow-up visit after her recent cancer surgery, Gail Rae-Garwood opted for a video consultation with her specialist, avoiding a long journey-and potential exposure to COVID-19 in medical offices. "I am so thankful not to have to go out that I've enrolled my grumpy husband into tele-visits, too," said the 73-year-old Arizona woman who was able to upload data from a blood pressure cuff and glucose monitor to her physician.

The coronavirus outbreak has severely strained the health system, but telemedicine is being seen as a vital way of coping including for those impacted by the outbreak.

"COVID-19 is very conducive to telemedicine," said Omar Khan, a family physician and head of Delaware Health Sciences Alliance in Wilmington, Delaware. Khan said doctors can make a preliminary diagnosis by evaluating symptoms such as fever and cough, and the patient's travel and contact with others. A lab order to confirm an infection can be transmitted electronically to minimize contact.

"Eighty percent of people with coronavirus don't need to go to the hospital," Khan said. If an infection is detected, "they move from quarantine to isolation" and many still don't need to leave home.

Khan said he has been handling all his consultations remotely for the past two weeks, and that patients are handling the shift well. "They know the danger," he said. "They don't want to put themselves or health care workers at risk, and don't want to come to the hospital unnecessarily. At a time like this a hospital is a scary place."

Highlighting value

The crisis has highlighted the value of telemedicine, long touted as a way to deliver medical care to people in underserved areas and to deal more efficiently with issues ranging from minor emergencies to mental health. "A crisis sometimes ends up giving you an incentive to change things," said Preeti Malani, a University of Michigan professor



MOSCOW: The chief of a telemedicine center Andrei Tyazhelnikov talks to the media in Moscow. The city of Moscow opened a telemedicine center to treat and support coronavirus patients who are well enough to stay home. — AFP

of medicine who led a 2019 survey of telemedicine for older adults.

A year ago, Malani said, the survey showed many older adults had little knowledge or interest in telemedicine, but the situation has now changed dramatically. "In a matter of days we've completely switched and particularly older adults who may be vulnerable to complications are being told not to come to clinic," said Malani.

Easing of regulations

With the virus raging, regulatory barriers to telehealth services have quickly come down. US

authorities last month waived restrictions that had prevented telemedicine for government-sponsored Medicare and Medicaid and a rescue package passed by Congress included some \$200 million to help providers establish remote care. Many US states have lifted restrictions and insurance companies have waived co-payments for these consultations.

Privacy regulations which limited the kinds of technology for video consultations have also been eased, making it possible to use consumer-friendly services like Skype or FaceTime.

"I've been pleasantly shocked to see (regulato-

ry moves) which would have taken five to 10 years," said Courtney Joslin, a researcher following regulatory issues with the R Street Institute, a public policy think tank. "We're going to come out of this with a lot of evidence on how well telehealth works."

Insurance on board

Gary Berman, a New Jersey cardiologist, began remote consultations as part of an effort to protect his practice and his patients during the outbreak. Berman would have offered telehealth consultations before, but until last month the visits were not covered by private or government insurance, or by his own malpractice coverage.

"I've been interested in telemedicine for a long time, but I didn't want to expose myself to legal risks and not get reimbursed," he said. The physician said he may continue offering remote consultations if insurance coverage is extended. "There are some things you can't do—you can't reliably take someone's blood pressure, you can't hear a heart murmur," he said. "But I would continue for some people. I have 90-year-old patients who can't get to the office."

Shaping the future

Joe Kvedar, president-elect of the American Telemedicine Association, said the pandemic is likely to help shed light on the kinds of services that need to be in person versus those handled remotely. Many urgent care needs, mental health, post-operative follow-ups and diabetes management are among the areas that are handled easily by telemedicine, he said.

Telemedicine is becoming easier with devices such as internet-connected thermometers, pulse oximeters and other technology to monitor vital signs. "Up until this crisis the only service delivery option was to come to the office," Kvedar said. "I don't think we'll go back to that system. After this is over, there will be a tapestry of options that are high quality and convenient." — AFP

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Lifestyle | Features

Jane Goodall says 'disrespect for animals' caused pandemic

World-renowned British primatologist Jane Goodall says the coronavirus pandemic was caused by humanity's disregard for nature and disrespect for animals. Goodall, who is best known for trail-blazing research in Africa that revealed the true nature of chimpanzees, pleaded for the world to learn from past mistakes to prevent future disasters. During a conference call ahead of the release of the new National Geographic documentary "Jane Goodall: The Hope", the 86-year-old also said everyone can make a difference.

How do you view this pandemic?

Goodall: It is our disregard for nature and our disrespect of the animals we should share the planet with that has caused this pandemic, that was predicted long ago. Because as we destroy, let's say the forest, the different species of animals in the forest are forced into a proximity and therefore diseases are being passed from one animal to another, and that second animal is then most likely to infect humans as it is forced into closer contact with humans.

It's also the animals who are hunted for food,



In this file photo Jane Goodall UN Messenger of Peace, speaks at the Securing a Sustainable Future for the Amazon, during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.—AFP

sold in markets in Africa or in the meat market for wild animals in Asia, especially China, and our intensive farms where we cruelly crowd together billions of animals around the world. These are the conditions that create an opportunity for the virus-

es to jump from animals across the species barrier to humans.

What can we do about these animal markets?

It's really good that China closed down the live wild animal markets, in a temporary ban which we hope will be made permanent, and other Asian countries will follow suit. But in Africa it will be very difficult to stop the selling of bush meat because so many people rely on that for their livelihoods. It will need a lot of careful thought on how it should be done, you can't just stop somebody doing something when they have absolutely no money to support themselves or their families, but at least this pandemic should have taught us the kind of things to do to prevent another one.

What can we hope for?

We have to realize we are part of the natural world, we depend on it, and as we destroy it we are actually stealing the future from our children. Hopefully, because of this unprecedented response, the lockdowns that are going on around the world, more people will wake up and eventually they can

start thinking about ways they can live their lives differently. Everyone can make an impact every single day.

If you think about the consequences of the little choices you make: what you eat, where it came from, did it cause cruelty to animals, is it made from intensive farming — which mostly it is — is it cheap because of child slave labour, did it harm the environment in its production, where did it come from, how many miles did it travel, did you think that perhaps you could walk and not take your car. (Also consider) ways that you could perhaps help alleviate poverty because when people are poor they can't make these ethical choices. They just have to do whatever they can to survive — they can't question what they buy, they must buy the cheapest, and they are going to cut down the last tree because they are desperate to find land on which they can grow more food. So what we can do in our individual lives does depend a little bit on who we are, but we all can make a difference, everybody can.—AFP

Football and rap, a perfect match in working-class Marseille

Marseille has the flow. Rap resonates at the Velodrome and references to OM infiltrate the airwaves, but why are the links with urban music and the club stronger here than anywhere else in Ligue 1? "The marriage between OM and rap was obvious," Sat l'Artificier, a former member of Fonky Family, one of the region's most prominent rap groups in the 1990s and 2000s, tells AFP. "A working-class city, with a working-class sport and working-class music like rap."

To illustrate the point, other than the timeless classic "Jump" by Van Halen, hip hop accounts for the rest of the soundtrack pumping out at the Velodrome, the club's 67,000-capacity stadium in the Mediterranean port city. The evening begins with Bouga's "Belsunce Breakdown" as the players shuffle out for warm-ups, then just before the teams are announced images of the city and its fans are projected against a backdrop of "Bad boys de Marseille" by Akhenaton, a singer with IAM, Marseille's biggest rap group. After home wins, the sound system blasts out "A la bien" by Soprano, another Marseille native and supporter. "Rap and football, we're in two very similar universes," says Herve Philippe, the club's chief marketing and media officer as he reflects on the electric atmosphere, currently on hold during the coronavirus pandemic.

City ambassador

"Marseille is a rap city," adds Kheops, the "musical architect of the group IAM, the first on the Marseille rap scene at the start of the 1990s. Listing the likes of Soprano and Jul, Kheops says all these artists have "OM in their blood". "All the youngsters in the north and south stands listen to rap," he adds. Marseille is without question "a rap stronghold", but Sat is keen to highlight the club's role in it all, with OM long upholding the link through various collaborations. The emblematic Akhenaton designed the club's European shirt for the 2012-13 campaign and Soprano, in 2007, filmed the clip for his "Hallahallah" hit at the Velodrome.

The end of the video shows the musician returning the stadium keys to the late former president Pape Diouf. Soprano was even named a club ambassador. "It's no small achievement," says Sat. "Imagine, a little Marseille boy with Comoros roots and from Plan d'Aou, one of the poorest neighborhoods, on the outskirts of the city, an ambassador of the biggest French club. It sends a strong message!" More recently, Alonzo, alongside Soprano formerly part of the Psy 4 de la rime group, another pillar of Marseille rap, has worked with sportswear giant Puma, shooting a commercial alongside Diego Maradona to promote the club's home kit.

Social media presence

Sat himself has recently been sharing the microphone with longtime stadium announcer Dede Fournel. Soprano concerts have filled up the Velodrome three times, and Jul was expected to do the same in June. Marseille's newest rap sensation has featured players in his music videos, including ex-France international Remy Cabella. The club itself also organizes 'OM Sessions' — working with budding artists to produce a series of freestyle videos. "We offer our platform, which is international, to local artists who are not yet very well known, for an OM freestyle," explains Philippe.

The clips are shot at the Velodrome or La Commanderie, the training centre, interspersed with shout-outs to players and specific catchphrases. They generate hundreds of thousands of views on the club's YouTube channel, such as "A la Boli" by Ilies. "For more than 10 years OM have maintained very strong links with the rappers in the city," says Sat. The connection remains strong with the younger generation too, with Drime's "Bouba Kamara" song a tribute to the rise of Boubacar Kamara from the working-class area of La Soude to the Marseille first team.—AFP



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



Kosovo's travelling barber keeps hair trimmed in virus lockdown

Equipped with a mask, gloves and tank of disinfectant spray, a popular Pristina barber has taken his show on the road to clip and coil clients who are stuck at home under coronavirus lockdown. "People are in need," Driton Kameri, a 33-year-old with a scruffy beard and fedora told AFP, after gearing up for one of his home visits. "You can shut down hairdressers but you cannot order hair not to grow. It needs to be cut regularly," he added. Like most other businesses in Pristina, Kameri's hair salon was closed under measures to halt the spread of the virus in Kosovo, where six people have died and more than 200 infections have been recorded.

