



One more death as expanded lockdown or full curfew eyed

UAE warns on worker repatriation, launches online weddings

Top oil producers agree on 'historic' cuts amid crisis

VIENNA: Top oil-producing countries agreed Sunday on "historic" output cuts in a bid to boost plummeting oil prices due to the new coronavirus crisis and a Russia-Saudi price war. OPEC producers dominated by Saudi Arabia and allies led by Russia met via videoconference for an hour Sunday in a last effort to cement a deal struck early Friday. It still required Mexico's agreement and in a compromise reached Sunday they agreed to a cut of 9.7 million barrels per day from May, according to its Energy Minister Rocio Nahle, down slightly from 10 million barrels per day envisioned earlier.

OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo called the cuts "historic". "They are largest in volume and the longest in duration, as they are planned to last for two years," he said. The agreement between the Vienna-based Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and partners foresees deep output

Continued on Page 16

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: The ministry of health yesterday reported 66 new coronavirus cases and one death of a 50-year-old Kuwaiti man, raising the total number of cases to 1,300 cases and deaths to two. Of the new cases, 45 are Indians, eight Bangladeshis, six Kuwaitis, three Egyptians and the rest of various other nationalities. As many as eight recoveries were reported, raising the number to 150.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet was expected to choose between expanding a lockdown on other residential areas and imposing a nationwide curfew in a session late yesterday. A small government committee has prepared studies on what is best for the country in its bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus in the face of a steep rise in the number of cases, especially among expatriate workers.

Last week, the Cabinet placed Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, home to more than half a million expatriates, under lockdown, and began a testing drive for coronavirus. The overwhelming majority of new coronavirus cases in the past few

days have been detected among expatriates, especially Indians, whose cases have exceeded half of the 1,234 reported cases in Kuwait.

In the meantime, the government will operate just under 200 flights over a span of eight days starting Thursday to repatriate more than 40,000 Kuwaitis who have been stranded overseas because of the coronavirus outbreak. Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways will operate a majority of the flights, but will also be assisted by a number of flights by Qatar Airways. The first flights back home will start from neighboring Gulf states.

The government has stepped up preparations to receive the large number of citizens by booking some 14 hotels to convert them into quarantine sites if needed. The plan calls to test citizens on arrival, and if necessary, send them to quarantine, otherwise they will be allowed to go home provided they undertake to quarantine themselves at home.

Local media reports meanwhile said authorities are seriously studying old plans that had proposed to

Continued on Page 16

Mon. 13/04/2020

Updates on COVID 19

Total cases	New cases	Active cases	ICU	Recovered	Deaths
1300	66	1148	26	150	2

Related to travel 4


3 cases of Kuwaiti nationals related to travel to United Kingdom, 1 case of Kuwaiti national related to travel to Germany.


Cases in contact 51


1 case of Kuwaiti national, 40 cases of Indian residents, 7 cases of Bangladeshi residents, 1 case of Egyptian resident, 1 case of Nepali resident, 1 cases of Pakistani resident.

Under investigation 11

1 case of Kuwaiti national, 5 cases of Indian resident, 2 cases of Egyptian residents, 1 cases of Iranian resident, 1 cases of Pakistani resident, 1 cases of Bangladeshi resident.


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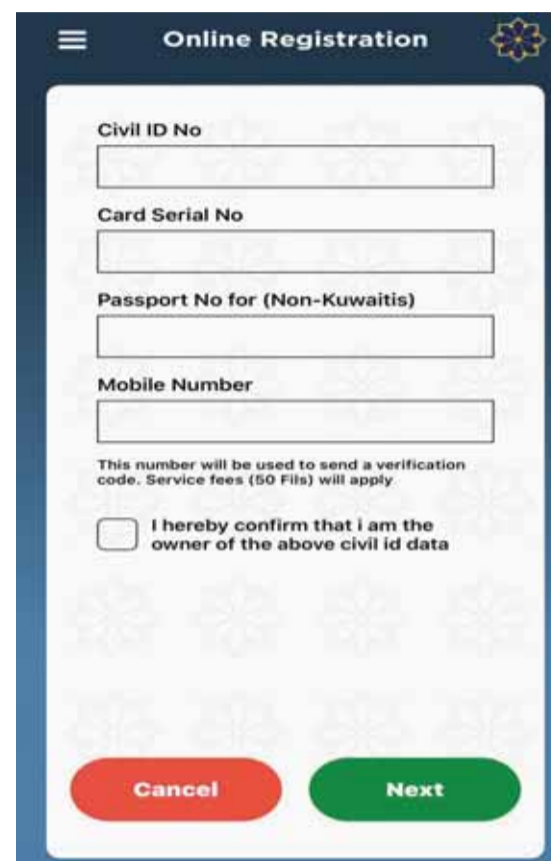
STAY SAFE STAY HOME



Local

Kuwait PACI launches online civil ID app

Commerce ministry launches website to book appointments to shop at co-ops



News in brief

155 stores closed in Ahmadi

KUWAIT: One hundred fifty five stores that did not abide by preventive measures to avoid the spread of coronavirus were closed since the past month, Ahmadi Governance Deputy Director for Municipality Affairs Fahad Al-Shtaili said yesterday. In a press release, Shtaili said inspectors of Al-Ahmadi Municipality sent 674 warnings, and warrants to shop owners, and issued 235 various violations, including a formal closure order to 20 stores. He added that the Ahmadi Municipality undertook the task of cleaning and sterilizing 251,427 containers of different sizes, and to transfer 74 neglected vehicles and scrapes, including putting 25 stickers on neglected cars, received seven reports, and issued 10 violations to street vendors. Shtaili noted that Ahmadi Municipality seized seven mobile grocery stores and removed 210 violating desert camps, among other tasks during operations.

Central kitchen closed

KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry recently closed down an unlicensed central kitchen used by a catering company in Shuwaikh Industrial, and referred its operators and staff to prosecution. "During a tour around various markets, we detected a central kitchen inside a catering company and found out that it was being operated without valid licenses," chief inspector Thaara Al-Rasheedi said. Inspectors also found quantities of inedible vegetables and foodstuff items with mold layers on them, he added, noting that citations were filed, the site was closed down and all officials and staff were referred to public prosecution.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has launched an online civil ID app where citizens and residents can carry their civil ID on their smart phone. To obtain the mobile civil ID, users must first download the app 'Kuwait mobile ID' for iPhones or Android devices and then enroll in the program. The application is available in Arabic and English.

Requirements:

1. Must be a citizen or resident of Kuwait with valid visa.
2. Have a previously issued smart civil ID that is valid for a minimum of at least one month.

- Process:**
1. Download the Kuwait mobile ID app.
 2. Register - You will need your civil ID number, serial number and passport number.
 3. Take a selfie.
 4. Complete the process. If accepted, your civil ID will now be on your mobile.

In other news, the Public Authority for Industry announced that companies that applied to evacuate its workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboulah must fill a 'workers evacuation form' in the website www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw. The two areas have been put under total lockdown as part of measures to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Co-op appointments

Separately, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a website on Sunday to enable citizens and residents to book appointments to shop at cooperative societies in their areas. The ministry later announced that the website is a trial version and will be developed based on customers' suggestions in order to launch it officially. The announcement noted that people who face trouble with mismatching addresses should choose the "unmatched address" option and add the current address number written in their rental contract.

The website is in its experimental stage, but some customers have tried it. One user told Kuwait Times that he

booked an appointment for 5 am - it turns out that the website allows you to shop during curfew hours. "I booked an appointment for 5 in the morning and received two barcodes - one allowing me to leave the house during curfew hours and one for the co-op to allow me to shop at that time," he said.

The website allows people to choose a date and time to shop in their area's central co-op or its branches. The service aims to reduce crowding and long queues in front of co-ops and shopping centers.

According to Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan, other markets will be included on the website soon depending on its success. To visit the website, go to www.moci.shop.

Pandemic Diaries

Be careful



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

When we were kids, after my father died and left us broke and bereft in Alabama, my mother took on the role of family worrier. Each time one of her seven children left the house to go to school or work or even just up the street to the corner market or over to a friend's house, she'd call out "Be careful" as we walked out the door. Wrapped inside her plea were also all the words that she didn't say: "Stay safe. Come home. I love you."

She worried that the worst might happen. That we'd be killed in a car wreck or swallowed by a random, yet fierce, tornado. She watched the clock while carrying on cooking or cleaning or finishing her work around the house, mindful of how long we'd been gone, what time we'd said we'd be home.

My mom said 'Be careful' so often that it became a reflex, automatic - and we children stopped hearing it, waving goodbye with the flick of our wrist or a wry smile as we headed off to whatever adventure awaited. My mother worried the entire time we were gone, sighing with relief only after we'd traipsed back through the front door, trailing whatever news or experiences we'd brought with us.

In all her worries, I'm guessing she never imagined the apocalypse as a tiny, viral organism leaping blithely from person to person across the globe. She never imagined a scenario where millions of people became destitute overnight, where despair and desperation led to a breakdown of law and order, where hospitals overflow with sick patients and triage protocols determine in advance who will live and who will die because there aren't enough beds or ventilators to treat them all.

My mother's entreaty meant watch out for drunk drivers and don't get into cars with strangers, not wash your hands a hundred times daily, stand two meters apart and pray to God that the virus either passes you by completely or that you are among the majority who get sick but not critically so.

We are not in the apocalypse yet. But we're edging closer to it. COVID-19 infections have reached almost two million cases globally and more than 114,000 people have died. Economies have ground to a near standstill and millions are facing destitution. This situation will only worsen the longer it takes to overcome this pandemic. Only by coming together and working united can we get through this and rebuild. Now is the time when we all need to be more careful.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 1,300 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to two deaths. With the exception of 26 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 hundreds have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 150 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,148 people receiving treatment and 1,367 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 Mahboulah 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. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas.

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.

Amnesty

The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and are willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations will be allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

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

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

Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.
- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:
 - 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
 - 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
 - 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
 - 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
 - 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
 - 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
 - 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
 - 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
 - 51588599 (Private Education Department)
 - 51592515 (Services Department)
 - 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new medicine delivery service for people in Kuwait, which they can use to order medications

to be delivered during curfew hours. The medications will be delivered within 72 hours after the order is submitted. To place an order, patients should send a WhatsApp to the numbers for the hospitals and medical centers as listed below. The patient should include their name, Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
 - Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
 - Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
 - Adan Hospital: 50880908
 - Jahra Hospital: 50881066
 - Sabah Hospital: 97632660
 - Jaber Hospital: 96992079
 - Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
 - Chest Hospital: 99258749
 - Razi Hospital: 97633487
 - Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
 - Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
 - Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
 - Maternity Hospital: 98559531
 - As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
 - Zain Hospital: 97552031
 - NBK Hospital: 96931761
 - Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
 - Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
 - Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
 - Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
 - KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363
- Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day.

The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-ehalth.com>.

Mental health assistance

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

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

Local

PM hails cooperation between executive, judicial branches

Foreign Minister chairs meeting on further repatriation of citizens

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Hamad Al-Sabah received on Sunday at Seif Palace Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa. During the meeting, His Highness the Prime Minister was briefed on the efforts exerted by various government agencies in combating the coronavirus, including the judicial role in supporting such efforts and cooperation to overcome this crisis. His Highness the Prime Minister praised this tangible cooperation between various government agencies, particularly in executing the emergency plan and all measures that accompanied the plan to ensure safety and security of the country within the framework of the law.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa. — KUNA

Citizens' repatriation

In other news, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, with attendance of Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Hamad Al-Sabah, chaired on Sunday a meeting for discussing coordination among concerned departments to pursue operation for repatriating Kuwaiti citizens. The Kuwaiti nationals have been stranded in a number of countries amid the prevailing coronavirus crisis. The meeting, held at the cabinet secretariat general office at Seif Palace, included Chair of the Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA) Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Chair of Kuwait Airways Yousef Al-Sagr, representatives of the ministries of foreign and health affairs, the DGCA and Kuwait Airways. — KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs a meeting for discussing coordination to pursue operation for repatriating Kuwaiti citizens.

Kuwait Minister calls OPEC+ deal historic

KUWAIT: Oil Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel on Sunday confirmed that OPEC and non-OPEC oil producing states had worked out a deal to slash crude output by 10 million barrels per day in May and June. The agreement is historic and the greatest in the oil history, said the minister in a statement to Kuwait TV, affirming that it had been endorsed by the stakeholders in the sector. Oil markets have been negatively affected by repercussions of the coronavirus spread, where demand dropped, thus there must be a slash of the production and exportation of the crude, he added. Affirming that the oil producers were seeking to maintain "certain price level and not a specific figure," the minister underlined their approach to preserve markets' stability. Kuwait's quota according to the OPEC plus agreement is based on the October 2018 output level, where the cut in its share will be in the range of 640,000 bpd in May and June, he added. OPEC member countries and oil producing states outside the organization have recently agreed on trim-



Oil Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel

ming the production by nearly 10 million bpd, effective May 1 for a period ending on June 30. They had said in a statement after the video conference that they also agreed on cutting the production by eight million bpd for six months starting on June 1 and ending on December 31. Moreover, they agreed on trimming the output by six million bpd for 16 months as of January 1, 2021, until April 30, 2022, in addition to examining its extension in December 2021. — KUNA



وزارة الصحة - ادارة منع العدوى



وزارة الصحة - ادارة منع العدوى



وزارة الصحة - ادارة منع العدوى



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health is sterilizing all hospitals and other health facilities on a daily basis as part of precautionary measures against the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), said Abdulmajeed Halawah, Cleaning Contracts Supervisor at the Ministry of Health.

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Bangladeshi nationals continue to avail amnesty

Indian nationals to start applying April 16th



KUWAIT: Bangladeshi nationals arrive at 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 for the second day on Sunday 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 pay-

ing 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 Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

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Salmiya building evacuated due to fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Fire broke out in a Salmiya building on Sunday and Salmiya, Bidaa and Hilali fire stations responded. Firemen found the blaze was in a ground floor flat. The house was evacuated and the fire was put out. A fireman broke his foot and was taken to hospital for treatment. Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) Deputy Director General for the Fire Fighting Sector Maj Gen Jamal Al-Bulaihees and Hawally Fire Director Brig Tareq Al-Sabti were present. Separately, firemen freed the foot of a child stuck in a cooking vessel in Riggae. Shuwaikh fire station responded to a call led by Lt Col Abdullah Akbar. The two-year-old child did not suffer any injuries.



Local Spotlight

An integral part of society

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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A doctor called me early in the morning and asked me for some products used to clean sensitive skin, and told me she will be waiting for me at Gate 5 of Jaber Hospital. I immediately realized that the place is the coronavirus quarantine site. I did my best to get the required products, and rushed to the hospital to deliver what the doctor wanted, and what I saw there made me happy, or to be more accurate, satisfied, because it was a different world.

The kind of organization and handling of matters was as in textbooks, and what drew my attention was the number of female staff. The doctor I went to see seemed very tired, and when I asked her about it, she said: "It is ok for the few of us to be tired now, so that the entire society is safe and healthy for a long time." Let me tell you that this woman is an indivisible part of life - she really complements it, and is part of the society that delivers and raises the so-called the other half.

Almighty Allah asked us to care for women as mothers, sisters and wives, and honored her just like a man, equal to him and not a second-class person in this life. It is divine justice that women get the same rights as men, and a man has duties that are suitable to her emotional and psychological nature.

Women are an integral part in moving civilization forward and actively; they are occupying various positions and many of them have become leaders, members of parliaments, teachers, doctors, engineers and ministers, as they have proven they can carry out all roles in life without affecting their "traditional" role as a mother who raises children.

The woman has the right from her family and society to receive all that guarantees her an honorable life, including education, training and care. The woman who receives the right education can bring up a strong and leading generation, as the woman is the biggest influence on children, and she can instill good manners and pride.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Only an honorable man treats women with honor and integrity, and only a mean, deceitful and dishonest man humiliates and insults them." So we have to understand that women are held in a special status even in religion, which puts her rights in its structure. The secret of life's beauty is the woman, because her nature forces her to be passionate towards all those around her.

Final word: "If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman." - Margaret Thatcher

Local

Quarantine sites prepared around Kuwait



KUWAIT: Director General of the Environment Public Authority Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah visited the southern quarantine site that was prepared by the Kuwait Integrated Petrochemical Industries Company

(KIPIC) on Sunday. The site has a 1,700-bed capacity, and will be handed over to the Ministry of Health within days. Kuwait is preparing to repatriate tens of thousands of Kuwaitis from countries affected by the

spread of the disease. Meanwhile, Kuwait National Guard prepared quarantine sites and field hospitals in Mahboula, while the Ministry of Defense prepared three locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to be used as a

field hospital and quarantine sites. The two areas have been put under total lockdown as part of measures to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat





Pakistan's Christians mark Easter vulnerable and jobless

Virus creates perfect storm for slavery in India



NEW DELHI: Monkeys get on a motorcycle to eat fruits from a box during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in New Delhi. — AFP

Tourists forced to write 'sorry' 500 times

Virus cases, deaths rise in India's slum

NEW DELHI: Ten foreigners who broke a coronavirus lockdown in an Indian town made famous by the Beatles, were forced to repent by writing "I am so sorry" - 500 times, officials said. The nationwide lockdown was imposed near the end of March, with residents permitted to leave their homes only for essential services such as buying groceries and medicine.