"The virus has no legs. Please, do not give it any," the Institute for Public Health has begged, with warnings the country's health system could buckle under a major outbreak. In the name of keeping up appearances, however, Kameri has decided to save his customers from attempts to buzz their own hair at home. Now he is making house calls — though he does the trimming outdoors to minimize the risks. "I'm not going anywhere without disinfectants, my facemask and gloves. Before I take scissors and comb in my hand, I disinfect my clients completely from head to toe," he told AFP.



Kosovo hairdresser Driton Kameri stands inside his salon in Pristina ahead of a curfew during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Solidarity

With more than 40,000 followers on Instagram, Kameri, known to clients as Toni, is something of a social media star in Kosovo and regularly posts pictures of his work on the platform. His new hashtag is

"Just send the location". The cuts cost his standard five-euro (\$5.50) price, though retirees and others struggling financially get them for free, he said. That type of solidarity with the poor has become common in Pristina during the virus turmoil, with one bakery also announcing that "customers who cannot afford to pay for bread would be given it for free". "We will not leave you without bread," reads a sign posted on the window.

One local health official said he couldn't condone Kameri's new business model given that "a stay-at-home order is in force." But the barber insists his visits are also a way to lighten up an otherwise gloomy time and fans online have welcomed the effort. "I do it for people who do not dare to leave home, but also for fun," Kameri said. "We have to relax a bit in this depressing situation." Samir, 27, recently got an open-air haircut on his lawn. "I like the idea," he said. "As long as this situation with the virus in our country and in the world goes on, why not?"—AFP

Bikes help New Yorkers ride out coronavirus lockdown

When America's oldest bike shop opened, the Spanish flu was ravaging New York. More than a century later, it's helping residents work and stay sane as cycling takes on a vital role during the coronavirus pandemic. While almost all stores were ordered to close for the Big Apple's COVID-19 shutdown, bike shops like Bellitte Bicycles were deemed essential businesses and allowed to stay open. They have proven a godsend for New Yorkers needing to commute to hospitals, migrant workers delivering takeouts and cooped-up residents desperate to escape their cramped apartments for some solitary exercise.

"Business has been good but it's also about serving the community," said co-owner Sal Bellitte, whose grandfather opened the shop, situated in the Jamaica area of Queens, in 1918. As inhabitants skip buses and subway trains due to social distancing and enjoy streets devoid of usual traffic, bike shops are one of the few businesses doing a decent trade. "Business is booming," said 29-year-old Paris Correa, who recently started working at Bike Stop, another outlet in Queens. "I was hired because the owner knew it was going to be crazy." Residents are getting old bikes spruced up or buying new ones to compensate for canceled Pilates classes and closed gyms while delivery men stop by to get brakes or gears fixed. Bellitte Bicycles is the oldest continuously owned bike shop in the United States, according to Bellitte, who is the third generation of his family to own the store.



A woman with her bike stands in front of the NBKC, North Brooklyn Cycles bikes shop in Brooklyn, New York.

'Lifeline'

It opened the year a flu pandemic killed about 30,000 New Yorkers, operated during the Great Depression, World War Two, the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Sandy, which caused devastation in 2012. "We've seen it all. The coronavirus pandemic is like coming full circle," Bellitte, 56, told AFP, adding that he thinks this is the worst crisis yet "because of the uncertainty." For many workers, New York's shutdown, which Governor Andrew Cuomo extended until April 29, has made them rely on a bicycle for the first time. Oliver Bucknor — 50 years old and originally from the Caribbean island of Jamaica — lost his job as a van driver when the deadly outbreak started spreading across the city early last month.

He bought an old bike from his landlord for \$250 and brought it into Bellitte's for a tune-up before embarking on a new job delivering food. "A bike is a lifeline for a lot of people," he told AFP. "It allows me to keep making a living." Other residents are making use of Citi Bikes, New York's popular bicycle share scheme, which the government has temporarily made free to overwhelmed health care staff. Emily Rogers, a 27-year-old social worker, started cycling the half-hour to and from the public hospital where she works on a Citi Bike after she became concerned about using the subway.—AFP



Rental bikes and bikes for purchase stand in front of the NBKC, North Brooklyn Cycles bikes shop.—AFP photos



Animal lovers move into shelter for S African lockdown

Dedicated staff at a South African animal shelter have gone into lockdown with dozens of dogs, cats and horses to make sure its four-legged residents are not left to fend for themselves during the coronavirus crisis. Despite the outbreak, it's business as usual for the team at the WetNose Animal shelter outside the capital Pretoria where they continue to walk, exercise, feed and care for its unwanted pets and farm animals. South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa imposed a nationwide lockdown late last month in a bid to halt the spread of coronavirus.

But under the new measures workers feared they would not be permitted to travel to the site. So five of them decided to move into the shelter to prevent the animals being abandoned. "It's been hard for the staff because they have been on lockdown on this property," said shelter manager Veronica van Greunen, stroking a ginger cat. "Not visiting their families, not allowed to go see them, not allowed to go out of this property. So they've basically been in quarantine... with all the animals." South Africa is the worst-affected country on the continent by the virus, with more than 2,000 confirmed cases of the disease and 24 recorded deaths so far. People are only allowed to leave their homes to shop for groceries or seek medical attention.

Van Greunen said having workers on site was key, as animals were still being taken in by the shelter despite being closed for adoptions until the end of the lockdown — which was extended to April 30 this week. Worker Josef Mashaba said he was undeterred by the prospect of not seeing his family for weeks, adding that he was driven by his "love for animals". "That's why we are here and dedicated our time to do this," he said, dogs wagging their tails excitedly in the background.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Dance moves from 'Tik Tok Doc' bring welcome relief from virus blues

A US doctor's dance videos posted on social media have proven just the right medicine for hundreds of thousands of people, including health care workers, who are cheering him on for lifting their spirits during the coronavirus pandemic. Dubbed "Tik Tok Doc" after the popular short-form video app, Dr. Jason Campbell has taken the Internet by storm with clips featuring him and colleagues doing the "corona foot shake," "the cha-cha slide" and other dance moves.

The 31-year-old anesthesia resident physician at Oregon Health & Science University Hospital told AFP he has been overwhelmed by the positive response, including from health care workers in New York, the country's epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. "When you're in medicine, you see a lot of serious, sad things all the time," Campbell said. "And so we too need a way to remain human, stay sane and a chance to just smile or laugh, even if it's just five minutes out of a 12-hour day." Campbell said he initially began

posting the videos to encourage teens, especially African-American youths, to pursue their dreams and know that they too could become physicians.

The clips, however, quickly went viral, resonating with a much wider audience clearly in need of cheering up during these dark times. His "corona foot shake" video alone has been watched four million times. "I got a message today (Friday) from someone who said his wife was a cardiologist working with COVID-19 response teams and found the videos so refreshing," Campbell said. Another message came from a lung cancer patient who thanked him for making his quarantine more bearable. "The overwhelming response has been, 'Hey, I work in New York City and I love seeing your video after my long day,'" Campbell said. "Others say, 'Hey, my family member has the virus and we watch these videos together while they recover.'"

Campbell said fellow doctors and nurses at the hospital in Portland were initially reluctant to appear in the videos, but after



This handout selfie courtesy of Dr. Jason Campbell shows him at the Oregon Health & Science University Hospital in Portland.

seeing the positive reactions have joined in the fun. Hospital officials have applauded the initiative. "Dr. Campbell's energy and charisma is infectious," said Dr. Renee Edwards, the hospital's chief medical officer. "A skilled physician, he's found a unique way to incorporate the power of

positivity into his daily work, helping to lift the spirits of patients and co-workers alike." The videos have been hailed by the state's governor and even caught the attention of popular recording artist Janet Jackson, who retweeted one of the doctor's TikToks.

Campbell, who has posted about a dozen videos since the beginning of March, said his next dance routine, currently being rehearsed, was in response to a special request from his co-workers' kids. "It's going to be a slow-motion challenge with one of my colleague's daughter," he said. "It's multiple moves where you go slow at first then speed it up back to real time." As for his plans once the pandemic is over, Campbell said he has no intention of stopping his dancing. "The focus will remain on connecting with the black youth," he said. "And working to enhance diversity in medicine long-term."—AFP



This handout selfie courtesy of Dr Jason Campbell shows him posing with program nurse Grace Choi on March 18, 2020 at the Oregon Health & Science University Hospital in Portland.—AFP photos



In this file photo taken on April 24, 2009, Iraqi architect Rafat Chadirji is pictured at his home office in the coastal Lebanese town of Halat.—AFP

Father of modern Iraqi architecture dies of COVID-19

Rafat Chadirji, known as the father of modern Iraqi architecture, died late Friday in the United Kingdom after contracting the novel coronavirus, friends and Iraqi officials have said. The 93-year-old architect and photographer is credited with designing some of Iraq's most well-known structures, including the iconic "Freedom Monument" in the now protest hub of Baghdad's Tahrir Square its name. "He was a giant of 20th century Iraq," said Caecilia Pieri, a scholar focusing on Baghdad's modern architecture who knew Chadirji well. Top Iraqi officials including President Barham Saleh and caretaker premier Adel Abdel Mahdi mourned him on Saturday. "With the death of Rafat Chadirji, architecture in Iraq and the world has lost its modern lung," Saleh wrote.

Born in Baghdad in 1926, Chadirji studied in London and returned to Iraq in the 1950s to design his magnum opus — an elegant arch entitled "The Unknown Soldier" — as well as the capital's post office and other public buildings. But when the Baathist regime came to power, it tore down "The Unknown Soldier," replaced it with a statue of Saddam Hussein and tossed Chadirji into the infamous Abu Ghraib prison, where he remained for 20 months. He wrote about the experience in "The Wall Between Two Darknnesses," relating how Saddam had him released from prison to design a conference centre. Chadirji moved to Beirut a few years later and lived abroad during most of the devastating 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the 1990 Gulf War, a decade of international sanctions and the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam.