The travelers - from Israel, Mexico, Australia and Austria - were caught taking a walk in Rishikesh, where the Beatles sought spirituality at an Ashram in 1968. Local police officer Vinod Sharma said they were each made to write "I did not follow the rules of lockdown so I am so sorry" 500 times.

More than 700 foreign tourists from the US, Australia, Mexico and Israel staying in the area had flouted the lockdown rules, Sharma said, adding the unusual punishment was handed out to teach them a lesson. Police said they would direct hotels in the area to allow foreign guests to step out only if accompanied by local helpers. Establishments that did not follow the order could face legal action, Sharma said.

Police have come up with unusual methods to encourage people to stay home to halt the spread of the deadly disease, including wearing coronavirus-shaped helmets. But officers in some states were also seen in videos on social media beating drivers on roadsides and making people out and about during lockdown do squats and leapfrogs as punishment. On Sunday, police

said they arrested nine people violating the lockdown after an officer's hand was chopped off in northern Punjab state's Patiala district.

The group were stopped in a vehicle at a checkpoint and - refusing to turn back as ordered - hit the accelerator and smashed into steel barricades, officials said. During the clash, one of the group pulled out a sword, slicing off a policeman's hand. Six more officers were injured in the attack, police said. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to extend a nationwide lockdown that was originally slated to end today, for another two weeks. Some states have already extended the restrictions. On Sunday, India had registered more than 8,300 coronavirus cases and 273 deaths from the disease.



'An unusual punishment

have stepped up measures to close off areas where cases have emerged in Dharavi, which is home to around a million people.

But 15 new cases and one death were reported overnight, taking the number of infections to 43 in the neighborhood made famous by the 2008 Oscar-winning film "Slumdog Millionaire", Mumbai council spokesman Vijay Khabale-Patil said Sunday. Testing sites have also been set up in recent days to pick up asymptomatic carriers of the virus, Khabale-Patil said, adding that "as a result more positive cases have emerged".

"We have been running extensive medical camps in Dharavi and other areas of Mumbai to test more people for coronavirus and make sure carriers are not ignored just because they don't display symptoms," he told AFP Saturday. Local officials also closed all shops, except pharmacies, near so-called "containment zones" in Dharavi from Friday to limit the number of people in public spaces. India has been in a nationwide lockdown since March 25.

Some states including Maharashtra, where Mumbai is located, said Saturday that the strict measures - due

to be lifted on April 15 - would be extended until the end of the month. "The state will show the way to the country even in these tough times," Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray said on extending the lockdown in his state.

"On Monday, we will complete five weeks since the first case of coronavirus was reported in the state. We can say that till now we have been successful in preventing the multiplication of the number of cases up to some extent." Maharashtra has the highest number of cases among India's states and territories, at 1,761 including 127 deaths. India's overall toll on Sunday stood at 8,356 infections including 273 deaths. The Indian Council of Medical Research, the scientific agency leading the government's response, on Sunday said testing was increasing, with more than 15,500 samples taken daily since last week.

The health ministry added that India now had 105,000 dedicated COVID-19 beds in 601 hospitals across the vast nation of 1.3 billion people, official Lav Agarwal said. "As numbers grow in India... (we are) being overprepared, being extra-cautious," Lav Agarwal told reporters. Experts have warned that coronavirus could spread like wildfire in slums where social distancing and self-isolation are all but impossible. Dharavi's population density is thought to be 270,000 people per square kilometer, according to the World Economic Forum. — Agencies

Ecuador's police collect 800 bodies from the epicenter

GUAYAQUIL: Ecuador said police have removed almost 800 bodies in recent weeks from homes in Guayaquil, the epicenter of the country's coronavirus outbreak, after the disease overwhelmed emergency services, hospitals and funeral parlors. Mortuary workers in the Pacific port city have been unable to cope with a backlog, with residents posting videos on social media showing abandoned bodies in the streets.

"The number we have collected with the task force from people's homes exceeded 700 people," said Jorge Wated, who leads a team of police and military personnel created by the government to help with the chaos unleashed by COVID-19. He later said Sunday on Twitter that the joint task force, in operation for the past three weeks, had retrieved 771 bodies from

homes and another 631 from hospitals, whose morgues are full. Wated did not specify the cause of death for the victims, 600 of whom have now been buried by the authorities.

Ecuador has recorded 7,500 cases of the coronavirus since the first diagnosis was confirmed on February 29. The coastal province of Guayas accounts for over 70 percent of those infected in the country, with 4,000 cases in the capital Guayaquil, according to the national government. The military and police began removing bodies from homes three weeks after the mortuary system in Guayaquil collapsed, causing delays in forensic services and funeral homes under a 15-hour long daily curfew.

Guayaquil residents posted videos on social media of bodies abandoned in the streets, along with messages asking for help to bury their family members. The Ecuadorian government has taken on the task of burying bodies, given the inability of relatives to do so for various reasons, including financial ones. In early April, Wated said "medical experts unfortunately... estimate that COVID-19-related deaths in these months will reach between 2,500 and 3,500, just in the province of Guayas." — AFP



GUAYAQUIL: Aerial view of workers burying a coffin at Maria Canals cemetery in the outskirts of Guayaquil, Ecuador. — AFP

'Ghosts' deployed to patrol the streets

KEPUH: Kepuh village in Indonesia has been haunted by ghosts recently - mysterious white figures jumping out at unsuspecting passersby, then gliding off under a full-moon sky. The village on Java island has deployed a cast of "ghosts" to patrol the streets, hoping that age-old superstition will keep people indoors and safely away from the coronavirus.

"We wanted to be different and create a deterrent effect because 'pocong' are spooky and scary," said Anjar Pancaningtyas, head of a village youth group that coordinated with the police on the unconventional initiative to promote social distancing as the coronavirus spreads. Known as "pocong", the ghostly figures are typically wrapped in white shrouds with powdered faces and Kohl-rimmed eyes. In Indonesian folklore they represent the trapped souls of the dead.

But when they first started appearing this month

they had the opposite effect. Instead of keeping people in they bought them out to catch a glimpse of the apparitions. The organizers have since changed tack, launching surprise pocong patrols, with village volunteers playing the part of the ghosts. President Joko Widodo has resisted a national lockdown to curb the coronavirus, instead urging people to practice social distancing and good hygiene.

But with the highest rate of coronavirus deaths in Asia after China, some communities, such as Kepuh village, have decided to take measures into their own hands, imposing the ghostly patrols, lockdowns and restricting movement in and out of their village. "Residents still lack awareness about how to curb the spread of COVID-19 disease," said village head Priyadi. "They want to live like normal so it is very difficult for them to follow the instruction to stay at home." There are now 4,241 confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Indonesia, and 373 deaths, with fears the numbers will rise significantly. Researchers at the University of Indonesia estimate there could be 140,000 deaths and 1.5 million cases by May without tougher curbs on movement. — Reuters

6 die; tornadoes rip through Mississippi

WASHINGTON: At least six people were killed when tornadoes ripped through Mississippi on Sunday, officials said, prompting the southern US state to declare an emergency. The tornadoes caused "catastrophic" damage, according to US media, and prompted the National Weather Service to issue its highest level of tornado alert. Governor Tate Reeves tweeted that he had declared a state of emergency "to protect the health and safety of Mississippians in response to the severe tornadoes and storms hitting across the state."

"We are mobilizing all resources available to pro-

tect our people and their property," Reeves said, telling residents "you are not alone." The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency reported that all six deaths occurred in the southern part of the state. "These are initial reports and will continue to update when info becomes available," the agency tweeted. The Storm Prediction Center said it expected "severe thunderstorms" to continue through the night in Mississippi, as well as in the neighboring states of Alabama and Georgia.

"Strong tornadoes, widespread damaging winds, and large hail are all possible," the center added. Earlier on Sunday, Reeves urged residents to take the "severe storms very seriously." "Please take precautions to keep your family safe." He later retweeted a message from the state disaster agency reminding people to cover their noses and mouths and practice social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus if they had to go to public storm shelters. — AFP

International

Despite COVID-19 disruptions, UN carries on — by videoconference

UN Security Council's president stuck in the Caribbean

UNITED NATIONS: The usually buttoned-down world of the United Nations is having an unruly April as it copes with the global coronavirus pandemic in a city that is suffering terribly from it. The UN Security Council's president is stuck in the Caribbean. Closed-door meetings of ambassadors have been disrupted by news leaks. Video conferences have been disrupted by unintended guest appearances.

So far, the UN appears to have been largely spared the epidemic raging in New York, the epicenter of the disease in the United States. Few in its 3,000-member workforce have tested positive for the disease, perhaps because it implemented working-from-home measures earlier than the rest of the city. To keep working in such exceptional circumstances, however, calls for exceptional measures - and, like most other organizations, the UN has experienced a few hiccups along the way.

Security Council in paradise

The presidency of the 15-country Security Council rotates each month in alphabetical order. After China in March, it has been the turn of the Dominican Republic in April. But Dominican ambassador Jose Singer is in Santo Domingo, stranded due to border closures. Thanks to videoconferencing he has been able to conduct discussions - but, according to one ambassador, endured some teasing when he showed up one day wearing his "local outfit."

Transparent meetings

Although they are normally quick to denounce news leaks of their conversations, Security Council ambassadors surprised journalists with how porous their first session on the COVID-19 pandemic became. No sooner had the "strictly closed door" meeting begun Thursday than one country's mission posted a screen shot of the participants on Twitter. Others followed with excerpts of speeches, some going so far as to email Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' speech to AFP before the session had ended. "There is more transparency behind closed doors," quipped one UN official.

Intimate video conferences

The diplomats have taken to videoconferences with abandon. "We see poorly; the sound isn't terrible," but "it forces us to be brief," said one ambassador. "We do WhatsApp and videos. It's a pain," but "it gets the job done." The UN diplomats also have multiplied the use of Zoom to conduct informal briefings. These too can be revealing. Diplomats have shown up on screen in their bedrooms. In one case, a diplomat mistakenly replaced himself on screen with a giant image of his wife.

Open but empty

Despite stay-at-home measures and orders closing schools, museums and theaters in New York, the



NEW YORK: In this file photo, the UN Security Council meets at the UN headquarters in New York City. — AFP

UN headquarters remains open. But it was emptied of its huge workforce in mid-March when most began working from home. Before the pandemic, more than 11,000 people would enter the United Nations on a typical day. Now, no more than 140 do, ac-

ording to UN figures. Guterres initially came in every day to work at his office. Now, he wears a mask and this month began splitting his time between the office and his residence, a house with a garden on the East River. — AFP

Millions celebrate Easter on lockdown; Boris thanks medics

LONDON: Virus-stricken British Prime Minister Boris Johnson thanked medics for saving his life after leaving hospital on Easter Sunday, as hundreds of millions of Christians observed the holiday under lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. More than half of humanity is confined at home as governments scramble to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed more than 112,500 lives around the world. More than 1.8 million people have been infected but glimmers of hope were emerging that the worst may be behind - especially in Europe, where hard-hit Italy recorded its lowest death toll in three weeks and fatalities fell in France.

Johnson, the highest-profile leader to contract the virus characterized by high fevers and coughing, voiced confidence that Britain would beat the pandemic in a candid video message after he was discharged from a state-run National Health Service (NHS) hospital. "I hope they won't mind if I mention in particular two nurses who stood by my bedside for 48 hours when things could have gone either way," said 55-year-old Johnson, who was admitted on April 5 to a London hospital where he spent three days in intensive care.

In a suit and tie but visibly worn, Johnson said he was discharged after "a week in which the NHS has saved my life, no question." Even as Johnson headed to a country estate to rest before returning to work, Britain passed the grim milestone of 10,000 deaths. Johnson, like US President Donald Trump, had initially resisted stringent measures such as shutting down public places. The United States has since recorded the world's highest death toll at more than 22,020.



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivers a television address after returning to 10 Downing Street after being discharged from St Thomas' Hospital, in central London. — AFP

'Easter of solitude'

From the Vatican to Panama and the Philippines, there were unprecedented scenes of empty churches as the world's two-billion plus Christians celebrated Easter from the confines of their homes. Speaking from a near-empty Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, Pope Francis offered prayers for the ill and urged "solidarity" to fight the outbreak. "For many, this is an Easter of solitude lived amid the sorrow and hardship that the pandemic is causing, from physical suffering to economic difficulties," he said in a live-streamed message beamed around the world. On the outskirts of Rome, one devout follower held a video session with friends to mark the holy day in lieu of being able to gather in church. "Before lunch, six of us connected online for the Angelus prayer," said Rosa Mastrocinque, adding that her "spirituality has increased" during her weeks-long confinement. The pope had earlier urged creativity to mark the holy weekend - a call that was met by many.

In Panama, an archbishop blessed his nation from a helicopter, while one priest in Portugal addressed the faithful from the open top of a moving

convertible car. In one church north of the Philippine capital Manila, hundreds of pictures of parishioners were taped to pews as a priest led a Sunday service in a near-empty sanctuary. "We also feel their presence virtually," said Father Mark Christopher De Leon. "This is our way of being with them, praying for them spiritually, praying for them, praying for their safety."

'Far from victory'

Unlike France and Italy, Spain reported a slight spike in deaths with 619 fresh fatalities after declines over three straight days. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warned there could still be tough times ahead, even as the number of new infections continued to slow. "We are still far from victory, from the moment when we will recover normality in our lives," Sanchez said in locked-down Spain.

"We are all keen to go back out on the streets... but our desire is even greater to win the war and prevent a relapse," he added. New York, the epicenter of the virus in the United States, has gradually seen the public health crisis stabilize after a devastating week. "You're not seeing a great decline in the numbers, but you're seeing a flattening," Governor Andrew Cuomo told reporters. "And you're also seeing a recurrence of the terrible news, which is the number of lives lost, which is 758," he said of the past 24 hours across the state of New York.

The World Health Organization has warned countries against lifting lockdown restrictions too early. Governments are under pressure to keep populations safe while preventing the collapse of their economies, amid warnings from the International Monetary Fund of a downturn not seen since the Great Depression. Trump had earlier voiced hope at returning to normal by Easter but backtracked after dire warnings from public health experts. Anthony Fauci, the White House's top advisor on infectious diseases, said Sunday that parts of the world's largest economy may be ready to reopen by May 1 - but warned it would not be like a "light switch" with the entire country ending restrictions together. — AFP

Questions over Nigeria measures as lockdown ends

ABUJA: President Muhammadu Buhari has appealed to Nigerians to stay at home to stop the spread of the coronavirus, but the government has still not said whether it will extend a two-week confinement order on three states that ends. Residents in Lagos, Ogun and the capital Abuja have been confined to their homes, only allowed to leave for shopping trips, since March 31 in a measure to halt virus infections. On Saturday Buhari in a statement urged Nigerians to stay at home and to wash their hands to help save lives, but there was no indication whether the official confinement period would be extended past yesterday.

"I don't have any information on that," presidential spokesman Garba Shehu told AFP on Sunday. "The doctors and scientists are the ones who will advise. It is not a political decision, it is a medical and scientific decision." Nigeria, with nearly 200 million inhabitants, is the most populous country in Africa, and has the world's largest number of people living below the extreme poverty line. Confinement measures are extremely difficult for the majority of the population who depend on the informal economy to survive.

On Twitter, hundreds of Nigerians have urged the presidency as well as the Lagos state government to lift the restrictions so they can work and feed their families. Nigeria had 318 reported cases of coronavirus on Sunday, with around 5,000 tests carried out, and has recorded 10 deaths. Coronavirus has spread to 52 African countries, though its steady rise in confirmed cases lags behind the global curve for infections and deaths. The World Health Organization has warned Africa faces a sharp evolution of pandemic and the continent appears poorly equipped to manage a major health crisis. — AFP

Defector hailed by Trump seeks Korea parliament seat

SEOUL: The crutch-wielding North Korean lauded by Donald Trump in a State of the Union address is seeking a seat of his own in the South's parliament to defend other defectors who have fled their reclusive homeland but often find themselves marginalized. Ji Seong-ho was stealing coal to feed his starving family during a devastating 1990s famine when he fell from a train wagon.

The drop knocked out the then 13-year-old and a train ran him over, severing his left leg and hand. He was rushed to hospital and operated on without anaesthetic. "My father was given a bag with his son's hand and leg" to bury, Ji recalled in an interview with AFP. "This was what he got for being loyal to the Party."

A quarter of a century later and on the other side of the Demilitarized Zone that divides the Korean peninsula, Ji is running for South Korea's main opposition, the conservative United Future Party, in legislative elections. The vote takes place on April 15, the same day the nuclear-armed North will celebrate the 108th birthday of its late founder Kim Il Sung. Ji's father was a loyal rank-and-file member of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party.