When he returned to Iraq in 2009, he was scarred by what he found. "I cannot believe what has happened to the buildings in Baghdad, everything has been almost completely destroyed," Chadirji said at the time. In 2019, another one of his famed buildings was torn down: the National Insurance Company in Mosul, a seven-storey building from where the Islamic State group then men accused of being gay to their deaths. The structure was ravaged by the months-long fight to oust IS from Mosul and a municipal committee later decided to demolish what was left of it saying it could not be restored. The NIC building was seen as a prime example of modern Iraqi design, with rows of slim archways and projected windows reminiscent of Iraq's beloved "shanasheel". Chadirji had been a longtime advocate of preservation, working even under Saddam to halt the demolition of traditional Iraqi architecture in Baghdad. "A people that cannot take care of its creations is a people without a memory," he said in 2009.—AFP

In da (digital) club: Life under quarantine fuels parties online

With New York's nightlife spots closed digital dance parties are all the rave, as DJs stream sets while revelers don their nipple pasties and disco-ball facemasks for clubs online. The city that proudly never sleeps has seen more than 90,000 of its residents test positive for the potentially fatal coronavirus, whose rapid spread has severely restricted public life. But clubgoers are finding new ways to stay up all night long. The velvet rope is tight at Club Quarantine, one of the internet's hottest spaces that requires a \$10-cover charge — \$80 will get you a private video room with more exclusive performances — and has seen pop celebrities including Charli XCX drop by.

And celebrity DJ D-Nice has drawn massive virtual crowds to his marathon Instagram Live sets including everyone from Rihanna and John Legend to Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden. The Brooklyn venue House of Yes — known for its drag shows, burlesque, aerial performers and elaborate costumes — also has gone digital, hosting parties via platforms like Zoom, Twitch and Instagram. The club's co-founder Kae Burke said New York's social life shutdown felt "like watching a 20-car pile-up in slow motion." "We didn't see the impending doom," she told AFP. But the first online session closed a hit: "I did not expect to

have so much fun — I ended up dancing in a costume for three hours straight," said Burke. "It completely blew my mind... it felt like I was with my friends."

'Silver linings'

At first House of Yes kept its requirements for entry as tight as those of its physical space, demanding parties wear costumes, the more intricate the better. But in the quarantine age they decided to relax the rules to ensure inclusivity, especially for the regulars stuck at their parents' house without glittering get-ups. Jacqui Rabkin, a brain behind the club's digital concept, said that on the whole participants are still bringing their A-game. "We've had people in like massive unicorn costumes, we've had people with pole dancing equipment, with aerial equipment," she said, saying one crew brought a smoke machine with elaborate lights and puppetry.

Rabkin said taking the dancefloor digital also allows the New York club to expand its audience as far as Europe or Asia. "I do see a lot of silver linings where it's actually expanding what people can do with each other," she said. The oft-riskie club even had its Twitch account suspended for 24 hours "because some of our people were dancing in their underwear," Rabkin said. It brought a sense of normalcy to the ven-

ue whose social media content already often was censored for participant self-expression that skewed mature. "We're just too sexy for everyone," Rabkin laughed.

Contagious vibes

New Yorker Nickodemus is among the many DJs spinning vinyl for the digital sphere, an antidote to stressful times that he hopes can offer respite to others. "I just felt weird when like I hear every three to five minutes an ambulance screaming by my building, and I see people getting pulled out of the building, it's hard to put on a fun face and just turn on the music," he told AFP. "But we can also check out every once in a while to keep like, our souls clean and keep positive and hopeful," Nickodemus said. "New York has always been a party for me... If I'm in the city, I'm DJing."

The coronavirus pandemic has dealt the entertainment industry a serious blow, with major festivals canceled, tours pushed back and many artists, crews and club workers unemployed. House of Yes is operating online with a "skeleton crew," Burke said, and held a fundraiser to be able to distribute tide-over payouts to the dozens of employees they were forced to lay off.—AFP



The designer Clare Waight Keller at her Givenchy couture show in January. —Valerio Mezzanotti for The New York Times

Meghan dress designer Clare Waight Keller leaves Givenchy

British fashion designer Clare Waight Keller, who created the wedding dress for Meghan Markle when she married Prince Harry, is stepping down from her role as artistic director of French fashion house Givenchy, the company said in a statement Friday. Clare Waight Keller, 49, became Givenchy's artistic director in 2017, the first woman to hold the role in the history of the fashion house, which is owned by French luxury giant LVMH. "As the first woman to be the artistic director of this legendary Maison, I feel honored to have been given the opportunity to cherish its legacy and bring it new life," she said in a statement released by Givenchy. "Focusing on a world based on Haute Couture has been one of the highlights of my professional journey," she added.

Sidney Toledano, chairman and chief executive of LVMH Fashion Group, thanked Waight Keller for her contribu-

tion to "Givenchy's latest chapter." "Under her creative leadership, and in great collaboration with its ateliers and teams, the Maison reconnected with the founding values of Hubert de Givenchy and his innate sense of elegance," Toledano said. Givenchy said it new "creative organization" will be communicated at a later date. Waight Keller created the boat-necked, sculpted dress that Markle wore for her 2018 wedding to Prince Harry, featuring a five-metre (16-foot) train embroidered with flowers from all 53 Commonwealth countries. Waight Keller made her name by turning Pringle of Scotland from a rather staid knitwear maker into a fashion brand. She has also worked for Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and for Tom Ford at Gucci. She joined Givenchy after six years at the helm at Chloe.—AFP

'Friends' reunion delayed by coronavirus

The much-anticipated "Friends" reunion has been delayed and will not be available at the launch of HBO Max, the new streaming platform said Friday, as the global coronavirus pandemic shuts down productions across Hollywood. News of the unscripted special had delighted fans of the beloved US sitcom, which remains wildly popular even among viewers too young to remember its original run, which ended in 2004. Stars Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer have signed up to return to the comedy's original soundstage on the Warner Bros. Studio lot outside Los Angeles.

But a spokesman told AFP Friday the special will not be available for HBO Max's May launch as planned, adding that it will be coming to the streaming platform "soon." Production has not yet taken place due to the coronavirus lockdown, part of measures put in place

for billions around the globe to break transmission of the virus which has killed more than 100,000 people worldwide. A remote or virtual reunion was not considered due to the significance of the original soundstage, according to Variety. Each actor is expected to receive \$2.5 million for taking part in the special, it reported. WarnerMedia's Sean Kisker this week confirmed the May launch of HBO Max itself, which will cost \$14.99 a month, remains "still very much on" schedule.

The "Friends" back catalog is a key selling point for the new streaming platform as it enters a fiercely competitive marketplace alongside Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime and Apple TV+. Unveiling the special in February, Kevin Reilly, chief content officer at HBO Max, said the show about a close-knit group of friends living in New York City had captivated "viewers generation after generation."—AFP



In this file photo taken on September 21, 2002 cast members from "Friends," which won Outstanding Comedy, series pose for photographer at the 54th Annual Emmy Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.—AFP



Paul McCartney's scribbled note for a recording session in London in 1968 of Hey Jude that sold for \$910,000.—Reuters

Handwritten 'Hey Jude' lyrics sell for \$910,000

A sheet of paper bearing Paul McCartney's handwritten lyrics to "Hey Jude" sold for \$910,000 in an online auction held Friday to mark the 50th anniversary of the Beatles' historic split. The document penned by McCartney and used during the 1968 London recording of the classic song at Trident Studios was sold for more than five times its pre-sale estimate. California-based Julien's Auctions shifted its sale of some 250 Beatles memorabilia online due to the coronavirus pandemic, with fans around the world bidding for guitars, rare vinyl and autographed items.

Friday marks exactly half a century since an interview given by McCartney sealed the acrimonious end of the "Fab Four," widely considered one of the most influential bands in history. Asked if he foresaw a time when his prolific songwriting partnership with fellow Beatle John Lennon would restart, his blunt reply — "no" — spoke for itself. McCartney wrote "Hey Jude" after an earlier split — Lennon's divorce from first wife Cynthia following his affair with Japanese artist Yoko Ono. The song was composed to comfort Lennon's son Julian during his parents' break-up, and was initially titled "Hey

Jules." The handwritten document sold Friday contains partial lyrics along with annotations including the word "break" used to aid the song's recording.

Other items included a drumhead with the Beatles' logo used during their first US tour gig in 1964, sold for \$200,000, and a handwritten shooting script page for the "Hello, Goodbye" music video in 1967, fetching \$83,200. A brass ashtray used by Ringo Starr at the Abbey Road recordings in the 1960s earned \$32,500.—AFP



Brazilian fashion photographer Marcio Rodrigues wears a mask made with recyclable bottles, cans and boxes after over 20 days in which these garbage items were not collected because of the quarantine imposed to control the spread of the new coronavirus in Belo Horizonte on April 11, 2020. Rodrigues will make a suit with recyclable garbage if the quarantine continues. — AFP

Morocco NGO delivers supplies to single mums

CASABLANCA: A small van zips through the streets of Casablanca to deliver food to single mothers, as economic paralysis caused by the coronavirus crisis puts pressure on Morocco's poor. "We have to be quick," says Bouchra, a coordinator from NGO INSAF who is supervising the day's rounds. The lockdown to curb the spread of the COVID-19 disease, and a lack of work and money, are creating tensions in the working-class neighborhoods of the country's economic capital.

Each year, INSAF helps over 500 young women who have fallen pregnant out of wedlock - viewed as a "sin" by a society marked by religious conservatism. The organization usually supports the mothers with medical and psychological assistance, tries to mediate between them and their families and helps find jobs for the pregnant women.

But that all changed when the coronavirus pandemic struck, with the first distress calls arriving some 15 days after the government declared a health emergency around mid-March. "The epidemic touches everyone, but single mothers are the most vulnerable", INSAF head Meriem Othmani says. "Their families reject them and they have to manage alone with their baby, without any support."

The organization phones a few minutes before the van's arrival to arrange a pick-up point on the street near the women's homes. It stops quickly, and the supplies are swiftly offloaded. At each stop, passersby ask if they can receive assistance too. The single mothers try to avoid

being noticed, ashamed of their social status and afraid of the envy of others. "Thank you," murmurs Habiba before disappearing down an alley with two big bags of supplies. "Many get by doing odd jobs in hairdressing, cleaning, or in the textiles industry or hospitality," INSAF's Latifa Ouazahrou says of the single mothers who have now found themselves without work or a safety net.

More than three million people out of Morocco's population of 35 million inhabitants are poor, according to official statistics. The monthly minimum wage is around \$260 while three-quarters of workers have no social security cover. The World Bank says around 10 million in Morocco could find themselves in difficulty as the pandemic hits and further pressure mounts due to a drought.