But that did nothing to protect his son from frequent beatings by guards who said his disabled body was "a disgrace to the Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il-Kim Il Sung's son, and father to current ruler Kim Jong Un. "I was crippled... because of a problem in the government, but they blamed us and tortured us," said Ji, who fled the North in 2006. Swimming across the Tumen river to China with his brother's help, he went on a 10,000-kilometre (6,200-mile), six-month odyssey through Laos, Myanmar and Thailand to reach South Korea,



SEOUL: This picture taken on March 24, 2020 shows North Korean defector and human rights activist Ji Seong-ho holding up his crutches in front of photos with top officials during an interview at his office. — AFP

where he was given a prosthetic leg and hand. "I was able to walk again," said Ji, who went on to study English, typing with one hand as he eventually obtained a master's degree in law. Ji, now 38, works as a rights activist running an organization that has helped around 500 North Koreans make their way clandestinely through China and into third countries from where they can travel to the South. His office is lined with photos with top officials including Trump, who in his 2018 speech to Congress called the defector's story "a testament to the yearning of every human soul to live in freedom". Next to Ji's desk stand the wooden crutches made for him by his father that he waved in the air in front of the world's cameras. His father also tried to flee shortly after Ji's departure but was caught and tor-

tured to death, he says. Ji, who is standing for a proportional representation seat, feels the 33,000-odd defectors in the South have been neglected by the current government in Seoul.

The dovish President Moon Jae-in held three summits with North Korea's Kim in 2018, including a meeting in Pyongyang, but human rights issues have largely been off the table. "The entire society of North Korea is a prison," Ji says. "When the peninsula is reunified, are we going to shake hands with the North Korean regime? How are we going to look the North Korean people in the face?" Last year, the South's government forcibly repatriated two North Korean sailors suspected of killing 16 fishermen - a move that defectors and activists say amounted to a death sentence. — AFP

Great-grandmother, 97, becomes Brazil's oldest virus survivor

RIO DE JANEIRO: When 97-year-old Brazilian Gina Dal Colleto was hospitalized on April 1 with coronavirus symptoms, few could have thought she would survive the deadly virus. On Sunday, however, Dal Colleto was pushed in a wheelchair out of Sao Paulo's Vila Nova Star hospital to applause from doctors and nurses, becoming the oldest known survivor of COVID-19 in Brazil, the Latin American country worst-hit by the outbreak. Her unexpected recovery was a ray of hope in Brazil, where the coronavirus has laid bare a stretched public health system and exposed fierce political debate over how to best tackle the virus' spread and prop up the country's economy.

The sole survivor of an Italian family comprising 11 siblings, Dal Colleto lived alone in the port city of Santos, Rede D'Or Sao Luiz, which controls the Vila Nova Star hospital, said in a statement. "Even with almost a century of life, Gina has a very active routine and enjoys walking, shopping and cooking," the statement said. "She has six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren." While she was hospitalized, Dal Colleto was put on oxygen and admitted to intensive care, the statement said.

On Sunday, Brazil's health ministry said 1,223 people had died as a result of the outbreak, 99 more than the previous day's total. Brazil now has 22,169 confirmed cases. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right former army captain, has chafed at social distancing measures imposed by state governors and even his own health officials. He wants the economy restarted, arguing that extended shutdowns pose a greater risk than a disease he calls a "little cold." — Reuters However, that stance has cost him in the polls and most nights, in cities across Brazil, quarantined Brazilians are banging pots and pans in protest at his handling of the crisis. On Sunday, Bolsonaro said he thought that the coronavirus was on its way out of Brazil, although he gave no explanation. — Reuters

International

Christians in Pakistan mark Easter vulnerable and jobless

Many Christians have also been laid off

ISLAMABAD: Days after the coronavirus crisis took hold in Pakistan, Amir Gill, a cleaner and member of the country's Christian underclass, was fired with no warning or severance by the wealthy family he had helped look after. Many other Christians - who live a hand-to-mouth existence in the Islamic country - have also been laid off and, with little access to government help, are wondering how they will survive. "We were already untouchables and now due to corona, rich people think the poor might bring it into their homes," Gill told AFP ahead of an uncertain Easter. Along with two other servants, he worked at a large house in the capital - mostly to clean up after parties.

"I have no idea how many bedrooms it had but it was big," explained Gill, who lives in Islamabad's Christian slums in a cramped one-room home with his family of four.

"My kids asked me for new Easter dresses and shoes but I have told them we are not going to have Easter this year." Christians - who comprise roughly two percent of the population - occupy one of the lowest rungs in class-obsessed Pakistan. Most work menial jobs without contracts as street sweepers, cleaners and cooks and live in crowded, multi-generational households where social distancing is all but impossible.

Their worsening plight means the Easter - which normally marks rebirth, springtime and abundance - will be filled with "depression and

despair", said Haroon Ashraf. "The coronavirus has snatched away the bit of bread we had," said the 25-year-old, who lost his restaurant job when the virus hit. Along with his brother, who is also now jobless, he is supporting a family of seven that is squeezed into a two-room flat. He was hoping to apply for financial relief from the state, but was hindered by being unable to read.

'Layers of marginalization'

Pakistan's Christian community largely descended from low-caste Hindus who converted, resulting in persistent caste stigmas and discrimination. For decades, they have been subjected to violent attacks by Islamists, and tarred with blasphemy allegations that they are mostly helpless to deflect and often result in lynchings. They often live in impoverished "colonies" in urban centers, including in the capital Islamabad where the slums are sandwiched between the wealthiest neighborhoods.

The loss of a job or an unexpected medical bill frequently sends families into spiraling debt in the absence of strong safety nets in the deeply impoverished country of 215 million. "In this crisis, where they are confined to crowded spaces with few resources, they cannot be left to face a cruel choice between starvation and infection," said Omar Waraich, deputy regional director for South Asia at Amnesty International.

The pandemic and ensuing lockdown means live-

Easter filled with 'depression and despair'



ISLAMABAD: Christians hold candles as they offer prayers during an Easter service in the rooftop of their house during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Islamabad. —AFP

ly Easter Sunday services and celebrations usually spent in churches inside the maze-like slums will be abandoned. Christians in Pakistan with smartphones have tuned into online services while others have joined neighbors on their rooftops, where sermons are yelled and hymns are sung in unison. For

Sharoon Shakeel, this Easter season has been laden with misery after the recent death of his father, followed by losing his job. "We are running out of food," said Shakeel, who was already in debt from the funeral costs. "How can we celebrate Easter?" —AFP

N Korea's Kim reshuffles top governing body

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has carried out a major reshuffle of his State Affairs Commission, official media reported yesterday, replacing more than a third of its members. Kim has established an iron grip on the levers of authority in his nuclear-armed country since inheriting power in his late 20s in 2011.

He is chairman of the SAC - the North's highest decision-making body - and five of its 13 other members were replaced at a meeting of the country's rubber-stamp Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) parliament on Sunday, the state KCNA news agency reported. "This is a rather large scale of SAC membership shuffle," said former US government North Korea analyst Rachel Lee. Pictures carried by the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed hundreds of lawmakers sitting in close proximity to each other without wearing protective masks.

A cabinet report reiterated the North's insistence that "not a single case" of the coronavirus pandemic that has swept the world since emerging in neighboring China has been reported in the country. Pyongyang put thousands of its own people and hundreds of foreigners - including diplomats - into isolation and mounted disinfection drives as it sought to prevent an outbreak, which experts say could be devastating given its weak health sector and widespread malnutrition.

"State emergency anti-epidemic campaign will continue to be intensified to prevent the spread of COVID-19," the cabinet report said. There was no mention on KCNA of Kim presiding over the meeting himself, and he did not appear in photos of it. "The fact that North Korea went ahead with the SPA suggests the country's confidence in managing the coronavirus situation," Lee said. "The fact that the attendees were not wearing masks only reconfirms that."

'Serious mistakes'

The new SAC members include Ri Son Gwon, a former senior army officer named as foreign minister earlier this year, while his predecessor, career diplomat Ri Yong Ho, was removed. Another former foreign minister, Ri Su Yong, was also taken off the committee. Under Kim the North has made rapid progress on its nuclear arsenal, launching missiles capable of reaching the whole of the US mainland, and has been subject to increasingly stringent UN Security Council sanctions as a result.

Talks with the US have been largely deadlocked since the collapse of the Hanoi summit last year over sanctions relief and what the North would be willing to give up in exchange. A budgetary report submitted to the SPA said 15.9 percent of state spending this year would be devoted to defense, KCNA said, a marginal increase on 2019.

The cabinet report acknowledged that "serious mistakes" were found in its work last year. "They taught a serious lesson that if the officials in charge of providing economic guidance fail to fulfil their duty," the authorities' economic goals will not be achieved, it said. North Korea "apparently wants to show its institutions are working and national safety is under control, while trying to lower public expectations about the economy by blaming the ongoing global pandemic," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul said. —AFP

COVID-19 creates perfect storm for slavery in India

CHENNAI: When the coronavirus outbreak brought India to a halt last month, Bhagwan Das lost his only income as a construction worker in Delhi and embarked on a three-day trek back to his village. Then the loan shark came knocking. Unable to maintain repayments on the 60,000 rupee (\$787) loan he took out in 2017 for his daughter's wedding, Das had no choice but to offer his son's labour to service the rising debt.

"My son works on the money lender's farmland now. He gives him food, but no wages," the 55-year-old said by phone from central Madhya Pradesh state. "We have to repay a loan and will do whatever work he gives us," added Das, who has yet to even clear the loan's interest. A coronavirus lockdown - due to end on Tuesday but set to be extended - has left hundreds of millions of informal workers without cash or food, and fearful that lacking paperwork or a bank account will hinder their access to government assistance.

Many families will instead resort to taking out loans at high interest rates in order to survive, while others will fall deeper into debt and end up trapped in bonded labor - India's most prevalent form of modern slavery - according to activists. India identified at least 135,000 bonded workers in its 2011 census, while the Australian charity Walk Free Foundation put the number at eight million in its 2018 Global Slavery Index.

"The only capital they (internal migrant workers) have is their labor and the only people they know how to negotiate their livelihood with is the middleman," said Rudra Pattanaik, chairperson for the migrant laborer welfare charity PARDA. "Cash flow in a migrant worker's home rotates around loans and working to repay them and that process has been completely derailed," he added. "The money lenders and middlemen are definitely going to recover the money, by hook or by crook." "It is a very risky time ... this crisis will only deepen."

Fears of violence

In a survey of about 3,200 informal workers who were walking home last week from cities to their villages, nearly a third had loans to repay - mainly to money lenders from their communities. Almost half of those who were in debt said they feared their inability to service the loans could see them subjected to some form of violence, according to the survey by charity Jan Sahas.

In Odisha, charities are using short videos inspired by the animated film "Madagascar" to inform villagers about coronavirus and warn them



CHENNAI: A man wearing heart-shaped glasses with his face covered (left) amid fears of the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, carries a sack of vegetables near a market during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in Chennai. —AFP

against taking out loans from local money lenders at high interest rates - a practice known to fuel slave labor. The Indian government says at least 300,000 people have been pulled out of slavery since 1976, and it has committed to rescue and rehabilitate more than 10 million bonded laborers by 2030. Yet such efforts could be set back as people turn to the most convenient source of cash - lenders their families have known for generations - despite aid promised by the government for the country's poorest, according to labor rights activists.

"Money lenders may increase interest rates ... distress migration will increase," said Binoy Peter, executive director of Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development, a non-profit. "It is going to be a catastrophe." A labor ministry official, who declined to be identified as he was not authorized to speak to the media, said government guidelines for employers to not deduct wages or terminate employment should prevent workers needing to take out loans.

The official did not comment on those who had already taken out loans, and said there were no government directives to examine the issue of debt bondage during or after the lockdown. India - which has at least 9,000 confirmed cases of the virus and more than 300 deaths - has pledged \$23 billion to provide food and cash to millions of its poorest citizens, along with \$4 billion from a welfare fund for construction workers.

Exploitation rising

For Odisha-based labor agent Nijam Khan and his business partner K Shivaiah Gowda, who runs a brick kiln in Telangana, the lockdown has caused consternation over the safety of their workers at the kiln, as well as the immediate financial blow. "Business losses are huge and the impact will be felt in every migrant's home," said Khan, explaining how some workers had been given advances of up to 40,000 rupees upon joining. "There are already talks between manufacturers on a no-advance policy for next season, which means there will be no easy cash available to workers for weddings, funerals or health emergencies."

Anti-trafficking activists are also concerned that workers who were stuck on site at brick kilns and rice mills when the lockdown was announced will have been overworked and exploited. "Owners of these facilities have pushed up deadlines for work to be completed, knowing that the workers will ... (go) home once the lockdown is opened," said Jaba Prince, a social worker for International Justice Mission in southern Tamil Nadu.

"The exploitation is rising and will only worsen," he added. While the prospect of getting government aid is uncertain for many informal workers, and life post-lockdown hard to predict - Das is sure of one thing when looking to the future. "The relationship between laborer and lender is timeless," Das said, referring to his son working for the local loan shark. "It stretches for many lives." —Reuters

Alarm over dozens of missing migrants in Mediterranean

ROME: Europe's coast guard agency said Sunday it was looking for a dinghy believed to be carrying dozens of migrants when it went missing after setting sail from Libya for Italy. The UN refugee agency told AFP it was "very worried" about the fate of what could be 85 migrants lost in Mediterranean Sea. Two German monitors of dangerous migrant crossings first reported spotting four boats in distress off the southern coast of Malta over the weekend.

The European Union's Frontex border guard and

coast guard agency later told AFP that one of the four boats had safely reached Italy and another two were still at sea. It said a fourth boat initially spotted on Friday was unaccounted for. "Frontex plane will fly again (Monday) morning in search of the remaining boat," a spokesman told AFP. A spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it appeared that the missing boat had capsized. "We are very worried," UNHCR spokeswoman Carlotta Sami told AFP. Frontex said it had notified the coast guard authorities of Italy and Malta about the boats at sea. Neither country's border authorities commented on the reported shipwreck when contacted by AFP. Germany's Sea-Watch International group showed the boats' geolocation - including one boat marked "unknown GPS contact lost" - on its official Twitter account. Sea-Watch presumed that the lost boat was carrying 85 people.

It said the other three boats were carrying 173

migrants in all. Germany's United4Rescue monitor of migrant crossings said in a statement that it was receiving the same reports and feared for the lives of "dozens". Italy has long established itself as the primary European port of entry for migrants seeking refuge from Africa and the Middle East. But the Mediterranean country shut down its ports and said it would quarantine any illegal migrants because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Swiss-based International Organization for Migration (IOM) said the reports were "very worrying" but difficult to verify. "In the absence of boats in the area, it is very difficult at the moment to confirm that there has been a shipwreck, or the number of victims involved," IOM Italy spokesman Flavio Di Giacomo said. "And unfortunately, from experience, we also think it is likely that there have been shipwrecks of which we are not aware." —AFP

Business

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10 Cautious hope for pandemic peak as Spain gears to reopen factories



11 Burgan Bank holds its 54th general assembly meeting



11 India plans to resume some manufacturing



DUBAI: Traders follow financial markets at the Dubai Stock Exchange. Oil prices rose yesterday after major oil producers finally agreed their biggest-ever output cut. — AFP

Oil climbs after OPEC+ agree output cut

Cuts equal to 10% of global supply: US output seen dropping by 2m bpd

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rose yesterday after major producers finally agreed their biggest-ever output cut, but gains were capped amid concern that it won't be enough to head off oversupply with the coronavirus pandemic hammering demand. After four days of wrangling, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and other producers, a group known as OPEC+, agreed on Sunday to cut output by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in May and June to support oil prices, representing around 10 percent of global supply. Brent crude futures rose 16 cents, or 0.5 percent, to \$31.64 a barrel by 0709 GMT after opening at a session high of \$33.99. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up 37 cents, or 1.6 percent, to \$23.13 a barrel, after hitting a high of \$24.74.

"What this deal does is enable the global oil industry and the national economies and other industries that depend upon it to avoid a very deep crisis," said IHS Markit Vice Chairman Daniel Yergin.

"This restrains the build-up of inventories, which will reduce the pressure on prices when normality



Citi, Morgan Stanley raise price forecasts

returns - whenever that is." Leaders of the world's top three oil producers, Russian President Vladimir Putin, US President Donald Trump and Saudi Arabia's King Salman, all supported the OPEC+ deal to cut global crude output, the Kremlin said on Sunday. Trump praised the deal, saying it would save jobs in the US energy industry.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates volunteered to make cuts even deeper than those agreed, which would effectively bring the OPEC+ supply down by 12.5 million bpd from current supply levels, the Saudi energy minister said. However, analysts cast doubts on producers' likely compliance with the

cuts, adding that the actual reductions may not be as high as the volume pledged by producers.

Furthermore, demand concerns capped oil price gains. Worldwide fuel consumption is down roughly 30 percent, due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus that has killed more than 100,000 people worldwide and kept businesses and governments on lockdown.

"After an initial positive reaction in oil prices, we expect the OPEC+ decision at best to establish a floor under the market," BNP Paribas' Harry Tchilinguirian said in a note, adding that oil price gains could also be capped by hedges from producers. "We do not expect a sustained recovery in the oil price until pent-up demand is released in Q3," he said.

The deal had been delayed since Thursday after Mexico balked at the production cuts it was asked to make. The OPEC+ group met on Sunday to hammer out the agreement, resulting in an output cut four times deeper than the previous record reduction in 2008. OPEC+ has also said it wanted producers outside the group, such as the United States, Canada,

Brazil and Norway, to cut a further 5 percent or 5 million bpd. Canada and Norway signalled a willingness to cut. The United States, where antitrust legislation makes it hard to act in tandem with groups such as OPEC, has said its output would already fall by as much as 2 million bpd this year without planned cuts because of low prices.

"We're going to see a significant drop in production anyway from producers who can't make money producing," said Phil Flynn, an analyst at Price Futures group. However, optimism over the longer term impact of the OPEC+ cuts have lifted prices for future months, widening Brent's contango, the market structure when later dated prices are higher than prompt supplies. "By (the third quarter), these cuts should make a difference and result in induced inventory draws for most of the rest of 2020," Citi analysts said as the bank raised its Brent price forecasts for third and fourth quarter to \$35 and \$45 a barrel, respectively. Morgan Stanley has also raised its forecasts by \$5 for the second half of the year to \$30 to \$35 a barrel. — Reuters

Is this stock halal? Islamic finance charts high-tech future

DUBAI: "Is it halal to buy shares in Tesla?" a young Muslim would-be investor asks on Twitter. Islamic finance—an amalgamation of Sharia law and modern banking—has become a \$2 trillion business over the past two decades, covering everything from bonds to buying cars. But with complex standards set out by a number of Islamic bodies, it's not easy for observant Muslims to decide whether or not an investment is halal (religiously permissible).

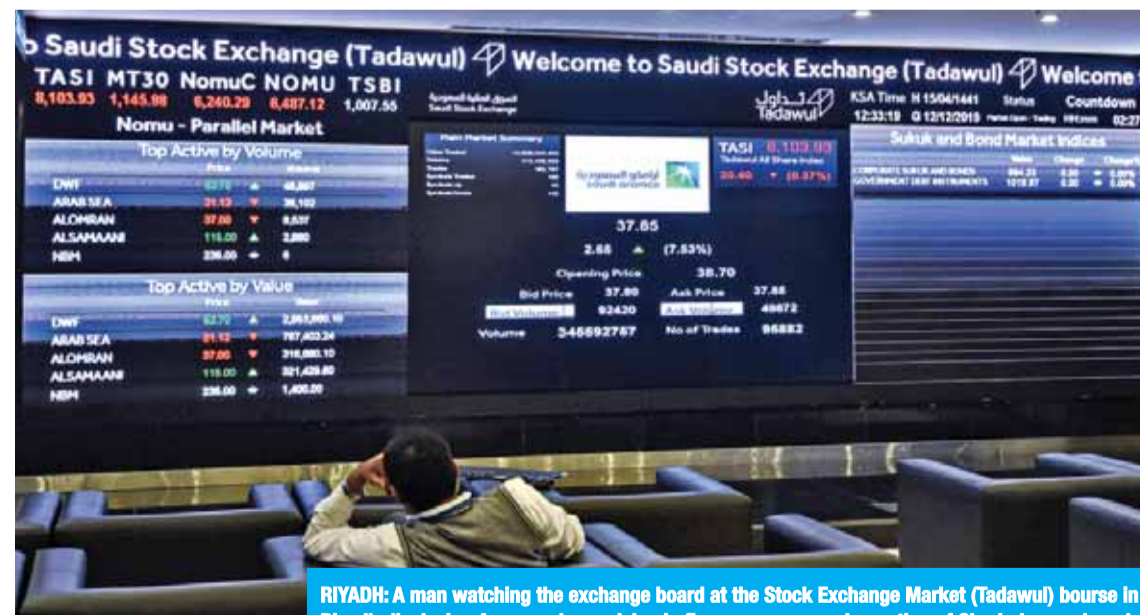
Yet new technology is helping. Tesla, the American electric car pioneer, for example, is considered 96 percent Sharia compliant, according to the Zoya mobile application.

The app screens US-listed stocks based on criteria issued by the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions, one of several bodies that set Islamic finance standards.

Islamic funds are banned from investing in companies associated with tobacco, alcohol, pork or gambling. Earning interest is also banned as "usury".

US-based Wahed Invest, an online halal platform, uses those criteria to help tens of thousands of people invest "ethically". Islamic bankers are hoping that modern platforms will open the industry up to young investors, and that its innately ethical credentials will prove to be another draw.

Mehdi Benslimane, Global Expansion Strategist at Wahed Invest, said the guidelines in religious texts boil down to two conditions. "A business must have a real economic impact, not just a speculative one. And it



RIYADH: A man watching the exchange board at the Stock Exchange Market (Tadawul) bourse in Riyadh displaying Aramco shares. Islamic finance — an amalgamation of Sharia law and modern banking — has become a \$2 trillion business over the past two decades. — AFP

must have a positive contribution to the world," he said.

Not just for Muslims

According to the ratings agency Standard & Poor's, the Islamic finance industry has in its relatively short existence grown to be worth \$2.1 trillion. In projections made before the coronavirus outbreak, it predicted the sector would "continue to expand slowly" in 2020. Financial technology, or fintech, could help the industry grow by "facilitating easier and faster transactions", it said in its Islamic Finance Outlook 2020 Edition.

The meltdown the coronavirus pandemic has caused in other parts of the economy has prompted

fears of a collapse in the sector. Dubai Islamic Bank has already delayed a planned issue of Shariah-compatible bonds, according to Emirati media reports. Yet Islamic finance-based on the concept of shared profit and loss, thus minimizing risk for banks—has fans well beyond the Muslim world.

For example, the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank in November signed an agreement with Japan's mammoth pension fund to support the development of sustainable Sharia-compliant products.

And the Responsible Finance & Investment (RFI) Foundation, a think tank, has talked up their ability to respond to the latest crash, due to the fact they are anchored in the real economy.

It also suggests that profits on investments in industries such as protective medical equipment could be donated to charities, helping tackle the coronavirus crisis without breaking the Islamic ban on interest payments. But the sector's current slow-moving nature may hobble its ability to respond to crises.

The emphasis has been on growing the market rather than making it more efficient, said Mohammed Al-Sehli, CEO of Wethaq Capital, a Dubai-based fintech firm. The sector must focus more on innovation after "suffering from lack of innovation, standardization and automation of processes", he told AFP.

Particular challenges

Before the novel coronavirus pandemic forced them to work from home, young men and women in traditional abaya robes or jeans and T-shirts-sat on bean bags or hunched over their laptops in an open working space at Dubai's FinTech Hive. The company's executive vice president Raja al-Mazrouei says it connects start-ups with the Dubai Islamic Economic Development Centre, Sharia scholars, Islamic banks and financial regulators. "If you're targeting countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia... you have to be able to offer a (sharia-compliant) solution," Mazrouei told AFP.

However, Islamic fintech firms face a string of obstacles that don't bother their traditional counterparts. "The main challenge... is to make sure that the whole supply chain, the regulations, are actually tested and verified by the Sharia scholars," said Mazrouei, a former computer scientist and a Harvard graduate.

Talal Tabbaa, founder of Jibrel.com which connects investors with start-ups, and itself uses blockchain technology, describes an industry where cultures can collide. The approach of some Muslim scholars who approve financial products "is not technological, it is very manual and, in my opinion, subjective," he said. — AFP

Business

Cautious hope for pandemic peak as Spain gears to reopen factories

Governments grapple with a once-in-a-century recession

MADRID: The death toll from the coronavirus pandemic has slowed in some of the worst-hit countries, with Spain readying yesterday to reopen parts of its economy as governments grapple with a once-in-a-century recession. Italy, France and the US have all seen a drop in COVID-19 deaths in the past 24 hours, with Italy—the European nation most afflicted—reporting its lowest toll in more than three weeks.

It came as Pope Francis delivered an unprecedented livestream message to a world under lockdown on Easter Sunday, and Britain's Boris Johnson left hospital, thanking medics for saving his life. More than half of the planet's population is staying home as part of efforts to stem the spread of the virus, which emerged in China late last year and has now killed at least 112,500 people, overwhelming healthcare systems and crippling the world economy. Spain's death toll has fallen in recent days, but as a small bump in deaths was reported on Sunday, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warned that the locked-down country was "far from victory." "We are all keen to go back out on the streets... but our desire is even greater to win the war and prevent a relapse," he said, as some companies were set to resume operations at the end of a two-weeks halt of all non-essential activity.

In the US—now the world's worst-hit nation with a fifth of all deaths and more than half a million con-

firmed cases—the government's top infectious disease expert added to cautious optimism that the pandemic may have reached its peak. Anthony Fauci said parts of the country could begin easing restrictions in May, but warned that the world's biggest economy would not turn back on like a "light switch".

"We are hoping by the end of the month we can look around and say, OK, is there any element here that we can safely and cautiously start pulling back on?" Fauci told CNN.

'Easter of solitude'

President Donald Trump had previously wanted the US to be back to normal by Easter, but most of the country remained at a standstill and churches took celebrations online. Many of the world's more than two billion Christians celebrated Easter from the confines of their homes, while Pope Francis delivered a livestream message from a hauntingly empty Vatican. "For many, this is an Easter of solitude lived amid the sorrow and hardship that the pandemic is causing, from physical suffering to economic difficulties," he said.

One priest in Rio de Janeiro blessed the Brazilian city from a helicopter, while another in Portugal addressed the faithful from the open top of a moving convertible car. In Britain, which has logged more than 10,000 deaths, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Sunday he had been discharged after "a



MADRID: A Spanish police officer distributes face masks at the Atocha Station in Madrid yesterday as some companies were set to resume operations at the end of a two-week halt of all non-essential activity amid a national lockdown to stop the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

week in which the NHS has saved my life, no question", referring to the country's state-run National Health Service.

Britain is now seeing daily death tolls to match those previously seen in Italy and Spain, after recording nearly 1,000 fatalities on Friday and Saturday. There were 737 new deaths reported Sunday. Johnson, like Trump, had initially resisted stringent meas-

ures such as shutting down public places.

Some factory and construction workers in Spain were set to return to work yesterday, with police to hand out face masks at metro and train stations. The fortnight of "economic hibernation" is about to be lifted, drawing criticism from some regional leaders and unions, but the rest of the lockdown restrictions in the nation of around 47 million people will remain in place. — AFP



Spain ends economic hibernation

Terrible or merely bad? Investors brace for ugly Q1 earnings

NEW YORK: The month of March opened with US unemployment near a 50-year low and concluded with countless companies turning to Washington for help as the coronavirus ravaged the economy. Quarterly earnings season—which kicks off this week with reports from major banks—will provide the first full accounting of how the COVID-19 crisis affects corporate America.

While the reports will no doubt be weak, it is difficult to know exactly how bad the first-quarter results will be because the first two months of the year saw fairly strong economic activity that was halted in sudden and dramatic fashion in March as governments imposed lockdown orders to halt the spread of the virus. Analysts expect companies in the S&P 500 to report a drop in profits ranging from six to 15 percent. The outlook is much worse for the second quarter, when the decline is expected to be at least 18 percent.

Adding to the uncertainty: numerous companies have withdrawn their earnings forecasts amid the fog over how long much of the US economy will remain in a state of suspended animation.

Major blow

Over the course of March, the US economy sustained an almost unimaginable series of blows. More



The month of March opened with US unemployment near a 50-year low and concluded with countless companies turning to Washington for help as the coronavirus ravaged the economy.

than 10 million people were suddenly put out of work, major auto plants closed down, thousands of small businesses shuttered as did restaurants, malls and movie theaters, major sporting events were canceled or postponed and thousands of commercial flights were axed or flew with fewer than 25 percent of the seats filled. Through this period, the S&P 500 shed more than \$3 trillion in market capitalization. The pandemic has killed thousands, rendered major cities ghost towns and scattered workforces, with executives suddenly managing employees who are sheltering in place at home.

In the wake of the remarkable halt to business, American, Delta, United and other airlines have sought massive public support, along with myriad hospitality

industry companies, while Boeing has encouraged workers to apply for unemployment benefits.

Washington has responded forcefully, with Congress enacting unprecedented fiscal stimulus and the Federal Reserve introducing a host of new programs to boost market liquidity and the real economy.

"Visibility is extremely limited at this time," said Francois Trahan, a strategist at UBS, expressing a sentiment shared by other market watchers who are hesitant to predict when profits might rebound.

"While the willingness of policymakers to use all the tools at their disposal is clear, only time will tell to what extent the actions succeed in limiting defaults, closures and layoffs," Goldman Sachs said in a note. — AFP

Virus pandemic to test China's job safety net

BEIJING: The coronavirus pandemic is expected to cause millions more people in China to lose their jobs, leaving many of them stranded without a safety net, unable to access state unemployment benefits, economists say. The rapid spread of the disease around the world has dashed hopes for a quick recovery in China, where the virus first emerged. Analysts expect nearly 30 million job losses this year due to stuttering work resumptions and plunging global demand, outpacing the 20-plus million layoffs during the 2008-09 financial crisis.

Beijing has fortified its jobless claims program in the decade since the financial crisis erupted, tripling the pot of funds to which both employers and workers contribute to 581.7 billion yuan (\$82.37 billion), according to the latest data. But millions of workers have no contracts or have not been paying into the unemployment insurance scheme, meaning they will have to rely on their employers giving them compensation if they get laid off. Many will be forced to dip into savings or seek help from their extended family if they lose their jobs.

Some 2.29 million people received unemployment insurance in January and February, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. In the same period, an estimated 5 million people lost their jobs, according to Dan

Wang of the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Wang estimates another 22 million people may lose their jobs this year but only half will likely qualify for unemployment benefit, she said. China's State Council did not respond to a request for comment.

"The rent is high in a city like Beijing, and I don't have any income," said a woman who gave her surname as Xue. The 19 year old was laid off from her job in a nail salon in April but said she wasn't able to claim unemployment insurance because she hadn't worked long enough.

Workers registered in the sys-

tem can draw monthly payments for up to two years if they have contributed to the scheme for a decade. The length of the payment decreases with shorter contribution periods. In Beijing, laid-off workers who have paid into unemployment insurance for long enough can expect up to 1,815 yuan (\$257) per month but that is less than half the average wage of a migrant laborer in 2018, according to government data, and is less than the average monthly rent of around 2,500 yuan for a modest room in the Chinese capital. If they can't claim for unemployment insurance, people with household income below a minimum threshold—ranging from 1,160 yuan (\$165) a month in Shanghai to 337 yuan in an impoverished region like Ningxia—can apply for assistance to top up their incomes. — Reuters



BEIJING: China has fortified its jobless claims program in the decade since the financial crisis erupted, tripling the pot of funds to which both employers and workers contribute to 581.7 billion yuan (\$82.37 billion), according to the latest data. — Reuters

Time is ripe for Mideast to take control of pricing export fuels

By Chris Wood

Regional pricing benchmarks are not new to the Middle East but there has been an evident shift by the Gulf in the past year in seeking to take a lead and take more ownership on the pricing of its crudes and products. We are currently experiencing an unprecedented change in global trading patterns, which puts the region in a very specific and advantageous spot geographically in terms of ability to effectively be the marginal barrel in the market.

Platts Dubai has been used successfully as a benchmark reference price for two decades. Similarly established is the pricing of the Oman contract as a reference price for crude in the region on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange. And most recently, we see ADNOC following in Aramco Trading's footsteps, to build a significant trading capability in the region and planning to launch the Murban crude contract on the International Commodities Exchange this year.

Determining the success of new pricing assessments will be transparency, liquidity, storage capacity, as well as a trustworthy well-regulated environment, which lends confidence that no individual or entity has absolute control. Another variable will be whether enough NOCs make use of new benchmarks—a common shortfall thus far. Fundability of the barrel is also important—its ability to be used by different refineries—in traditionally, benchmarks have been set on sweet crudes for this very reason but other crudes are now being considered as refining systems increasingly become more equipped to deal with complex slates.

Alongside crude contracts, we see a strong impetus and opportunity for setting up price assessments for products, such as those based out of Fujairah, which have so far been priced off Singapore references. We are not only seeing more volumes produced within the region, bolstered most recently by the IMO 2020 directive, but also witnessing more products in demand by local customers. If you look at Brent, ICE (Intercontinental Exchange) or even JKM (Platts' Japan/Korea Marker), one reason for their success has been that several producers sell into them and traders and customers then price around that. Currently, there is a geographic dislocation in timing for trade between Singapore and Fujairah, but if we had our own price, it would allow us to manage that exposure, enable us to add more flexibility and give more opportunity to manage and meet our customer requirements, particularly locally.