In a large room normally used as a kitchen, INSAF teams fill bags with couscous semolina, lentils, potatoes, rice, oil, tea, flour, soap and sanitary products. A leaflet detailing virus protection measures is also included. Emergency deliveries also go to families in isolated hamlets in the central Atlas region, where a drought in the agricultural sector is exerting further pressure.

State aid of up to 1,200 dirhams (around \$120) is being allocated to needy families to weather the crisis, part of an emergency package also funded by corporate and private donations. In recent days, the first beneficiaries were able to withdraw money from ATMs after receiving a text message from the authorities, thanks to a new payment system set up



CASABLANCA: Moroccan volunteers of local organization INSAF prepare food donations to be distributed during the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

with help from local banks.

But helping the poorest is a challenge, and the country lacks a social register to identify the needs of the population.

"Some (single mothers) can't even buy milk for their baby any more," Ouazahrou says. "It's very important to bring them basic necessities." As of Sunday, the

coronavirus had claimed 111 lives in the North African country from a declared total of 1,545 cases. Only around 7,000 tests have been conducted. — AFP

Easter celebrations muted as US virus...

Continued from Page 1

On Saturday, Pope Francis live-streamed his Easter Vigil to the world's 1.3 billion Catholics from an almost empty St Peter's Basilica. "Darkness and death do not have the last word," he said. "As the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Let us not give in to resignation... We can and must hope," said the pontiff. Francis was praised by Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte for his "gesture of responsibility" to observe Easter in private.

In Jerusalem, Christians were prevented from gathering for the Easter service and all cultural sites were shuttered, regardless of their religious affiliation. And at one church in the Philippines, photos of parishioners were taped onto the empty pews.

The hardest-hit countries of Europe, and the centres of infection in the United States - New York and New Orleans - were seeing signs of infection rates levelling off. Numbers from Spain offered a shred of hope Saturday: 510 new deaths, a dip in fatalities for the third day in a row. Newly reported coronavirus deaths in France also fell by one-third from Friday to 635. "A very high plateau for the epidemic appears to have been reached, but the epidemic remains

very active," said French health official Jerome Salomon, urging people to remain vigilant.

Italy meanwhile said the number of daily deaths there was starting to level off - though the government resisted pressure to lift its lockdown, extending confinement measures until May 3. New York and New Orleans saw a slowdown in the number of new infections, deaths and hospitalizations.

But Britain on Saturday recorded its second highest daily toll, as virus-stricken Prime Minister Boris Johnson made "very good progress" after being released from intensive care, a spokeswoman said. Although global infections stand at 1.75 million, according to an AFP tally of official counts, the real number is thought to be much higher, with many countries only testing the most serious cases. Many experts and the World Health Organization are cautioning countries against lifting lockdown measures too quickly.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned Friday that jumping the gun could lead to a "deadly resurgence" of the novel coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV-2. From the crowded slums of Mexico City, Nairobi and Mumbai to conflict hotspots in the Middle East, there are fears that the worst is yet to come for the world's poorest. Trump said this past week that the disease was near its peak in the United States and he was considering ways to re-open the world's biggest economy as soon as possible. "We look like we'll be coming in on the very, very low side, below the lowest side of the curve of death," Trump said in an interview with Fox News. — AFP

Oil prices, virus, instability put...

Continued from Page 1

It is "imperative to put an end to bad practices instilled over a period of financial well-being, such as waste and a spirit of laziness and overconsumption", Tebboune has said. His words might be too little, too late, as the drop in prices, the coronavirus and ongoing political uncertainty create a perfect financial and social storm.

Algeria "is on the edge of a financial abyss", according to Luis Martinez, North Africa specialist at France's Sciences Po University. The government decided to slash public spending in March, after oil prices dipped to \$22.50. The country's 2020 budget had been based on an oil price of \$50 per barrel, with growth of around 1.8 percent. Algiers announced a 30 percent cut to the state budget, without touching civil servants' wages, and a reduction in its enormous imports bill.

State oil giant Sonatrach is to halve operating and capital expenditure, from \$14 billion to \$7 billion, in order to preserve foreign currency reserves. But former Sonatrach CEO Abdelmadjid Attar said in principle, the company "shouldn't have to reduce hydrocarbon production" as the cuts would affect other operations. Meanwhile, Algeria's foreign reserves dropped to under \$60 billion at the end of March, compared to almost \$80 billion at the end of 2018 and over \$97 billion at the end of 2017.

Some economists are concerned those could quickly run out. Economist Ahmed Dahmani warns of multiple dangers: a rapid draining of foreign exchange reserves, a worsening budget deficit and balance of payments, a sharp devaluation of the dinar and an inflationary surge, leading to economic recession and mass unemployment. "The government has no choice but to broaden the tax base, to resort to public debt and negotiate loans," Martinez said. "With the remaining foreign reserves, that should allow it to hold on until 2021. But after that?"

Others worry that Algeria will struggle to diversify its economy away from oil and attract investors. Economics expert Aderrahmane Mebtoul expressed doubt the country could recover capital that has already left, and said Algeria's "bureaucracy, fossilised financial system and corruption" would keep foreign direct investment away. With the coronavirus disrupting economies worldwide, the pandemic could provide a scapegoat for the government. "The Algerian authorities could in fact argue that the economic and financial situation is no better" elsewhere, Martinez said.

But in Algeria, the pandemic follows a protracted political crisis. The "Hirak" citizens movement that began in February 2019 brought down longtime autocrat Abdelaziz Bouteflika a year ago. Only the pandemic was able to halt - perhaps temporarily - massive weekly anti-government protests. And a continued collapse in oil prices could prove to be the final straw for a country on the edge. "It's not the year 2020 that's on trial, but the 20 years of patronage, nepotism and corruption" of Bouteflika's reign, Martinez said. — AFP

Stars

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

medium

Yesterday's Solution								
2	7	8	9	6	1	3	5	4
6	5	3	8	7	4	9	1	2
9	4	1	5	2	3	6	7	8
4	1	7	6	8	2	5	9	3
8	6	5	7	3	9	4	2	1
3	9	2	1	4	5	7	8	6
7	3	9	4	1	8	2	6	5
1	2	6	3	5	7	8	4	9
5	8	4	2	9	6	1	3	7

hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

A warm, loving phone call or letter could come your way today from a lover or close friend who's presently out of town. You'll wish with all your heart that he or she could be home! In the meantime, you're likely to keep yourself quite busy. Creative projects, activities in your community, or both could keep you too busy to miss anyone too much. Tonight, spend some time alone.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

An intense study of philosophy, religion, or some other exalted school of thought could find you involved with a group that shares your interest in the subject. You could make a new friend today, or if you aren't currently romantically involved, meet a potential romantic partner. This should be a very satisfying day on both mental and emotional levels. Remember how it all came about, and enjoy yourself!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today you could discover a talent for investment, real estate, or other form of money management that you never thought you had, Taurus. The opportunity to make an investment or cash in on one could enable you to take strides toward making your money grow. This might be a good time to buy or sell any type of property. You might also want to do some reading on future investment opportunities.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Sex and romance should be at the top of your priority list today, Scorpio. You should be feeling especially warm, loving, and passionate. Romantic novels and movies could be especially appealing, as could an intimate evening with a lover! Career and money matters look fairly strong and stable at this time, although it might take a little effort to keep them that way. Go for the gold!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You might wake up today feeling a little grumpy and out of sorts, Gemini. You could aspire to nothing more strenuous than spending the day without any distractions other than a good book. However, by the middle of the day a warm and loving letter or phone call is likely to snap you out of your reclusive mood. You could spend the evening strolling through your community, visiting shops or restaurants. Enjoy!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A lack of communication on the part of your mate or perhaps a business partner can cause you to feel uncertainty about the relationship. Don't fall into this trap, Sagittarius. Use your warmth and understanding to open up the communication between you. You'll probably find that all is basically well. Your partner just needs some space. Take some space for yourself, too! A little solitude might do you some good.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Some pretty heavy soul searching could reveal that the time has come to make use of a talent you may have always had but never developed. This could involve nothing more than a little practice, or you could decide to get some formal training in the skill. This is a positive sign, Cancer, but your determination could waver over the next few days. Don't hesitate - stay with it!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

The right moment to ask for a raise or apply for a promotion or new job could come your way today, but you'd better make use of it or the opportunity could pass you by. A chance for a romantic encounter or fun evening with friends could also come up. Whatever pleasant things arise today aren't sure things, Capricorn, so don't let them escape. They could be significant milestones for you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You're looking good and your social skills are at their peak, Leo. Therefore, social events and group activities that you might attend today could well be the most satisfying and beneficial you've known in a long time. People you meet should be impressed with you, and you could make a lot of new friends. If you aren't romantically involved now, a new love could come your way.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Love and romance are definitely on the agenda for today, Aquarius, and you should be feeling warm, passionate, and particularly sexy. You're likely to be looking quite attractive, too, and romantic partners or potential partners could seem especially attractive to you. This is a wonderful day to shop for new clothes, have your hair styled, or prepare a candlelit dinner for someone very special. Go for it!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