Having multiple price references would give market participants a greater sense of security of choice. Singapore has undoubtedly done a good job in working with the industry, with trading companies and with the refining sector, to create liquidity, transparency and trust and it should continue to drive forward what it has always done. But Fujairah now stands at a clear turning point and can focus on the Singapore example as a reference point as it expands its hub ambitions to become the undisputable location for fuels trade between Europe and Asia.

Note: Chris Wood is Managing Director, Uniper Energy DMCC



Fed official says US economy faces 'long, hard road'

WASHINGTON, DC: The US economic recovery from the disruptions caused by the novel coronavirus outbreak will likely be a "long, hard road" in which some parts of the economy will periodically shut down and restart, Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank President Neel Kashkari said on Sunday.

In an interview on CBS's "Face the Nation," Kashkari said projections for a quick economic turnaround were overly optimistic unless a treatment for COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, became available in the next few months. "This could be a long, hard road that we have ahead of us until we get to either an effective therapy or a vaccine," he said, according to a CBS transcript. "It's hard for me to see a V-shaped recovery under that scenario."

Kashkari's comments came amid signals from President Donald Trump that he wants to re-open the economy as soon as possible. Trump said on Friday that he would unveil a new advisory group this week that would focus on the process of economic opening.

Public health experts have warned that the US death toll could surge to 200,000 over the summer, from 21,300 on Sunday, 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.

Kashkari said additional support was needed for small businesses beyond the \$350 billion provided in the coronavirus aid package passed in March, but he was optimistic that Congress would approve more funding. He added that he was looking toward an 18-month strategy to address the health and economic effects of the pandemic. During that time, certain parts of the economy may close and re-open on a rolling basis, starting with workers who are at lowest risk of infection. — Reuters

Business

Burgan Bank holds its 54th AGM

Shareholders approve distribution of 12 fils cash dividend for the year 2019

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank held its 54th Ordinary Annual General Assembly meeting on 12 April 2020 at the KIPCO Tower, with a quorum of 82.7 percent. The Board of Directors of the bank submitted the financial results achieved for the past year ending on December 31, 2019 to its shareholders, which highlighted the strong operating and financial performance provided by the bank. The shareholders of the bank approved the distribution of 12 fils per share as cash dividends.



AGM held with a quorum of 82.7%



Majed Essa Al-Ajeel



Masoud Hayat

of maximizing returns for shareholders. The net profit of Burgan Bank witnessed a growth during FY2019, recording KD 84.7 million (an increase of 3 percent on an annual basis), and accordingly, the return on shareholders' equity recorded 10 percent. In view of this solid performance, Burgan Bank's Board of Directors has proposed to distribute 12 fils per share as cash dividend.

Burgan Bank Group achieved for the fiscal year 2019 a total revenue of KD 248.2 million with a net interest margin of 2.7 percent in addition to achieving strong levels of non-interest income (33 percent in FY'19 compared to 31 percent in FY'18). During FY'19, the group succeeded in reducing operating expenses by KD 9.5 million and improving the cost-to-income ratio by 90 basis points.

The quality of the assets also witnessed further improvement, as non-performing loans recorded 2.5 percent in FY'19 (a decrease of 20 basis points year on year), while the loan coverage ratio improved further to record 200 percent (compared to 168 percent for FY'18). The cost of credit also improved to record 110 basis points, compared to 140 basis points for the 2018 fiscal year.

The loan portfolio of Burgan Bank Group during the fiscal year 2019 recorded a growth of 1 percent, which reflects the cautious growth methodology pursued by the group in the subsidiary bank markets, while the focus was on the main market



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank's Chairman of the Board Majed Essa Al-Ajeel chairs the annual general assembly meeting.

In order to ensure the safety of the attendees during the current COVID-19 situation, the bank undertook precautionary measures through the provision of sterilizers, gloves, masks, followed safe and social distancing, in addition to on-ground medical staff, and provided a live broadcast to follow up on the meeting remotely.

During the meeting, the Chairman of the Board, Majed Essa Al-Ajeel explained that the strong results for 2019 reflect the bank's focus on achieving high value profits, achieving operational efficiency, and improving the quality of assets with a clear goal

(Kuwait), where the loan portfolio witnessed 8 percent growth. Moreover, during FY'19, customer deposits with Burgan Bank increased by 6 percent, which in turn led to an increase in the diversity of the bank's funding base.

Regarding the availability of capital strength during the fiscal year 2019, the bank recorded the shareholder equity (CET1) ratio of 11.5 percent, while the capital adequacy ratio reached 16.8 percent. Al-Ajeel concluded his statement by thanking, on behalf of the Board of Directors, the bank's esteemed clients and shareholders for their confi-

dence, the supervisory authorities and the Central Bank of Kuwait for their continuous support, the bank's executive management for their leadership and abilities for implementing the bank's strategy effectively, and the employees for their dedication and commitment.

In response to a question during the meeting regarding exposure to NMC Healthcare Company, Masoud Hayat, Vice Chairman of the Board and Group CEO, clarified that Burgan Bank has not provided any facilities to NMC and has no direct or indirect exposure to the aforementioned company.



AHMEDABAD: An electronic engineer shows a sanitized banknote after using his brainchild automatic currency sanitizer machine, during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Ahmedabad. — AFP

India plans to resume some manufacturing

NEW DELHI: India is planning to restart some manufacturing after April 15 to help offset the economic damage of a nationwide coronavirus lockdown, two government sources said, even as it weighs extending the lockdown. The 21-day lockdown of India's more than 1.3 billion people is due to end today, but the government is widely expected to extend it until the end of the month, with the number of coronavirus cases rising to 9,152 and the domestic death toll reaching 308, yesterday.

One of the sources said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed some ministries to come up with plans to open up some crucial industries as the livelihoods of the poor were being hit.

The source said the government was considering allowing the resumption of some operations under guidelines that were being drawn up. The trade and industries ministry did not reply to an email seeking comment. The government's principal spokesman, K S Dhatwalia, declined to comment.

The sources, who spoke to Reuters

on Sunday, asked not to be identified as the plans are still under discussion. Separately, in a letter seen by Reuters, the industries ministry has recommended restarting some manufacturing in the autos, textiles, defense, electronics and other sectors.

The ministry said in the letter, addressed to the home ministry, that this could be achieved via reduced shifts with lower staff numbers to ensure social distancing. "We believe some industries could be allowed with reasonable safeguards as long as social distancing norms are maintained," the second official, from the industries department, said. The home ministry and the Prime Minister's Office are likely to take a final call on the recommendations this week, the sources said.

The sources also said that other ministries would soon submit plans on allowing partial resumption in other sectors. India's economy, which was already growing at its slowest pace in six years before the onset of the coronavirus, is set to take a severe hit amid the lockdown, say economists, who warn that unemployment could rise to record levels.

The lockdown resulted in many thousands of daily wage laborers losing their jobs in cities and leaving to return to their homes, raising the risk of spreading the coronavirus into the countryside. — Reuters

\$1.6bn claimed by US released in Luxembourg: Iran

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said Sunday the country had won a legal "victory" over \$1.6 billion of its assets that had long been frozen on a US request in Luxembourg. Tehran and Washington have long been arch enemies and tensions have risen sharply since President Donald Trump in 2018 withdrew from a nuclear accord and reimposed stinging sanctions.

In a separate dispute, a New York court in 2012 ordered Iran to pay \$7 billion in damages over the September 11 attacks, arguing that it had aided Al-Qaeda by allowing its militants to travel through its territory. Iran has rejected the accusation and refused to pay the money.

Rouhani said in a televised cabinet meeting Sunday that "our central bank, our foreign ministry [have] recently won a very good victory in a legal battle". "\$1.6 billion of our money was in Luxembourg and the Americans had put their hands on it," he said. After trying for months, "we succeeded some days ago and freed this money from the Americans' grasp," he declared.

The Luxembourg Court of Cassation had devoted a hearing in April 2019 to the case of Iranian assets frozen there on a US request, according to the news site Paperjam. The court is yet to make its decision public. But Rouhani hailed a victory in a "difficult situation" for Iran, which has been battling the Middle East's most deadly novel coronavirus outbreak. COVID-19 has so far killed over 4,400 people and infected more than 71,600 in the Islamic republic, according to official health ministry figures. Sanctions-hit Iran has requested a \$5 billion emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund to battle the outbreak. But the US, which effectively holds a veto at the IMF, has signalled it has no intention of allowing the loan, alleging that Iran would use the money to fund "terror abroad". Tehran in 2017 unsuccessfully attempted to repatriate the \$1.6 billion frozen in the Clearstream clearing house, a financial company based in Luxembourg. A judge denied the demand at the time and ruled that the assets would remain temporarily frozen in the small EU nation. — AFP

Warehouse workers risk virus to ship Gucci shades

NEW YORK: As US authorities ordered shutdowns of non-essential businesses to fight coronavirus, retailer Nordstrom Inc closed hundreds of stores and gave in-store workers three weeks' pay, calling their safety its top priority. That benefit did not extend to Meagan Christensen, 34, an Iowa warehouse worker who packs online orders of Birkenstock sandals, swimsuits and \$60 face cream. The facility recently closed for cleaning after a co-worker contracted COVID-19, but it reopened 36 hours later. With Americans stuck at home, warehouse workers scramble to fill surging online orders. Some, such as Amazon.com Inc and Walmart Inc employees, often ship groceries and other essentials. Others risk their health for furniture or fashion retailers such as IKEA, Wayfair Inc or Macy's Inc.

Government stay-home orders have carve-outs for warehouses or e-commerce operations, allowing a wide array of retailers to piggyback on exemptions intended primarily to ensure the flow of necessities. The loophole means a large segment of retail workers - who often have scant benefits or sick time - must choose between their health and their paycheck. Some retailers, including Wayfair, Kohl's and Macy's, have given workers letters from executives to show police if they are stopped while commuting.

"A lot of people are scared" at Nordstrom, said Christensen, who says she earns less than \$40,000 per year and is enrolled in the company's health insurance plan. "We're selling designer-line apparel and cosmetics. None of this is make-it-or-break-it for the current situation." Nordstrom said its online operations are keeping its business afloat - and ensuring workers' livelihoods for the long term. "What's the opposite scenario? Everything gets shut down completely, and we can't afford to pay your benefits?" said Gigi Ganatra Duff, a Nordstrom corporate affairs vice president. "And we can't afford to hire you back when it's over?"

As in-store sales evaporate, retailers are chasing a captive audience - stuck inside, bored, tempted to shop online. Macy's ads, echoing others, tout "our lowest prices of the season right now!"

Those orders are filled by warehouses employing hundreds of people. Stephanie Morris, 57, works for IKEA in New Jersey, shipping sofas and shelves. She says she checks her temperature before each shift. "People don't understand that, when you order something, there's got to be someone there to pull that merchandise," she said. Reuters interviewed three dozen warehouse and fulfillment workers and reviewed COVID-19 wage-and-benefit policies at nine retailers - Amazon, Walmart, Target Corp, Nordstrom, Wayfair, O'Reilly Automotive Inc, IKEA, Macy's and Kohl's. Five of them - Amazon, Walmart, Nordstrom, Kohl's and Target - extended temporary \$2-per-hour raises to workers, some of whom make less than \$15 an hour. Wayfair offered \$4 raises.

The firms said they prioritize safety by cleaning, encouraging social distancing and providing protective gear. Kohl's, Walmart and IKEA said their workers' temperatures are checked before shifts, although several IKEA workers said that's not happening at their warehouses.

IKEA and Wayfair called their products essential to people who suddenly

need home-office furniture or other household items. Consumers depend on "companies like Wayfair to keep them supplied with the items they need for their homes during these challenging times," Wayfair said, adding that the government has recognized its crucial role. A recent report from the Brookings Institution think tank estimated that between 49 million and 62 million US workers - 34 percent to 43 percent of the total workforce - are employed in industries deemed to be essential under what the organization called a "sweeping" federal definition. Those industries, Brookings found, tend to employ lower-wage workers who often have less health insurance than most Americans.

Labor relations and public policy experts said the crisis poses dilemmas for employers and workers trying to balance safety with financial survival. For consumers, the ability to shop online makes "this extraordinary period more comfortable," said Erica Groshen, a Cornell University labor relations professor. Online sales amount to an understandable "survival strategy" for a sector that is important to consumers, investors and the economy, said Thomas Kochar, a management professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But staying open also creates an obligation to give workers more say in benefits and protections.

"The companies may view these workers as essential," he said, "but they're not treating them as essential." Workers themselves are often torn about continuing to work. One of Christensen's Nordstrom co-workers, Makenzie McMullen, 28, called the warehouse environment a "ticking time bomb," and yet said she was "very conflicted" about whether to stay home.

"I do love my job," she said. "I wouldn't have been there the last three years if I didn't."

'Every sale counts right now!'

Luxury retailer Neiman Marcus Group has asked, but not required, workers to report to shuttered stores to package online orders for sweaters, handbags and other items. "Every sale counts right now!" wrote a Neiman manager at Pennsylvania's King of Prussia Mall, in an email to employees. The pandemic has put Neiman in especially dire straits: It is straining to make payments on about \$4 billion in debt as it prepares for a possible bankruptcy. Neiman did not comment on whether it has extended additional benefits, but said its precautions include cleaning and temperature checks.

Some retailers offer more generous pandemic-related benefits than others. Macy's gave e-commerce employees two weeks of extra paid leave to use anytime. Nordstrom said it would pay infected workers' medical bills and salaries until they recover. Other companies, such as Amazon, Walmart, Target, O'Reilly, Wayfair and IKEA, offered warehouse workers one or two weeks of additional leave if they test positive or get quarantined by a medical professional. IKEA's policy also applies to workers showing COVID-19 or flu symptoms, those with family members showing symptoms, and workers with underlying health conditions that heighten the threat of the virus, the company said. — Reuters

UK extends BoE overdraft over virus crisis

LONDON: The British government expanded its overdraft with the Bank of England to help weather coronavirus turmoil. The government's "ways and means facility" - effectively its overdraft at the BoE - is also being used to temporarily help finance spending on COVID-19 emergency measures, the Treasury and the central bank announced in a joint statement.

A limit of £370 million (\$455 million, 420 million euros) has been extended by an undisclosed amount, while the government has pledged stimulus worth billions of pounds. The government will continue to use markets as the main source of cash, while its virus-emergency response will be "fully funded" via normal debt channels, it said.

'Period of disruption'

"HM Treasury and the Bank of England have agreed to extend temporarily the use of

the... long-established Ways and Means facility," read a joint statement. "As a temporary measure, this will provide a short-term source of additional liquidity to the government if needed to smooth its cashflows and support the orderly functioning of markets, through the period of disruption from COVID-19." Any money drawn from the overdraft facility will be paid back as soon as possible before the end of the year, according to the statement. As Britain's coronavirus crisis accelerated, Britain ordered a three-week lockdown on March 23, shutting down swathes of the economy.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak had unveiled a series of multi-billion-pound packages to help those affected. Notably, the government has stepped in to back up employee wages by up to 80 percent, give tax holidays to businesses and boost welfare payments.

Economic firefighting

The Bank of England has been at the forefront of Britain's economic firefighting in response to the pandemic, which has so far killed more than 7,000 people in the UK. The bank had last month slashed its key interest rate to a record-low 0.1 percent and expanded its quantitative easing policy - under which

it buys UK government and corporate bonds - to £645 billion. At the same time, the Financial Conduct Authority watchdog is seeking to ease pressure on commercial banking customers hit by the coronavirus crisis. The FCA, which is a division of the BoE, confirmed Thursday various "targeted temporary measures" for consumer credit products. The package includes a temporary payment freeze on loans and credit cards for up to three months and reduced overdraft costs for consumers who have been negatively impacted.

'Calm before storm'

Separately, official data showed Britain's gross domestic product inched down 0.1 percent in February as floods hit construction. That dashed market expectations for a gain of 0.1 percent, and followed 0.1-percent expansion in January. Paul Dales, chief UK Economist at Capital Economics, described the latest ONS data as "the calm before the storm of a lifetime". "The 0.1-percent month-on-month fall in GDP in February will be the last figure that looks anything like 'normal' for a while as the coronavirus lockdown will mean that in March and April GDP will fall at a speed and magnitude no one has ever seen," he added. — AFP

Health & Science

Coronavirus: Latest global developments

PARIS: Here are the latest developments in the coronavirus crisis:

China imported cases rise

China records its highest daily toll of imported virus cases, confirming 97 new infections.

Over 112,000 dead worldwide

At least 112,510 people have died worldwide from the coronavirus in over 190 countries and territories, according to an AFP tally around 1900 GMT Sunday based on official sources. There have been 1,824,950 reported infections since the virus emerged in China in December. The United States has 21,489 deaths, making it the hardest-hit country. It also has the highest number of reported infections with 546,874 cases. With 77,129 deaths out of 932,205 diagnosed cases, Europe is the hardest-hit continent. Italy has 19,899 deaths, Spain 16,972, France 14,393 and Britain 10,612.

Spectre of recession

The World Bank warns South Asia is on course for its worst economic performance in 40 years, with decades of progress in the battle against poverty at risk. It slashes 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".

'Easter of solitude'

Pope Francis livestreams Easter Sunday mass to the world's 1.3 billion Catholics, from an empty Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. He calls for a reduction or forgiveness of poor nation's debts and an "immediate" ceasefire in global conflicts. In Jerusalem, a handful of priests celebrate Easter at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest site in Christianity, closed

this Easter for the first time in at least a century.

Confinement goes on

Lebanon extends its lockdown until April 26. Syria extends the closure of schools and universities until May 2. Argentina extends its obligatory confinement until April 26 in big cities, but considers relaxing the measures in rural areas.

UK PM out of hospital

Britain's virus-stricken Prime Minister Boris Johnson is discharged from hospital after spending three days in intensive care. Downing Street says that on the advice of his medical team, he will not immediately return to work and will recover at Chequers, the country estate for British prime ministers. Johnson had earlier praised staff treating him in a state-run hospital.

Aid

Canadian lawmakers pass a wage subsidy program heralded as the largest economic measure in the country since World War II, to help businesses and their employees. The British government says \$200 million (228 million euros) additional aid will go to British charities and international organizations to assist developing countries fight COVID-19 and help prevent a second wave.

Oil deal

Top oil-producing countries agree to record output cuts in order to boost plummeting oil prices due to the coronavirus crisis and a Russia-Saudi price war. Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump hail the new OPEC-plus oil deal as if "great importance". OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo describes the cuts as "historic". — AFP

'Medibot' to do rounds on Malaysian virus wards



GOMBAK: Engineering professors pose with the version two prototype of the IUM Medibot medical robot, being developed for health workers to treat patients without risking infection from the COVID-19 coronavirus, at the International Islamic University Malaysia in Gombak. — AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian scientists have created a barrel-shaped robot on wheels that they hope will make the rounds on hospital wards to check on coronavirus patients, reducing health workers' risk of infection. "Medibot" is a 1.5 metre tall (five foot) white robot, equipped with a camera and screen via which patients can communicate remotely with medics.

The invention, built by scientists at the International Islamic University Malaysia, is also fitted with a device to check patients' temperatures remotely. It is aimed at helping nurses and doctors working on the wards with social distancing, Zulkifli Zainal Abidin, a member of the team

behind the invention, told AFP.

It cost about 15,000 ringgit (\$3,500) to develop, and the university plans to trial it soon in their own private hospital, which does not treat virus patients, said Zulkifli. If that proves a success, the scientists hope it can be used in government hospitals where people with COVID-19 are sent. Malaysia has reported 4,683 coronavirus cases, including 76 deaths. From Thailand to Israel, robots are being used in the fight against the coronavirus, which has killed over 110,000 people worldwide. They are being increasingly relied on as fast, efficient, contagion-proof champions in the war against the virus. — AFP

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Italian chef Aldo Giaquinto cooks breakfast for him and his wife Vera Kozlovskaja at a mini kitchen in his car in Miami.—AFP photos



An aerial view shows Italian chef Aldo Giaquinto (left) and his wife Vera Kozlovskaja, cooking in a mini kitchen in the trunk of their car parked in a Walmart parking lot in Miami.



Vera Kozlovskaja, wife of Italian chef Aldo Giaquinto, cleans the portable bed inside their car.

Virus stalls globetrotters' trip in a Florida parking lot

They have been traveling the world for four years on an ambitious trek that has taken them to 50 countries on five continents. But the coronavirus pandemic has stopped the couple in their tracks. And now they have been stuck in Florida for two weeks, living in their car in a shopping center parking lot north of Miami, their visas about to expire. "We had a dream," said Aldo Giaquinto, a 38-year-old Italian, "and our dream was to drive around the world with a car." For four years they were able to live that dream.

But then came the pandemic. The travel restrictions imposed by country after country were like doors slamming around the world. And now, Giaquinto added, "We're stuck here in Florida." He and his wife Vera Kozlovskaja, a 35-year-old Moldovan, quit their jobs in 2016 to set off on their far-flung travels in a black Toyota Land Cruiser Prado nicknamed "Toto" — short for Toyota, but also a tribute to the late Italian comic actor. She worked in information technology in England, where they lived; he had a fish and chips restaurant.

Swimming with the manatees

Their ambitious voyage began with a trip through the Nordic countries. From there they made the long crossing through Russia and China and then down to Southeast Asia before touring through Australia. From there they sent Toto by ship to Uruguay. The couple spent 2018 driving slowly up through South America to Panama, before heading north through Central America, and then for the past year driving through Canada and the United States.

All was going well. They went swimming with Florida's huge but gentle manatees. They were among the last tourists to visit the Florida Keys, the colorful island chain that extends down near Cuba. Then came the coronavirus.



Italian chef Aldo Giaquinto (right) and his wife Vera Kozlovskaja eat their breakfast in a park near a Walmart parking lot.



Italian chef Aldo Giaquinto (left) and his wife Vera Kozlovskaja share their breakfast with people in a park.

Stranded but 'lucky'

And now, said Giaquinto, "we are stranded here in Florida." Still, he added, "our life has not changed. Somehow we're lucky" and have stayed healthy. With their tourist visas set to expire on Tuesday, however, the couple is growing increasingly nervous. They have applied for an extension but so far heard nothing back. So for now, their Toyota remains parked in front of a Walmart store in Hallandale, 20 miles (30 kilometers) north of Miami. The car has become the couple's home. They sleep and wash up in it. The "kitchen" is a stove in the trunk. Internet connection comes free from nearby stores.

'Good people'

The couple normally relies on public facilities, like restrooms on public beaches, but "right now

everything is closed," Kozlovskaja said. That, fortunately, does not include the nearby Walmart store. "It is a little difficult, but we try to keep positive, hoping for the best," she said. "We remember there's people in much worse situations, we are grateful with everything we have." Despite the setbacks, they have kept up their spirits and especially appreciate the support of locals who drop by to chat or offer food. "We are overwhelmed by the amount of people trying to help," Kozlovskaja said. "It's amazing how many good people are around."

The couple's Instagram account, @alvetoexpedition, tells of better times: visits to California's spectacular Lake Tahoe; to the Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt flats, in Bolivia; to the breathtaking Cerro de los Siete Colores (Hill of Seven Colors) in the Argentine Andes; to the mosques of Brunei, Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple and the Red Square

in Moscow... The plan was to send the Toyota by ship to South Africa while they fly to Johannesburg. At the end of the African leg of their trip, the couple looked forward to settling in Italy, where they have an apartment under construction. And with so many new experiences under their belts, the couple has drawn up a long list of projects they hope to undertake back in Italy to help the environment. But for now, everything has come to a halt. They hope to get their visas extended and then wait out the virus in Florida until the crisis passes and they're able to travel to Africa. "We will wait," Aldo said. "Like everybody is doing."—AFP



This combination photo shows traffic along Mahabandoola road, with the Sule pagoda in the background, in central Yangon on January 18, 2017 (top) and a trishaw rider cycling on the same road on the first day of Myanmar's New Year water festival, also known as Thingyan, in Yangon on April 12, 2020, amid restrictions put in place to halt the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus.—AFP photos



This combination photo shows people resting around the Independence Monument at Mahabandoola Park in Yangon on March 17, 2020 (top) and the same park on the first day of Myanmar's New Year water festival, also known as Thingyan, in Yangon on April 12, 2020.



This combination photo shows punks gathering to celebrate on the eve of Myanmar's New Year water festival, also known as Thingyan, at Mahabandoola park in front of city hall in Yangon on April 12, 2019 (top) and the same park empty, due to concerns about the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, on the first day of Thingyan on April 12, 2020.



This combination photo shows revelers gesturing as they take part in celebrations marking Thingyan, a water festival which brings in the country's new year, in Yangon on April 14, 2016 (top) and vehicles parked along the same street on the first day of Thingyan in Yangon on April 12, 2020.

Silent streets for water festival in Myanmar lockdown

Myanmar's New Year festival of Thingyan is the country's biggest public holiday — normally a week of nation-wide celebration and water-fights, with soaked revelers partying late into the night. But this year, in an echo of cancelled Easter celebrations elsewhere in the world, the country's commercial hub Yangon is locked down, with residents confined indoors because of the coronavirus. Food delivery bicycles and rickshaws have commandeered the city's usually traffic-choked streets after the government ordered people to stay home unless for essential food and healthcare needs.

By Sunday Myanmar officially had just 38 confirmed cases — including three deaths — but many fear the low number of tests mean the real figures are likely many times higher. Images from last year's holiday show a different city, hoses drenching cheer-

ing crowds dancing to deafening techno beats pumped out from mammoth loudspeakers. This year the silence is broken only by the cawing of crows and cooing of pigeons, and the motor of an occasional taxi searching for custom. "Thingyan's in the heart of every Myanmar person," a sad Soe Moe Aung, 36, told AFP. Both the public holiday and lockdown is due to end next Sunday, but efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus could be extended. Yangon-based public health expert Dr Frank Smithuis warns any sustained lockdown would be "devastating" for Myanmar — and other underdeveloped countries in the region — where many live hand-to-mouth.—AFP



This combination photo shows pedestrians crossing a street in Yangon June 5, 2016 (top) and a man cycling along the same street on the first day of Myanmar's New Year water festival, also known as Thingyan, in Yangon on April 12, 2020.



This combination photo shows cars making their way on a street as revelers dance to music during celebrations marking the beginning of the Buddhist New Year, or Thingyan as it is known locally, in Yangon on April 14, 2017 (top) and a general view of the same street on the first day of Thingyan in Yangon on April 12, 2020.

Lifestyle | Features

Millions watch **Andrea Bocelli** sing in empty Milan cathedral

Italian tenor and opera singer Andrea Bocelli sings during a rehearsal on a deserted Piazza del Duomo in central Milan on Sunday, prior to an evening performance without public.—AFP photos

Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli performed a solo Easter concert from an empty Milan Cathedral streamed live to millions of people around the world in coronavirus lockdown. The "Music for Hope" performance, which was streamed on YouTube from Milan's Duomo cathedral, has been watched more than 22 million times so far. Accompanied by an organist, Bocelli sang four songs inside the magnificent Gothic building and ended with a rendition of "Amazing Grace" from the cathedral steps with a montage of images showing the empty streets of Paris, London and New York.

"On the day in which we celebrate the trust in a life that triumphs, I'm honored and happy to answer 'Si' to the invitation of the City and the Duomo of Milan," the visually impaired

star said in a message played before the short concert. "Thanks to music, streamed live, bringing together millions of clasped hands everywhere in the world, we will hug this wounded Earth's pulsing heart," he said. The Lombardy region, of which Milan is the capital, has been the hardest hit in Italy's coronavirus crisis, with more than 9,000 deaths. "Andrea Bocelli is a true gift from God. This was beautiful and just what I needed to see and feel right now. Thank you Mr. Bocelli for sharing your gift of your voice and music with us," wrote YouTube viewer Peggy Young. Churches in Italy remain closed and even prayers given by Pope Francis on Easter Sunday were livestreamed.—AFP

**Trashy fashion:** Dressing up to take the bins out in virus lockdown

Staying at home all day is rubbish, so people around the world are dressing up to take the bins out and sharing photos of their outfits online to cheer up others in lockdown. Wearing evening gowns, a teddy-bear costume or full cosplay, thousands are using the garden path as a catwalk to show off the fruits of ample time spent in isolation. "As crazy as I feel dressing up at home, it's the only thing keeping me sane during isolation. Wheeling my bin out in style helps me feel happy again," said Victoria Anthony, 30, a DJ who lives in Sydney.

Anthony, who posted a photo of herself in a cocktail dress on Instagram under the hashtag #BinIsolationOuting, said all her gigs had been cancelled because of the pandemic, which has sparked enforced stay-at-home orders affecting billions across the world. The trend began in Australia but has inspired jokey posts from as far as Texas, the UK and

the Netherlands. Bus driver Stuart Cunningham, from Glasgow in Scotland, posted a picture of himself taking out the bins in a kilt with a bottle of whisky. And Christine Leland shared a photo of her husband wheeling a bin through the Canadian snow in a Superman T-shirt, wig and red towel for a cape. Others have gone all-out with horror clown outfits or whole-body suits made to look like characters from sci-fi series, from Star Wars to Gundam.

For Simon Wait, an Australian superhero fanatic who has built "dozens of costumes and props" over the last decade, bin night was the perfect occasion to don his huge, eight-foot (2.5-metre) tall Hulkbuster outfit. It all began when Danielle Askew, a kindergarten teacher from Hervey Bay in the Australian state of Queensland, started a dedicated Facebook group that has now grown to 470,000 members. "A friend put a post up on her Facebook page saying that she was

excited it was garbage night and she gets to go out," the 47-year-old told AFP. "I dared her to dress up to take it out and she said she would take that challenge. I said I would too, and I'd make a Facebook group for us to laugh at, to have a giggle at each other." Askew said she was happy to have "cheered so many people up" and had received messages from users saying they were feeling depressed or scared about the virus, but that looking at her page had made them smile. "There are just so many wonderful, creative people out there," she said.—AFP



This handout photo shows Simon Wait posing for a photo taken by his wife Melanie Wait as he takes out the rubbish bin dressed up in Iron Man costume in Newcastle in the Australian state of New South Wales.—AFP photos



Jodie Bignall posing for a photo taken by her 12-year-old daughter as she takes out the rubbish bin dressed as Snow White in Adelaide.



Victoria Anthony posing in a sparkly evening gown for her friend and neighbour Skye Paez as she takes out the rubbish bin in Sydney.

Third Los Angeles woman added to new Weinstein sex assault case

Disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein was charged by Los Angeles prosecutors on Friday with sexually assaulting a third woman, as authorities there build their own case against the convicted rapist. Weinstein, 68, is already in prison in New York state after being sentenced to 23 years in jail for rape and sexual assault. The new charge of "sexual battery by restraint" will form part of a separate trial he faces in Los Angeles over allegations he assaulted multiple women in local hotels, with extradition proceedings under way. "We are continuing to build and strengthen our case," said Los Angeles prosecutor Jackie Lacey.



In this file photo Harvey Weinstein arrives at the Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City.—AFP

"If we find new evidence of a previously unreported crime, as we did here, we will investigate and determine whether additional criminal charges should be filed," she added. The new charge alleges Weinstein sexually assaulted an unnamed woman in Beverly Hills in May 2010 — just within the 10-year statute of limitations. He has already been charged with the rape and sexual assault of two other women on consecutive nights in 2013. Two additional Los Angeles cases against Weinstein are no longer being pursued as those accusers did not want to testify. It is not known when the trial will begin, but Los Angeles prosecutors confirmed Friday they have initiated a request for Weinstein's transfer. "Upon his arrival, he will be arraigned on the amended complaint. Once a court date is set, the public will be notified," a statement read.—AFP

Evolve or perish: Virus reshaping art auction market

The coronavirus pandemic poses a huge global challenge to auction houses large and small, but those that have embraced technology could prosper as nervous investors seek a safe haven, according to experts. Major London-based house Sotheby's has closed its London, Hong Kong, Dubai, Geneva, Milan, Paris and New York offices, throwing their marquee May auctions into doubt. Main rival Christie's, meanwhile, said it was "working swiftly" to reschedule postponed auctions. "It's a threat to all of us, but I do think we'll get through it," Giles Peppiatt, director for modern and contemporary African art at fellow London-based auction giant Bonhams, told AFP.

Although no longer able to hold live auctions, the pandemic has accelerated the move to online sales. "We thank our stars that we have online bidding," said Peppiatt. "When online sales first started, all the auctioneers thought it would suck the life out of the auctions. But it's amazing that the thing we feared most at the time is probably going to be our saviour." Jen Zatorski, president of Christie's America, told a media conference call that the company had responded by accelerating the reprogramming of its online sale platform using its own technology developed over the last

decade. "The art market and our clients are ready and wishing for this type of digital engagement and transaction," she explained.

'Defining moment'

The outbreak poses different challenges for various sized auction houses, and for different segments of the market, experts said. "I think small auction houses... will really struggle through this because they just don't have the... liquidity to ride it out," Clare McAndrew, CEO of Arts Economics, told AFP. But Pierce Noonan, the chairman and CEO of London-based auction house Dix Noonan Webb, said that nimble smaller firms could thrive. "Number one: It's going to be technology," he said. "This is a defining moment."

His house, which specializes in small collectibles such as watches and jewelry, is planning to hold a live online sale next week, with the auctioneer presiding from home, if necessary. A cut of the proceeds will go to Britain's National Health Service. "Our website traffic, it's never been busier," he added, explaining that people were stuck at home with little else to spend their money on.