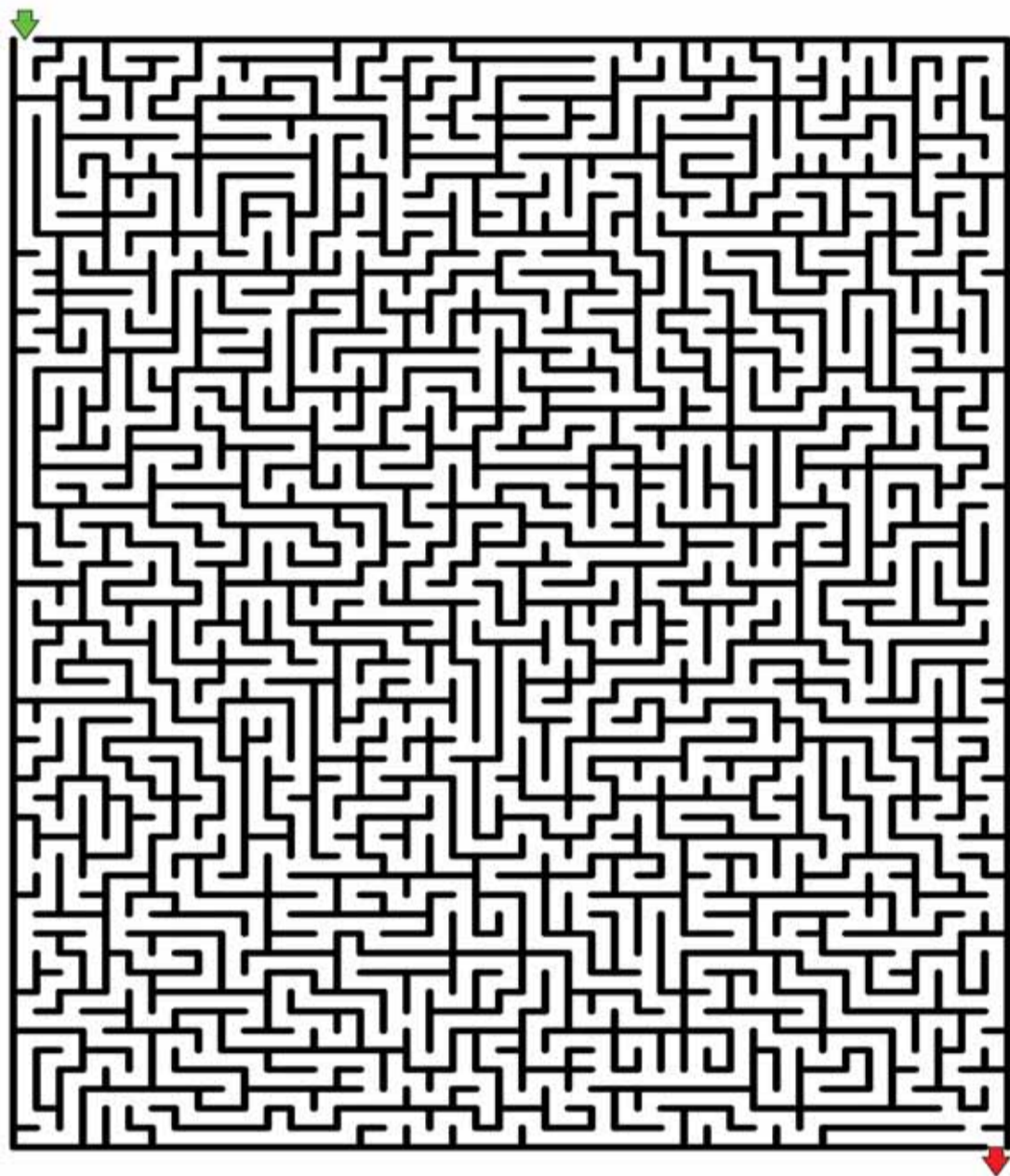
Today you could find yourself brainstorming a way to put your inventiveness and ingenuity to work so that you can advance your career by leaps and bounds and increase your income. You could also become involved in artistic projects of some kind. Don't be surprised if great ideas come to you with little effort. You're very intuitive today, Virgo, so enjoy it.



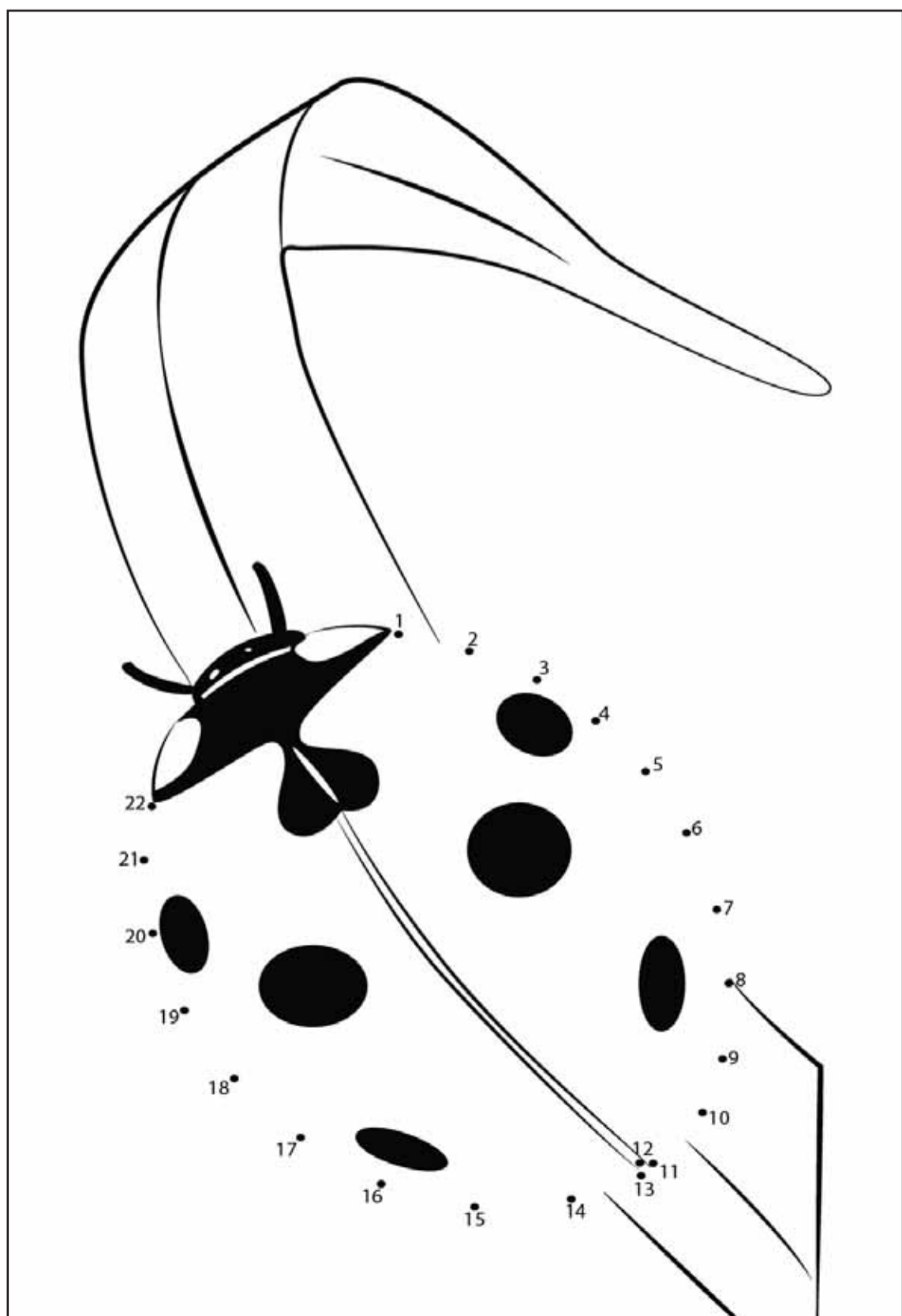
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

A friend or family member could be feeling rather grim, taciturn, and not open to communication. He or she could have you wondering if you've done something wrong, or they're angry with you. If you use your warmth and generosity of spirit to induce this person to open up, Pisces, you'll probably find that the issues have nothing to do with you. You might even help relieve them! Tonight, prepare everyone's favorite meal.

Find the way



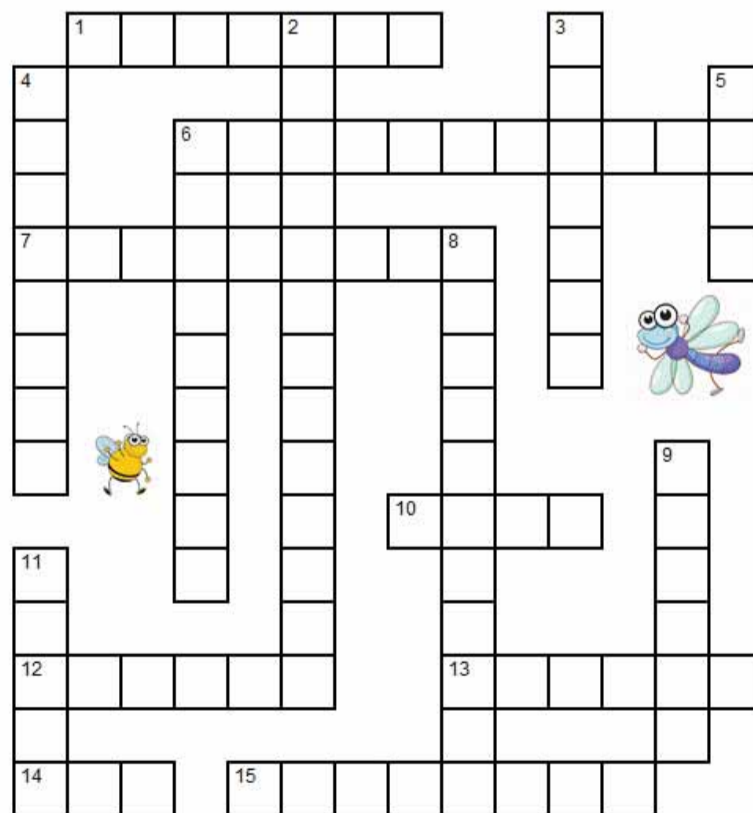
Join the dots and color It



Crossword



INSECTS



ACROSS

- 1. last of the three segments of an insect
- 6. baby butterfly
- 7. chemical odor used to communicate
- 10. first of the three segments of an insect
- 12. young insects that look almost identical to their parents
- 13. middle segment of an insect
- 14. number of legs on an insect
- 15. long sense organs covered with tiny hairs

DOWN

- 2. process of changing shape
- 3. process of shedding the exoskeleton
- 4. eye with many lenses
- 5. beetle larvae
- 6. protected place where metamorphosis takes place
- 8. hard external shell of an insect
- 9. young insects that look very different from their parents
- 11. many, but not all, adults insects have these

Sports

Photo of the Day



CALIFORNIA: Brighton Zeuner skates for the Red Bulletin in Huntington Beach, California.— Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Booker sweeps Ayton in NBA 2K final

MILWAUKEE: Devin Booker swept fellow Phoenix Suns teammate Deandre Ayton on Saturday night to claim the title at the first-ever NBA 2K Players Tournament. Booker won the first two games of a best-of-three final series, beating Ayton without playing as the Los Angeles Lakers, who are generally regarded as the best team in the game. Playing as the Houston Rockets, Booker took the first game 72-62 from Ayton, who used the Lakers. He won the second 74-62 while playing as the Denver Nuggets against Ayton's Milwaukee Bucks.

"Feels good, bro," Booker said afterward. "It was a talented field. I said from the beginning, it was going to be me and Deandre in the championship."

"... We've played in the past, and he's definitely a gamer." Booker, the fifth seed in the 16-player tournament, won \$100,000 to donate to the coronavirus-relief charity of his choice. Ayton, the 10th seed, trailed by only four at halftime of the first game after hitting a buzzer-beater with JaVale McGee. But Booker was red-hot from 3-point range throughout the game, hitting 13 of 23 attempts, and also got 30 points from his bench to close it out.

In the second game, Booker pulled away after halftime, putting the exclamation point on the victory with a three-point play on a dunk by Paul Millsap with less than 90 seconds to go. Both finalists swept a member of the Los Angeles Clippers earlier Saturday in the semifinals, with Booker beating Montrezl Harrell and Ayton dispatching Patrick Beverley. Booker played as the Clippers in the first game and cruised past Harrell, who played as the Rockets, capping the win with a dunk by Harrell's virtual character. In the second game, Booker (playing as the Toronto Raptors) came up with a steal off Harrell (Milwaukee Bucks) with a two-point lead in the final minute. Ayton took the first game from Beverley playing as the Brooklyn Nets against Beverley's Boston Celtics, hitting a 3-pointer in the final minute to put the game out of reach. In the second game, Ayton played as his own team, the Suns, and used a few big plays from his virtual character to handle Beverley's Nuggets. —Reuters

Sports events around the world hit by coronavirus pandemic

CONCACAF suspends all competitions

NEW YORK: Major sports events around the world that have been hit by the coronavirus pandemic:

OLYMPICS

- The postponed Olympic Games will now begin on July 23, 2021 and run until Aug. 8.
- World Athletics has suspended Olympic qualification until December.

PARALYMPICS

The postponed Paralympic Games will run from Aug. 24-Sept. 5, 2021.

OLYMPIC TRIALS

- U.S. trials for wrestling (April 4-5) were postponed.
- U.S. Rowing postponed its team trials.
- U.S. diving trials (April 3-5) were postponed. All USA Diving events postponed for next 30 days.

WORLD GAMES

• The 2021 World Games have been pushed back by a year to avoid clashing with the Tokyo Olympics.

COURT OF ARBITRATION FOR SPORT

• The Court of Arbitration for Sport said all cases were being put on hold until May. No in-person hearings will be held before May 1.

NORTH AMERICA

- The NBA suspended its season.
- The NHL suspended its season.
- The MLB further delayed its 2020 season's opening day of March 26 after CDC calls for gatherings of 50 or more people to be cancelled or postponed for eight weeks.
- Boston Marathon organisers postpone the race from April 20 to Sept. 14.
- The National Hockey League told players, including those from outside North America, that they can return home and should self-quarantine through March 27, lengthening the period the NHL had said it was pausing its season.

SOCCER

- Aleksander Ceferin, the head of European soccer's governing body UEFA, said that the current season could be "lost" if it is unable to re-start by the end of June.
- Euro 2020 and Copa America were postponed. The two tournaments will now be staged from June 11 to July 11, 2021.
- FIFA has agreed to delay the first edition of its revamped Club World Cup due to be held in 2021.
- UEFA put all club and national team competitions for men and women on hold until further notice.
- The men's and women's Champions League finals and Europa League final originally scheduled for May have been postponed.
- Europe's top leagues remain suspended but German Bundesliga clubs have returned to training with tight restrictions.
- The Scottish FA have extended the suspension of all levels of the game to at least June 10.
- South America's two biggest club competitions, the Copa Libertadores and Copa Sudamericana, were suspended until at least May 5.
- CONCACAF suspended all competitions, including the Champions League and men's Olympic qualifiers.
- U.S. Major League Soccer suspended its season.
- Asian and South American qualifying matches for 2022 World Cup postponed.
- New seasons in the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean leagues were postponed.
- Asian Champions League: Matches involving Chinese clubs Guangzhou Evergrande, Shanghai Shenhua and Shanghai SIPG were postponed. The start of the knockout rounds was moved back to September.
- The Asian Football Confederation postponed all AFC Cup

- 2020 matches scheduled for March and April.
- The Brazilian football Confederation suspended all national competitions until further notice.
- The CAF postponed the African Nations Championship, a national team tournament for home-based players only (Cameroon: April 4-25).
- Semi-finals of the CAF Champions league (May 1-3) and CAF Confederation Cup (May 8-10) were postponed.
- The Mauritius FA have cancelled the remainder of the football season.
- This year's International Champions Cup, a pre-season tournament featuring Europe's leading clubs, has been cancelled.

OTHER SPORTS ATHLETICS

- The World Athletics Championships scheduled for 2021 in Eugene, Oregon have been postponed to the summer of 2022 because of the Olympic Games rescheduling.
- The Diamond League postponed its first five meetings of the 2020 season due to be held in April and May in Qatar, China, Stockholm, Naples and Rabat.
- The World Athletics Indoor Championships (Nanjing, March 13-15) were postponed. They will be held in the same city from March 19-21, 2021.
- The London, Paris and Barcelona marathons were postponed.

AUSTRALIAN RULES

- The Australian Football League's attempt to forge on with the season despite the virus outbreak lasted one round before it was shut down on March 22.

BADMINTON

- The Badminton World Federation (BWF) cancelled the last five tournaments in the qualification period for the Olympics, making the All England Open played from March 11-15 the final event to count towards qualification.
- The Indonesia Open (June 16-21) was among a host of badminton events that have been cancelled while tournaments over the next three months were also suspended in Australia, Thailand and Russia.
- The BWF is seeking clarification from Danish authorities on how the ban on large gatherings will affect their ability to stage the Thomas and Uber Cup Finals in August.

BASEBALL

- The final qualification tournament in Taiwan for the Olympics was put back from April to June 17-21, while the March 22-26 qualification event in Arizona was postponed.
- Japan's professional league postponed the start of the season.

BASKETBALL

- The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has postponed the start of its 2020 regular season, originally scheduled to run from May 15-Sept. 20.
- The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) has postponed the men's Olympic qualifiers, European Championship and the Americas Championship by a year.

BOXING

- The European, American and final world qualifying boxing tournaments for the Tokyo Olympics were suspended on March 16. The European qualifier in London that was underway and due to run to March 24, ended after the evening session on March 17.
- Anthony Joshua's world heavyweight title defence against Bulgarian Kubrat Pulev at Tottenham Hotspur's stadium on June 20 has been postponed.

CANOEING

- All events originally scheduled for May, including the Paracanoe World Championships, canoe sprint Olympic qualifiers, and the ICF canoe sprint World Cup have been cancelled.

- Pre-Olympic canoe slalom training camps in Tokyo in May, June and July have all been cancelled.
- The opening two ICF canoe slalom World Cups, set for June in Italy and France, have been postponed.

CRICKET

- The last two games of Australia's three-match one-day international series against New Zealand in Sydney and Hobart were cancelled while the limited-overs tours were postponed.
- The start of the Indian Premier League T20 tournament (March 29) was postponed until April 15.
- The boards of India and South Africa agreed to reschedule a three-match ODI series to a later date.
- England's two-match test series in Sri Lanka scheduled to start on March 19 was postponed.
- Australia's proposed test tour of Bangladesh in June has been postponed and both boards will work together to find new dates to reschedule the series.

CYCLING

- The final two stages of the UAE Tour were cancelled after two Italian participants tested positive.
- The Paris-Nice cycling race ended a day early after the eighth stage into Nice was cancelled.
- The Giro d'Italia, the Paris-Roubaix, Liege-Bastogne-Liege and the Tour de Yorkshire Race were postponed.
- All cycling races up to the end of April have already been cancelled and riders in France and Spain, where many are based, were explicitly told they cannot train outside.

GOLF

- The Masters, PGA Championships and U.S. Open were postponed while the Open Championships was cancelled.
- The European Tour has either postponed or cancelled events scheduled between March and May.

HORSE RACING

- The Grand National festival (April 2-4) was cancelled while the Kentucky Derby, the first jewel in North American horse racing's Triple Crown (May 2) was postponed to Sept. 5.
- The Dubai World Cup, one of the world's richest horse races and a premier annual sporting event in the United Arab Emirates, will not go ahead this year.
- The Guineas Festival at Newmarket in May and June's Epsom Derby have been postponed while June's Royal Ascot may be held without spectators.

MOTORSPORT

- Formula One cancelled the opening race in Australia on March 15 and the showcase Monaco Grand Prix in May has also been scrapped. A number of races were postponed, the latest being the June 14 Canadian Grand Prix.
- Formula One expects to run a shortened season of 15-18 grands prix once racing resumes, down from its original calendar of a record 22 races.
- Seven races of the MotoGP season have now been postponed after the first round in Qatar was cancelled.
- NASCAR postponed all race events through May 3, including races at the Atlanta Motor Speedway (March 15) and Homestead-Miami Speedway (March 22), but intends to run all 36 races this season.
- The Le Mans 24 hours race was postponed from June 13-14 to Sept. 19-20.
- The Indianapolis 500 has been postponed until Aug. 23.

RUGBY

- Four Six Nations matches were postponed.
- Rugby Europe announced a suspension of all its matches and tournaments from March 13-April 15.
- France's rugby federation suspended all its competitions.
- The European rugby season was suspended after European Professional Club Rugby postponed Champions Cup and Challenge Cup quarter-final matches (April 3-5).
- The semi-final and final of this season's Champions Cup and Challenge Cup tournaments, which were due to take place in Marseille in May, have been postponed.
- England's Rugby Football Union and Wales' governing



PARIS: Alexandra Recchia of France, five-time karate world champion, trains in the garden of her house, in L'Hay-les-Roses, near Paris, on the 18th day of a lockdown in France aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). — AFP

body confirmed the end of the 2019-20 season for all league, cup and county rugby, but the English Premiership has been excluded.

- The English Rugby Football League and Super League suspended all fixtures until April 3.
- Super Rugby suspended its season.
- Japan's Top League is cancelling the remaining 42 matches of the season.

SHOOTING

- The 2020 ISSF World Cups in New Delhi (May) and Baku (June-July) have been cancelled.

SNOOKER

- The World Snooker Championship in Sheffield (April 18-May 4) at the Crucible Theatre, will be re-arranged for July or August.

SWIMMING

- The 2020 European Aquatics Championships that was scheduled to take place from May 11-24 in Budapest, Hungary, has been postponed to August.