'Art survives'

Having tangible assets could also become more attractive as other investment options collapse. A "sad truth is that art survives disaster," art economics expert Kathryn Brown, from Britain's Loughborough University, told AFP. "People continued to buy art during the First World War. You can look at correspondence between the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, writing from the trenches to a dealer in Paris, telling him what art to buy." Christie's president Jussi Pytkkanen said they had not experienced "falling appetite from our buyers." A bigger issue could be supply, explained McAndrew. "The problem is people might perceive it as a poor time to sell." So those in search of a cut-price Picasso could be disappointed. "This idea of panic offers is a little bit rubbish," she said. "They tend to sell from the bottom of the pile." This seemed to be borne out by Christie's US chairman Marc Porter, who explained that "we have not seen, yet, people who need to raise capital immediately."—AFP



Experts don't believe in-person auctions for major works of art like Leonardo da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi" are at risk, but the coronavirus crisis is likely to push the industry even further to online business.—AFP

Russians battle confinement blues with DIY artwork challenge

From laying out shrimp to resemble Henri Matisse's "Dance" to cross-dressing and posing for Leonardo Da Vinci's "Lady with an Ermine", Russians have embraced a challenge to re-create famous artworks while under lockdown. As boredom and restlessness set in under coronavirus quarantine, internet users are posting DIY versions of museum masterpieces in a Facebook group that is approaching 400,000 members. "The proliferation of our project has been even more exponential than that of the virus," jokes Yekaterina Brudnaya-Chelyadinova, who founded the Izoizolyatsia (Artistic Isolation) group to fight lockdown blues.

The group follows similar artwork challenges started in March by Getty Museum and some dedicated Instagram accounts, but Russians seem to have heeded the call with particular gusto. Brudnaya-Chelyadinova, a 38-year-old employee of Mail.ru group, said she was initially looking for a distraction when she posted a photo of her husband dressed up as Vincent Van Gogh's famous self-portrait. "It was easy to do with an old straw hat found in the closet and a quick red dye for his beard," she told AFP. In response to her post, she received an elaborate recreation of Marc Chagall's "The Lovers". A couple pretended to fly through the sky by perching on a stool, with the city below built out of Legos. "And it was off," she says.

One of the masterpieces created from what's found around the house was "Dance" by Matisse, which shows pink dancers in a circle. The version posted by Natalia Shevchenko constructed the dancers out of boiled shrimp and walnuts, laid out on a blue plastic bag. The remarkably effective result has garnered a thousand shares. The rules are strict: any photo editing software is prohibited, and only pictures taken at home can be posted. But even with these restrictions, participants have let their imaginations run wild, the output often hilarious with a touch of self-deprecation. One couple posted three images made in their Saint Petersburg flat, including Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son". "The lockdown situation isn't easy, but we're hoping for the best, that's why we chose this

painting," explained 48-year-old Ruben Monakhov, himself a professional artist.

In their version of the Rembrandt, Ruben is the prodigal son, kneeling with a dirty bare foot sticking out from under her bathrobe. The group features participants of all age groups and generous use of pets. One spaniel stands in for Albrecht Durer in his curly-haired self-portrait. One Facebook user from the Moscow region, Polina Vasilyeva, posted a popular version of Ivan Kramskoi's "Portrait of The Unknown Woman", interpreted by her 88-year-old grandmother in her living room. "We began participating in this great project for our grandmothers," Vasilyeva wrote. "And today, she made this. Isn't she great?"—AFP



This undated handout picture shows the reconstruction of Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal Son" by Ruben Monakhov and his family members in Saint Petersburg.—AFP

Saudi quarantine temporary lifeline for struggling hotels

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has quarantined thousands of people in hotels, some in luxury suites, to combat COVID-19, throwing a temporary lifeline to an industry struggling just months after tourist visas were launched. Faced with nearly 4,500 novel coronavirus infections - the highest in the Gulf - the petro-state has halted air travel, locked down cities and imposed nationwide curfews in a crisis that has dealt a blow to the nascent tourism sector.

Offering a ray of hope, however, the government is splurging millions of dollars to quarantine thousands of overseas travellers and those exposed to infected people in otherwise empty hotels around the kingdom. One four-star hotel in central Riyadh with 100-plus rooms was left with only five guests in mid-March when the Saudi government offered four million riyals (\$1.06 million) a month for it to be used as a quarantine facility, an industry source told AFP.

One of its larger sister hotels was offered six million riyals, added the source, who requested the names of the properties be withheld because of the stigma attached to the disease. "This is better than running an empty hotel," the source said. "The staff had been preparing for layoffs, up to 50 percent pay cuts or leave without pay."

But things are looking up, for now. Such was the desperation from a slump in business that multiple hotel chains are chasing similar deals with the government, despite some reservations that being linked with COVID-19 could hurt their brand image

in the long term, the source said. Nearly 1,900 rooms in hotels and other tourism facilities in Riyadh had been reserved for quarantine cases, along with more than 2,800 in Makkah and another 1,900 in the kingdom's eastern region, the tourism ministry said on its website at the end of March.

This week the ministry said 11,000 rooms around the kingdom had been prepared to quarantine Saudis stranded abroad who are expected to return to the country. The government spending comes despite a precipitous fall in state revenue as oil prices plunge to multi-year lows.

'Vacation'

The ministry has said it is committed to hosting Saudi returnees, including in the "most prestigious hotels". Saudi football coach Abdulhakem Al-Tuwaijri told AFP his free-of-charge quarantine experience in Makkah after he returned with his team from a football training camp in Barcelona "beats any five-star hotel in Europe". Despite the pressures of round-the-clock confinement, Tuwaijri - who was put up in a plush suite - said it felt like "going on a vacation".

A group of South Asian transit passengers at one Riyadh hotel took advantage of the all-expenses-paid quarantine to order "too much" room service, the industry source said. But the quarantine system has also seen complaints of misplaced luggage and food delays from some passengers who were hauled

by authorities from Saudi airports to hotels without any prior warning.

Saudi nationalists have attacked such critics online as being ungrateful. "Saudi Arabia is not a champion of human rights, but it is keen to show it is pampering people quarantined in hotels," Quentin de Pimodan of the Research Institute for European and American Studies told AFP. "With this, it is hitting two birds with one stone - it is also trying to save hotels and its nascent tourism industry."

Saudi Arabia's hotel industry faces a sharp downturn after the kingdom launched tourist visas last September with much fanfare and ambitions to welcome 100 million visitors by 2030. The kingdom has spent billions in an attempt to build a tourism industry from scratch, one of the main planks of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's drive to wean the economy off its decades-long dependence on oil revenues.

The announcement led to a rush to build new hotels, with officials at the time estimating 500,000 rooms will be required nationwide over the coming decade to fill the current infrastructure gap. More than 138 hotel projects with 54,143 rooms were due to be unveiled in the kingdom in 2019-20, according to industry projections.

But the projects are bound to suffer delays and funding setbacks amid COVID-19 shutdowns, said the manager of a five-star Riyadh hotel that declined government offers to be used to quaran-



RIYADH: Saudi writer and journalist Taghreed Al-Tassan takes a selfie in a hotel where she has been quarantined after testing positive for coronavirus on April 1, 2020. — AFP

tine people. He said such deals offered a "short-term cash benefit" at a time when his hotel was forced to slash staff salaries and force many to go on unpaid leave. But, he added, the move could affect the hotels' brands and guests will be afraid to return to a "hotel associated with the virus". — AFP

Virus 'disaster in the making' in war-torn Syria

PARIS: As Europe and the United States struggle to contain the coronavirus pandemic, experts warn that disaster looms in war-torn Syria, where hospitals are unable to meet existing needs and hygiene conditions are dire. The outbreak has infected more than 1.8 million people and killed more than 112,000 around the world since emerging in China in December last year. In Syria, the Damascus government has closed borders, forbidden movement between provinces and shut schools and restaurants in an effort to stem the spread of the virus.

Official numbers are low with two deaths and 19 confirmed cases, but only 100 patients are being tested daily, with half of the testing carried out in the capital Damascus. And while the government has regained control of most of the country after almost a decade of civil war, some areas are still held by pro-Ankara rebels and Kurds. Experts accuse Damascus of minimizing its death toll for political motives.

"Medical staff believe that there are many people who are dying in Syria with the symptoms of the virus," said Zaki Mehchy, senior consulting fellow at London-based think tank Chatham House. "But the security agencies ask them or order them not to mention it, especially to the media," he added.

'Impossible physical distancing'

Aid groups are sounding the alarm on the potentially devastating consequences of a severe outbreak in Syria, where nine years of war have hit hospitals and left them ill-equipped to deal with the pandemic. "There is a disaster in the making," said Emile Hokayem, Middle East analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London (IISS). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), less than two-thirds of hospitals were up and running at the end of 2019 and 70 percent of healthcare workers have fled since the war began in 2011.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned that physical distancing is impossible in displacement camps in Idlib, the last rebel-held province, which was already enduring a



HAZANO, Syria: Syrian youths wave to a convoy of Turkish military reinforcements advancing near this town in the countryside of Idlib province on Saturday on the high-way linking the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey to Idlib. — AFP

humanitarian crisis before the pandemic started. "A lack of food, clean water and exposure to cold weather have already left hundreds of thousands of people in poor health, making them even more vulnerable," said Misty Buswell from aid group International Rescue Committee (IRC), adding that the devastation in Idlib could be "unimaginable".

The IRC said that almost all of the 105 intensive care beds and 30 adult ventilators in Idlib were already in use. WHO said testing would start in Idlib at the end of March, but little help is to be expected from Damascus, according to Mazen Gharibah, associate researcher at the London School of Economics. "One cannot simply assume that the regime - which was systematically targeting the hospitals three weeks ago - is going to provide the same hospitals with medical equipment

next week," he said. Activists have repeatedly accused the government of targeting hospitals in rebel-held areas, a charge denied by Damascus.

A ceasefire negotiated at the beginning of March for the northwest region between the two main foreign power brokers in Syria's war, Russia and Turkey, has so far held. But according to the IRC, "the security and political vacuum the pandemic will create is likely to be exploited by actors involved in the Syrian conflict - including ISIS - to serve their interests".

For Syria expert Fabrice Balanche, associate professor and research director at the University of Lyon 2, "this epidemic is a way for Damascus to show that the Syrian state is efficient, and all territories should be returned under its governance". But Gharibah said politicization of the pandemic by

the Syrian government was catastrophic, accusing the regime of "using the current pandemic for its own political gains by gambling with the lives of millions of people".

Experts say there is a risk that the pandemic will lead to a decrease in humanitarian assistance as donor countries focus on kickstarting their economies. "With attention and resources at home focused on recovery, it is going to be a lot harder to make a political case for sustaining humanitarian operations abroad," Hokayem said. Aid groups warned against cuts in aid at a time when needs are critical. "Should we fail, not only will the most vulnerable pay the price today for the inaction of the international community, the consequences will be felt across the globe for years, if not decades, to come," said IRC president David Miliband. — AFP

Top oil producers agree on 'historic'...

Continued from Page 1

cuts in May and June followed by a gradual reduction in cuts until April 2022. Barkindo added that the deal "paved the way for a global alliance with the participation of the G20".

Following extensive efforts "we announce completing the historical agreement", Kuwait Oil Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel tweeted. Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, who chaired the meeting together with his Russian and Algerian counterparts, also confirmed that the discussions "ended with consensus".

US President Donald Trump welcomed a "great deal for all", saying on Twitter it would "save hundreds of thousands of energy jobs in the United States". He added he "would like to thank and congratulate" Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, both of whom he had spoken to. The Kremlin in a statement confirmed the joint phone call, adding that Putin and Trump agreed on the "great importance" of the deal.

Initial reticence from Mexico to introduce output cuts had led to a standoff that cast doubt on efforts to bolster oil prices, pushed to near two-decade lows. Oil prices have slumped since the

beginning of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has sapped demand as countries around the world have put their populations under lockdown. Compounding the problem, key players Russia and Saudi Arabia had engaged in a price war, ramping up output in a bid to hold on to market share and undercut US shale producers.

Rystad Energy analyst Per Magnus Nysveen said Sunday's agreement provided "at least a temporary relief" as fuel consumption was expected to fall globally by 27 million barrels per day in April and 20 million barrels per day in May. His colleague Bjornar Tonhaugen said that even though the deal made "the single largest output cut in history", prices were still expected to see "renewed downwards pressure". "The oil market will see enormous stock builds in April as the deal is only in effect from 1 May, while gradual shut ins and production declines will already happen during the current month," he said.

Top oil producers struggled to finalize production cuts during a virtual summit held by G20 energy ministers on Friday, despite Trump's mediation efforts to end the standoff with Mexico. Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak was quoted by Russian news agency TASS as saying he did not expect oil markets to recover before "end of the year, in the best case". Harry Tchilinguirian of BNP Paribas said "a sustained recovery" in the oil price was not expected "until pent-up demand is released in Q3 on the lifting of confinement and social distancing measures related to COVID-19". — AFP

One more death as expanded...

Continued from Page 1

substantially cut the number of expatriates and make them equal to the number of citizens. The plans mean that over the next five years, Kuwait must take measures to reduce the number of the 3.3 million expats to just 1.5 million, a proposition that seems to be extremely difficult to achieve, given that there are over 700,000 domestic helpers in the country.

Opposition MP Mohammad Al-Mutair called on the interior and social affairs ministers to refer all visa traders to the public prosecution. He said that it is not acceptable that only one officer is responsible for visa trading, adding that the authorities have ample information to refer many more to court, "otherwise we will use our constitutional tools".

Elsewhere, the United Arab Emirates has launched an online marriage service that allows couples to wed amid restrictions on movement and interaction imposed to counter the deadly coronavirus. The justice ministry said on Sunday that citizens and residents can set a date for an online wedding ceremony conducted via video link with a cleric after their paperwork is submitted and approved - also online, according to the UAE's official news agency WAM.

The procedure will see a cleric confirm the identity of the couple and witnesses, before a marriage certificate is relayed to a specialized court for vali-

ation. The couple will receive confirmation of their marriage certificate via text message. The service was launched "to maintain the health of the public and that of people working in courts and to limit the presence of employees", WAM reported.

This comes after Dubai, one of the seven emirates that make up the UAE, said on Wednesday it suspended "until further notice" marriages and divorces in the emirate. No announcement has been made about divorce proceedings. Dubai has temporarily restricted the movement of people and vehicles, except for those working in "vital sectors" and with "essential needs" - such as food or medicine.

The UAE also warned it would review labor ties with countries refusing to take back citizens, including those who lost their jobs or were put on leave, and said it was considering strict quotas for work visas issued to nationals of those states. "Several countries have not been responsive about allowing back their citizens who have applied to return home under the current circumstances," the Human Resources and Emiratization Ministry said, without specifying which countries.

India's ambassador to the UAE said on Saturday the country cannot repatriate large numbers of nationals while trying to combat the virus at home. "Once the lockdown in India is lifted, we will certainly help them get back to their hometowns and their families," Pavan Kapoor told the Gulf News daily. Pakistan's ambassador said the embassy was waiting for permission from Islamabad for repatriation flights and was hoping for "positive news soon". "We are very keen to bring Pakistanis back but we need to finalize our treatment and quarantine facilities," Ghulam Dastgir told Reuters.

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

hard


Yesterday's Solution

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

medium


STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)




It's hard to imagine a world without computers, Aries. Technology has been key to your professional life, and it's likely to be even more important in the future. Expect your income to increase dramatically this year as a result of a technological innovation. You could play a part in developing it, or more likely, find a creative use for it. Eat well and rest up, because you'll need a lot of energy soon.