TENNIS

- The Wimbledon championships were cancelled for the first time since World War Two while professional tennis has been suspended until July 13.
- The French Open was postponed until Sept. 20-Oct. 4.
- The Fed Cup finals (Budapest: April 14-19) were postponed.
- The WTA leg of the Rogers Cup scheduled to take place from Aug. 7-16 in Montreal has been postponed to 2021.

WINTER SPORTS

- The International Ski Federation cancelled the final races of the men's Alpine skiing World Cup.
- The World Cup finals in Cortina were cancelled along with the last three women's races in Are.
- The women's world ice hockey championships in Canada were cancelled.
- The Ice Hockey World Championship scheduled for Switzerland in May was cancelled.
- The speed skating world championships in Seoul were postponed until at least October.
- The March 16-22 world figure skating championships in Montreal were cancelled.
- The Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) has cancelled the remainder of its season after temporarily suspending its playoffs. —Reuters

Sports

Uncertainty spreads due to coronavirus pandemic in Europe's lower leagues

Zaragoza president says he will 'defend the club's interests'

PARIS: The suspension to the current football season due to the coronavirus pandemic has left the game's biggest clubs arguing with star players over cuts to their multi-million euro salaries as top sides brace for huge drops in revenues.

However the potential damage is even more serious at the lower reaches, where clubs are losing out on gate receipts vital to keeping them afloat and potentially being denied planned-for financial windfalls from reaching the top table.

ITALIAN COURTROOM CARNAGE

Italy could be the scene of legal chaos this summer as clubs desperately try to defend potential promotions which boost their coffers.

On Tuesday, Frosinone president Maurizio Stirpe threatened "legal action" if his club were not promoted to Serie A this season, despite his team only being third and not in Serie B's two automatic promotion places.

The season finishing as it stands would give Frosinone no chance of breaking into the top two, while the removal of the play-offs would open up a potential deluge of legal challenges with millions in Serie A TV revenue up for grabs.

Stirpe had already suggested last month that this season be extended until the end of June next year, extending contracts until that date but "only paying for this season".

However that would be disastrous for players in the lower leagues, in particular those in third-tier Serie C, which according to Monza CEO Adriano Galliani (formerly of AC Milan) has "basically no revenues" and "loses 120 million euros a year".

'EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES' IN SPAIN

The economic fall-out from teams being denied

promotion will exacerbate an already brutal financial situation for lower-league clubs. Real Zaragoza have been out of Spain's top flight since 2013, but are currently second in the Segunda Division, five points ahead of the play-off positions with 11 matches remaining.

Zaragoza president Christian Lapetra said he will "defend the club's interests" if the season is cancelled and they don't reach La Liga.

"There is an economic significance for all clubs if we don't restart. We would have to adopt extraordinary measures to be able to come out of it and continue to compete," he said in a videoconference with Spanish reporters.

"If we end up being left in Segunda we will be squeezed even more and we will have to keep looking for ways of getting by. Promotion is the best way of financing ourselves."

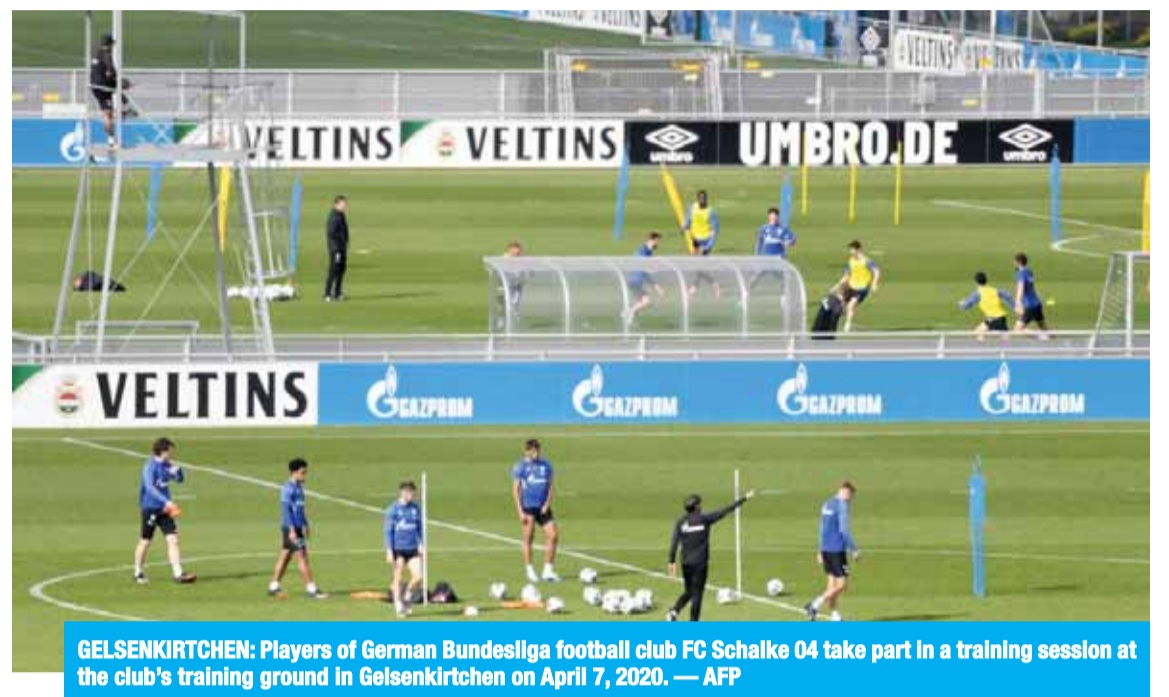
ENGLAND: 'EXPECT SOME CASUALTIES'

The situation is similar even in England, the richest football nation of all. Last month League One and League Two clubs — the third and fourth tiers — said they face losses of around £50 million (\$63m) if the season doesn't restart.

Phil Wallace, chairman of League Two's bottom team Stevenage, is reluctant to pull the plug on a club he has owned for 20 years but told AFP the current state of limbo is "a disaster".

"I would expect some casualties this year," he says. "We get average crowds of 3,000 so we are losing £45-£50,000 per home match. We have been given an advance of money by the EFL (English Football League) which is what we would normally receive in August. However, when we get to July we have got to be thinking what on earth do we do then."

The prospect of matches being played behind



GELSENKIRCHEN: Players of German Bundesliga football club FC Schalke 04 take part in a training session at the club's training ground in Gelsenkirchen on April 7, 2020. — AFP

closed doors doesn't cut it for Stevenage either, due to the loss of income from bars, restaurants and sponsorship. "All that income is gone," he says.

JOB FEARS

Across Europe clubs have put measures in place to protect the income of non-playing staff, either through topped-up partial unemployment schemes or player donations, but many workers at the sharp end of the industry are in limbo because of the suspension of the season.

German TV station Deutsche Welle reported this week that in Germany nearly two thirds of some 56,000 Bundesliga matchday jobs, such as security and catering, are staffed by third-party employees

rather than the clubs.

Those employees have been largely overlooked by solidarity measures extended by German clubs. Lawyer Verena Speckin told Deutsche Welle that football clubs only have a legal responsibility towards those who are directly employed by them, and the channel reports that the vast majority of Bundesliga clubs have no plans in place to help third-party employees.

Speckin said "the challenge many employees face is the fear and pressure of losing their livelihood", meaning that they are scared to challenge their employers. "Many decide to keep silent and choose not to do anything so that they'll be able to keep their job." — AFP

Montreal WTA tournament put off until 2021

MONTREAL: The Montreal WTA tournament, one of the key build-up events ahead of the US Open, was axed on Saturday and will not be played until 2021, officials said.

The event, scheduled for August 7-16, had been in jeopardy after Quebec Province requested that all sporting and cultural events be cancelled through August 31 as a means of slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

"As a result of the measures imposed by the Quebec government prohibiting holding events until August 31, the Rogers Cup in Montreal will postpone their event to 2021," said a WTA statement.

"The WTA reiterates that health and safety will always be the top priority. We understand this was a difficult decision and we look forward to being back in Montreal in 2021."

Tournament director Eugene Lapierre said the decision was made for them. "At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis we were hoping that the situation would be resolved in time to be able to host our tournament as initially planned on the calendar."

"It is thus with a heavy heart that we received this news, but we understand that this decision was necessary," Lapierre said. "We will be working tirelessly in the coming months in order to make next year's

tournament a great celebration during which we will be able to celebrate the sport and enjoy each other's company."

This is the latest blow to the tennis season which has been on ice for the last month. The French Open was postponed from its traditional May-June slot and rescheduled for September-October, just a week after the conclusion of the US Open.

Wimbledon was cancelled for the first time since World War II, meaning that the earliest tennis can resume this year is July 13. "As it currently stands, the WTA Tour is suspended through July 12," added Saturday's statement.

"We will continue to work with our tournament partners in evaluating when we will be able to get back on the court. "We do not foresee any further decisions until next month." — AFP

Dalglish hails 'brilliant staff' after positive coronavirus test

LONDON: Liverpool legend Kenny Dalglish was discharged from hospital on Saturday after testing positive for coronavirus and hailed medical staff as "absolutely brilliant." Dalglish, 69, found he had the virus after being admitted to hospital on Wednesday for treatment for a separate infection which required intravenous antibiotics.

"They (the hospital staff) were absolutely brilliant," Dalglish told the Sunday Post. "As a nation, we are all very fortunate to have them and I wish them all well as they work tirelessly to help the country through this pandemic."

He added: "People may think my name got me the best of care but every patient in the National Health Service gets the best of care." On Friday, Dalglish's family said that he had tested positive for COVID-19 despite having previously displayed no symptoms of the illness.

Earlier Saturday, Dalglish's son thanked the world of football for the "truly humbling" messages of support. Paul Dalglish, also a former player, tweeted: "It's not my place to comment on my old man, he can do that for himself in due course."

"Truly humbling messages from supporters of all teams. "I'm sure we can all agree this is more important than football and that we are all united to support the NHS. Stay safe everyone."

Dalglish's daughter, Sky Sports presenter Kelly Cates, also shared a message of thanks to fans for their kind words and well wishes. "Thank you so much for your lovely messages and I'm really sorry I can't reply to them all," she tweeted.

Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker said on Twitter: "Love from Becker family to Sir Kenny Dalglish!!" Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher tweeted: "Hopeful Kenny will be rid of the virus ASAP."

Ian Rush formed a prolific partnership with Dalglish during their playing days at Liverpool and the Welshman took to Twitter to give his old teammate his best wishes.

"Wishing a speedy recovery to the best...Sir Kenny Dalglish. Get well soon," he wrote. Dalglish won the Scottish league title with Celtic as a player on four occasions before signing for Liverpool in 1977.—AFP



Garry Kasparov

Profile of Russian chess champion Garry Kasparov

LONDON: Garry Kasparov hated losing but in defeat, to an "alien opponent" incapable of fear or the faintest flicker of emotion, the youngest of chess champions and greatest of grandmasters made history.

The Russian's 1996 and 1997 man vs machine matches against Deep Blue, an IBM RS/6000 super-computer capable of crunching 200 million positions in the space of a second, wrote headlines around the world.

Although Kasparov won the February 1996 match in Philadelphia, his faceless foe took the opening game in a watershed moment for artificial intelligence and 20th century technology. The computer, playing with the advantage of the white pieces, forced the Russian to resign on the 37th move after surrounding his king.

It was the first time a computer programme had ever beaten a reigning chess world champion under classic tournament rules, where players have hours to plan their strategies. Kasparov sat on a raised platform opposite a video display terminal as a programmer received the moves over the internet from New York.

The second encounter held over nine days in a New York skyscraper, with Deep Blue's software upgraded, was declared "The Brain's Last Stand" by Newsweek magazine.

"The computer is an alien opponent and the characteristics of this opponent are very, very different from any human opponent," Kasparov, then 34, had told reporters. The swashbuckling Russian won the first game but cracked under pressure on May 11, 1997, the computer clinching the match with two wins, three draws and one loss.

"In brisk and brutal fashion, the IBM computer Deep Blue unseated humanity, at least temporarily, as the finest chess playing entity on the planet," reported the New York Times. "One small step for a computer, one giant leap backward for mankind?" asked the Wall Street Journal.

Kasparov later said he had treated the \$1.1 million event as a great scientific and social experiment but Deep Blue, whose two towers soon became museum pieces, proved "anything but intelligent".

"The way Deep Blue played offered no input in the mysteries of human intelligence," he told the DefCon hackers' conference in a 2017 keynote address. "It was as intelligent as your alarm clock."

"Although losing to a \$10 million alarm clock didn't make me feel any better," Born Garik Kimovich Weinstein in Baku, now the capital of Azerbaijan, Kasparov adopted his mother's surname at a young age after his father's death.

He became a grandmaster at 17 and world champion at 22 in 1985 when the charismatic youngster beat Soviet establishment hero Anatoly Karpov. The first match in Moscow between the two in 1984-85 lasted more than five months and was abandoned on health grounds after a record 40 drawn games, with Kasparov coming back from 5-0 down to 5-3.—Reuters

Don't write off Dhoni: Hussain

NEW DELHI: Former England captain Nasser Hussain has backed veteran Mahendra Singh Dhoni to make an international comeback despite growing uncertainty over the start of the Indian Premier League.

The 38-year-old Dhoni has not appeared for club or country since playing for India in last year's 50-over World Cup and the nationwide coronavirus lockdown is limiting his chances of getting back in the side with the IPL likely to be truncated or cancelled.

There has been speculation that Dhoni might retire from international cricket. "What I have seen of Dhoni, I still think he has a huge amount to offer to Indian cricket," Hussain told Indian broadcaster Star Sports on Saturday.

"Yes, there have been one or two occasions where he has got it wrong in run chases, like that World Cup game against England. But in general, Dhoni is still a really good talent."

Hussain warned that Dhoni was a once-in-a-generation cricketer that India would struggle to replace.

"Don't push Dhoni into retirement too early. In the end only Dhoni knows his mental state, in the end selectors select and players turn up when asked to," he added.

"I do believe that certain individuals should not just retire into the sunset without some kind of farewell."

Dhoni, who gave up Test cricket in 2014, has been busy gardening at home during the lockdown, according to an Instagram post by his wife.

The opening match of the Twenty20 tournament between the Dhoni-led Chennai Super Kings and holders Mumbai Indians was pushed back to April 15 as sporting events around the world were delayed or postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Former India captain Krishnamachari Srikkanth said Dhoni's comeback prospects looked "very, very bleak" if the IPL was cancelled.

"Because straightaway, in my opinion, KL Rahul will be the wicket keeper-batsman," Srikkanth, former chairman of the national selection committee, said. "Rishabh Pant, I still think he might be a bit of a doubt, but I believe that Rishabh Pant is highly talented."

"He is absolutely fit, he is a legend, he is brilliant. I am a great fan of Dhoni myself. But the question is for the (T20) World Cup team. So you'll have to put the Indian team first and then the individuals."

Dhoni led India to win the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in 2007. He hit a six to seal the 2011 World Cup final victory and his status as a national hero.

He has amassed 10,773 runs from 350 ODIs, but his form dipped noticeably at last year's 50-over showpiece. — AFP

18 Sports events around the world hit by coronavirus pandemic



19 Uncertainty spreads due to coronavirus pandemic in Europe's lower leagues



19 Profile of Russian chess champion Garry Kasparov



Sponsors worry they are paying for nothing

European clubs struggling to offer 'partners' a return on their investments



STOCKHOLM: AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic (C) talks with fans as he leaves the Arsta IP training ground in Stockholm, on April 9, 2020 after participating in a training session of the Swedish football league club Hammarby. — AFP

PARIS: With stadiums dark, match shirts folded in closets and most players confined at home, football's sponsors have lost all visibility and are growing restless. European clubs are struggling to offer their 'partners' a return on their investments as sport grapples with the coronavirus pandemic.

"We're trying to do activities with our players for our sponsors, who are even more demanding since the lockdown. But it's very complicated because of the health crisis," one club marketing manager told AFP. The stars, the surest way for sponsors to attract an audience, are at home, many back in their native countries.

Worse, there are no games for them to play. Matches on TV display the brands on the team jerseys or around the pitch to millions of viewers.

At West Ham, one of the sponsors, high-risk finance company Basset & Gold, which the club stresses is not connected with owner David Gold, has just gone bankrupt, blaming the coronavirus crisis.

Many sponsors are in sectors hit especially hard, such as airlines and hotel and restaurant chains. Some sponsors are beginning to cancel payments.

"It's quite obvious that having no more events, everything has to be suspended, it seems so logical to me. It's a case of force majeure," Marc Vanhove, the boss of the Bistro Regent restaurant chain, which sponsors the Bordeaux shirt, told AFP.

The Bordeaux-based chain suspended its contract, which runs until 2023, he said, "until we have the dates for the resumption".

French hotel group Accor, PSG's main sponsor, left open the question of whether it would pay the full amount provided for in its contract (about 50 million euros, \$54.7 million, a year), before saying two days later that it had honoured its commitments.

"When you're a sponsor, you want visibility," Accor CEO Sebastien Bazin told French radio.

"But at the same time, it's in bad times that you recognise your friends and those who are there for you." Sponsors can say overnight "we're stopping

everything because we're in an emergency situation where we have to eliminate all the superfluous expenditure", sports economist Jean-Pascal Gayant told AFP. "In the event of a crisis, the first budget item they cut is often the communications."

With matches cancelled and some broadcasters, notably in France, beginning to withhold payments, club finances are already strained.

"Sponsorship is particularly important for Europe's biggest clubs," said Deloitte, the accountancy and services firm, in the 2020 edition of its 'Football Money League' which ranks clubs by income. It said the primary source of revenue for its top five clubs (Barcelona, Real Madrid, Manchester United, Bayern Munich and PSG) is commercial and averages 49 percent of total revenue — although that number is inflated by PSG, which reports 57 percent of revenue from sponsorship. Lower down the Deloitte table, the proportions change. For the clubs

placed 16 to 20 (Roma, Lyon, West Ham, Everton and Napoli), 65 percent of revenue comes from broadcasting. One market expert, who did not wish to be named, said that the risks of deserting can outweigh the financial costs, especially for companies "who are doing well" in sectors that are seen to be less affected, such as technology or the food industry. "You can go to them and say: 'You can play the white knight by investing in sport in these difficult times,'" the market expert said.

The value of being seen to remain loyal is reflected in the attitude of the Iberdrola Group, the main sponsor of the Spanish women's first division.

"It is now, in this dramatic situation, that the support of sponsors is needed more than ever. You don't pull out at times like these," a spokesman for the Spanish electricity supply group told AFP.

Even so, players in the sector estimate a 60 to 70 percent drop in investment and the prospect of several lean years. "There is of course a risk that some companies that wanted to invest will no longer do so, but will do so later," said Bruno Bianzina, director of the Sport Market agency, a French company. —AFP



Shirts folded in closets

Women athletes should stay focused on fight for equality: King

LOS ANGELES: Tennis great Billie Jean King on Saturday said that despite the myriad of setbacks facing female athletes due to the coronavirus pandemic, they should not lose sight of the need to continue their push for equality.

Speaking on an online panel event titled #WeKeepPlaying hosted by King's Women's Sports Foundation and Yahoo Sports, the American said she

hoped to provide comfort and encouragement to the thousands who tuned in to view it.

"But I also want them to think about the future as well," said King, the 12-time Grand Slam champion who famously waged a decades-long battle for equal pay in professional tennis.

King said her early goals for women's tennis were to make sure all girls would have a place to compete, that women would be valued more for their accomplishments than their looks, and to ensure female athletes earned enough to make a living.

"Many of these athletes still do not have the dreams and the opportunities that they deserve," she said.

While strides have been made toward pay equality in tennis, women's ice hockey still has a long way

to go, said Kendall Coyne Schofield, a forward for the United States women's national team.

"Right now the professional landscape of women's hockey is a disaster," said Coyne Schofield, an Olympic gold medalist who played for NWHL's Minnesota Whitecaps.

"Until we can show young girls the dream of growing up to be a professional athlete who can make a living doing it, our goal has not been met," she said.

The formation last year of the Professional Women's Hockey Players Association is a good step that will help the players speak with one voice as they fight for a sustainable professional women's league that pays living wages, she said.

U.S. national team soccer midfielder Carli Lloyd

said her World Cup-winning squad's ongoing lawsuit against their federation over allegations of gender discrimination and lower wages is already having a positive ripple effect.

"Obviously we've been very successful over the years on the field but more importantly what we're doing off the field has been so powerful," she said. "We are empowering so many other women across the globe to fight to make things better."

She said some international players are pushing to get better collective bargaining agreements and are starting to see more investment in the women's game. "When you hear about that investment, you are seeing the product on the field," she said.

"So we need to continue to do that for women's soccer." — Reuters