Libra (September 23-October 22)




Today could have you itching for a change, Libra. The difficulty is figuring out what you really want to do with your life. A good first step would be to talk to people. Find out what they do and don't like about their careers. Use the library and the Internet. Take a profile test, such as Myers-Briggs, to see what types of careers mesh with your personality. Once you've done this, you're bound to have a clearer vision of where you want to go.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)



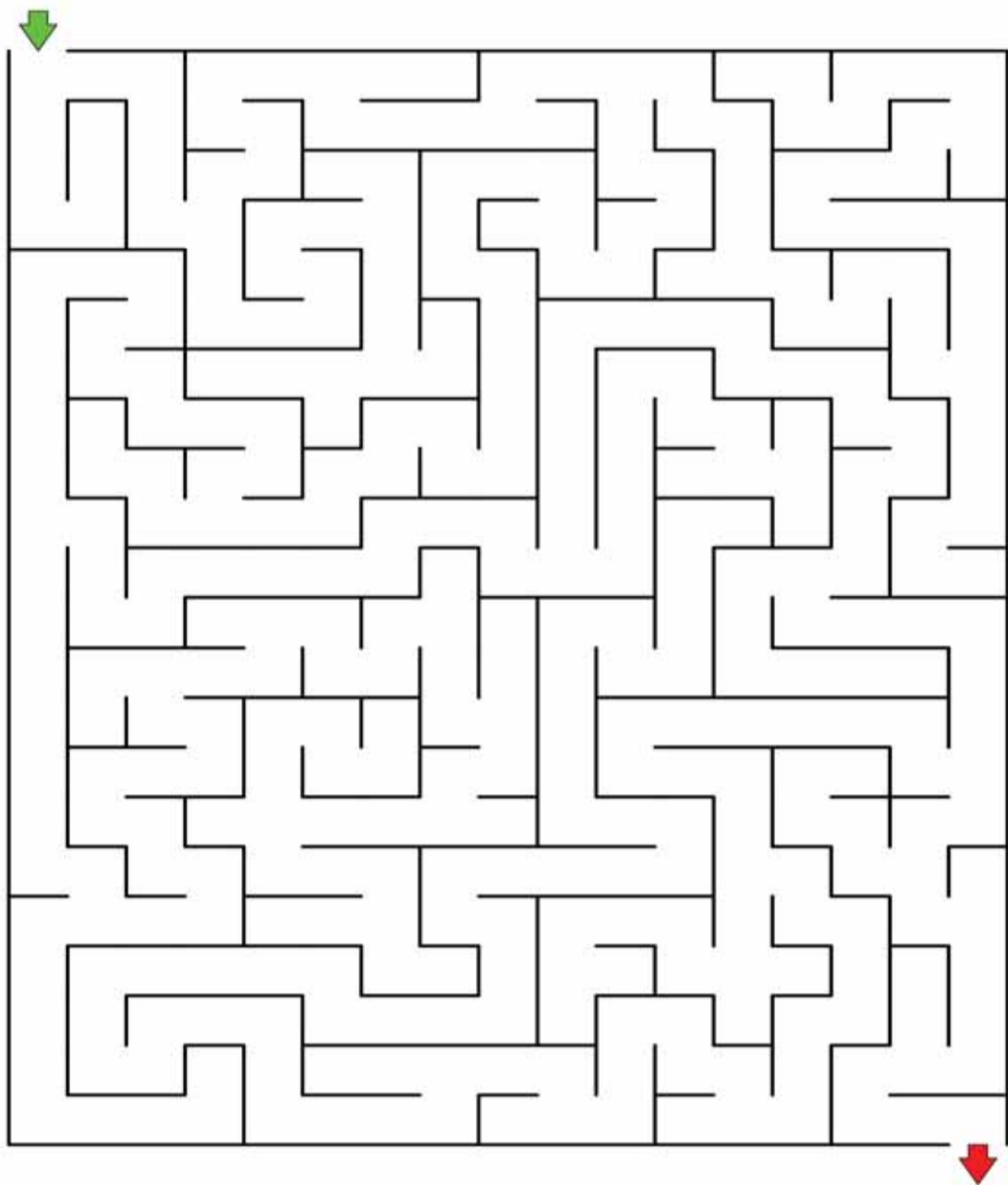
You might want to straighten up the house this morning, Taurus. Some unexpected visitors could drop by. With no warning, you could be serving lunch or dinner to a group of ten! Don't panic. Take-out was created for just such an occasion. Pull out the linens from the back of the closet, make a few calls to your favorite bakery or restaurant, and voila! The meal is served.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)




You're going to be busy but happy today, Scorpio. It's likely that a project you've been working on for a long time suddenly yields positive results. You can't help but be delighted, as this achievement comes at a time when you've been questioning your abilities. Question no more. It's clear that you're right for this particular job. Social activities are also highlighted, so treat your team to lunch to celebrate.

Find the way



Gemini (May 21-June 20)




Friends or work colleagues could introduce you to a field of study that captures your interest, Gemini. You're ready for something new in your life, and the lecture series that has been suggested to you could turn out to provide just the stimulation that you need. Your creative juices are flowing and you'll want to make good use of them. Writing, painting, and photography are all good choices for today.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)



You could be invited on a last-minute adventure today, Sagittarius. By all means, seize the chance! You're certainly ready for a change, and this opportunity could turn out to be just what you've been hoping for. Adventure calls, and whether it's a journey or a lecture, you'll find it enlarges your world in just the way you'd hoped. Today promises to be stimulating as well as fun. Enjoy it!

Cancer (June 21-July 22)




Travel is in store today, Cancer. It could be a spur-of-the-moment trip with a friend. More likely, it will be a series of short trips closer to home. You could visit friends or take advantage of sales and do some shopping. Your active mind will pick up on all sorts of ideas for improving your home. Once the errands are done, go home and look at your space with a fresh eye. There is a lot you can do to improve it.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)




If you've been thinking about making a career change, Capricorn, today is a good day to do some research on professions that interest you. It may be that you're ready to take the leap and start a business of your own. Ideally, you'd have an able partner to help with the planning and execution. Get out your address book and college directory. It's likely that you already know the perfect person for the job.

Leo (July 23-August 22)




You're likely to receive news today that brightens your future outlook, Leo. It could be that your boss calls you at home and hints at a pending promotion, or your partner could receive a raise or unusually large bonus. Whatever the news, know that your financial picture will begin to look dramatically better than it has been. Start making plans for how you'll improve your lifestyle. A vacation may just be in order.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)




Technology is going to play a big role in your life today and in the immediate future, Aquarius. It could be that your office is upgrading its systems and you're in charge of getting everyone up to speed on the new equipment. Or it's possible that you'll decide to take a class to increase your technical knowledge. One thing is clear - you're likely to achieve extraordinary success through the use of technology.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)



You can expect your life to change in a fairly dramatic way today, Virgo. The change could be subtle at first, but with time and distance you're likely to look back on this day as pivotal. You could receive an intriguing piece of news that sets your head spinning with ideas. Perhaps you've been thinking of starting your own business, and today you have an idea. Maybe you meet someone who helps your career.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)



You might find yourself unexpectedly busy today, Pisces. It could be that you'd planned to spend the day tidying up and reorganizing your home. A change of plans could mean you spend most of the day at the office handling one crisis after another. Perhaps a friend calls in need of your help. You could find it difficult to switch gears, but by the end of the day you'll be happy that you could help.

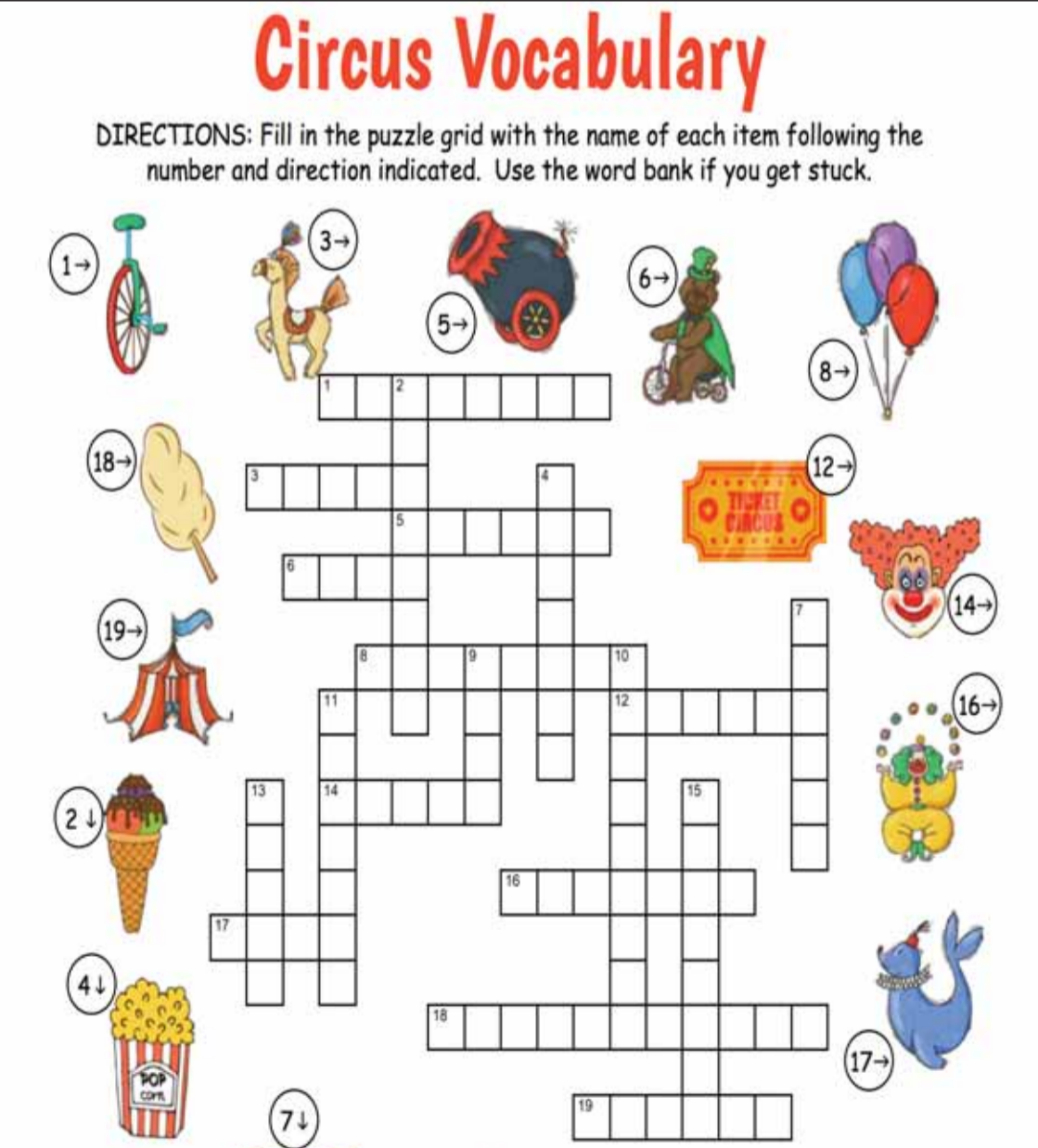
Join the dots



Crossword

Circus Vocabulary

DIRECTIONS: Fill in the puzzle grid with the name of each item following the number and direction indicated. Use the word bank if you get stuck.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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BALLOONS

BEAR

BICYCLE

BIG TOP

CANNON

CLOWN

COTTON CANDY

ELEPHANT

HORSE

HOT DOG

ICE CREAM

JUGGLER

LION

POPCORN

SEAL

STRONGMAN

TICKET

TIGER

UNICYCLE

Sports

Photo of the Day



GREENLAND: Wakeboarder, Martyanov wakeboards through polar icebergs in Greenland. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Woods relives joy of winning fifth Masters

LOS ANGELES: Fifteen-time major winner Tiger Woods says he can't help feeling like the green jacket he claimed for winning the Masters last year doesn't belong in his locker anymore.

The 44-year-old Woods doesn't like the idea of holding onto the coveted sports coat due to the world-wide coronavirus epidemic that led to the 2020 Masters tournament being postponed until November.

The pandemic "has been a shock to all of us. We know it's still going to continue to get worse. It's a very difficult situation, a very difficult time, a unique time in history," Woods told CBS television on Sunday.

The American broadcaster replayed Woods' stunning comeback victory on Sunday with the five-time Masters winner adding his own commentary from his home in Florida. Woods said it felt odd not to be in full training for a major and also to be keeping the winner's jacket for another seven months.

"This is not the way I wanted to have the jacket for a longer period of time," he said. "Come Masters Tuesday, after our Champions Dinner, we put our jackets back up in our lockers, and the next person who gets to take it off the grounds is the champion that particular week. "So hopefully we'll have it in November, and we'll be able to compete for it." The Masters has been rescheduled for November 12-15. Woods says he was raring to go and would have been healthy for this year's event.

"Yes, I would have been good to go," Woods said. "Mind and body were coming together. I was not my normal self (earlier in the week), and all of my normal pre-major championship self. "I'm used to having this four times a year. I kind of get in that mode. And it started happening again." Looking back, Woods said he remembers little about his merrymaking on the green after holing the final putt 12 months ago. —AFP

No kicks in Kashmir: Stranded soccer players turn to video games and gym

Four African and six British players stuck in a hotel

SRINAGAR: Stranded by the coronavirus lockdown in one of the world's most militarised regions, Zambia's Aaron Katebe is no longer kicking a football — he is playing video games or working out in a hotel gym in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Katebe is one of four African and six British players for Real Kashmir now stuck in a hotel the region's main city of Srinagar, after Indian football's top-flight I-League was abruptly ended by the pandemic last month. The foreign imports including Scottish coach David Robertson's son Mason, have helped turn Real Kashmir into a force after becoming the first club from the war-torn Himalayan region to play in the I-League.

"It is the first time that I have had to face such a situation," 28-year Zambian international Katebe told AFP. "I am in touch with my wife and parents. Connectivity is low here so it is difficult to communicate but I do talk to them over phone."

"I am not scared because I believe in God and have faith that everything will be OK. There is gym in the hotel, which I frequent, and I am also on my PlayStation a lot."

Nigerian Loveday Okechukwu, Ivory Coast players Armand Bazie and Gnohere Krizo, the British players, coach Robertson and his wife and son are also living in the hotel. Robertson is anxious to get home to Scotland to be with his ailing mother who is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer.

"We are hopeful of getting a flight from Punjab next week. So keeping our fingers crossed. Hopefully

we get to Aberdeen safely," said Robertson.

"I have been in constant touch with my mum and dad despite the internet connectivity being not too good here. "Facetime and video calls are very difficult, so most of the time it is just by voice. There is frustration." Kashmir has been at the centre of dispute between India and Pakistan with both claiming the whole Himalayan region.

'SAFE AND COMFORTABLE'

Last August, India's central government stripped Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status and imposed a communications blackout until January that virtually cut it off from the outside world.

"It has been difficult. Internet and power cuts are bad. I have got used to it and this season was good," said Robertson.

But then came the government proclamation aiming to tighten its grip on the Muslim-majority region.

"We couldn't get back to Kashmir and when we did get back we couldn't call home for two weeks," Robertson said. "There are 10 of us here in the hotel.

And day by day we don't even talk of football anymore," he added. "So it just shows, that despite football being a big part of my life, when these things happen it doesn't leave anything really." Against the odds, Real Kashmir were title contenders in their first I-League season, but finished third. The current season has been abandoned with leaders Mohun Bagan of Kolkata declared champions.

Real Kashmir's co-owner Sandeep Chattoo, who

Anxious to get home

MARCH 13: F1'S CHEQUERED FLAG

The opening Grand Prix of the Formula One season was called off two days before the race with teams already in Melbourne and practising. Since then, eight more races have either been postponed or cancelled and by Saturday, when Haas became the latest outfit to furlough employees, half the teams on the grid had put staff on enforced absence.

MARCH 15: THE IPL DECLARES

The Indian Premier League, cricket's annual money maker which generates an estimated \$11 billion, was postponed and rescheduled for April 15. That won't happen. "Let's say July-August is the earliest," said Kevin Pietersen, the former England batsman.

MARCH 17: EURO 2020 POSTPONED

UEFA postpones Euro 2020 until 2021 though for a few days it insists the name will not change. Moving its marquee international tournament gives the governing body of European football a window to sort out more pressing problems.

With club football halted almost everywhere, can it finish this season before player contracts expire at the end of June and sort out relegation, promotion and Champions League qualification in time for next season?

MARCH 24: TOKYO OLYMPICS OFF

After an uprising from athletes and sports bodies, the Tokyo Olympics became the first peacetime Games to be postponed.

The Games, originally scheduled for July 24-August 9, will be held 12 months late.



SRINAGAR: In this photo taken on April 11, 2020, Real Kashmir Football Club (RKFC) players Kallum Higginbotham (R) of England, Mason Robertson of Scotland and coach David Robertson (C) sit at a restaurant hotel during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in Srinagar. —AFP

has also taken up residence in the hotel, said the players are sticking together despite the panic.

"I just couldn't have dumped them here. Staying back has helped and our efforts have ensured that at

least the UK nationals will probably leave in the coming week," Chattoo told AFP. "The African players unfortunately have to stay longer but they are safe and comfortable here." —AFP

Coronavirus: The weeks that rocked sport

PARIS: As the coronavirus pandemic has put much of the globe in lockdown, sports has not been immune, indeed the deadly fall out from a Champions League game in Milan and the speed with which the disease spread through the UAE Tour peloton raise worrying issues for the future. AFP Sport picks 10 dates during the crisis that tell the tale of how sport has been hit.

FEBRUARY 19: SPREADING THE VIRUS

Atalanta met Valencia in Milan in the Champions League just as infection numbers began to rise in northern Italy. Thousands of Bergamo residents travelled to the game as others crowded together at home and in bars to watch. "It's clear that evening was a situation in which the virus was widely spread," Bergamo mayor Giorgio Gori later said as the virus raged across his city. Valencia said 35 percent of their team and staff tested positive for coronavirus following the trip to Milan.

FEBRUARY 27: DANGER IN THE PELOTON

The first sportsmen to come down with the virus were at cycling's UAE Tour, which was abandoned after two Italian mechanics tested positive. Tests immediately found six more cases.

The International Olympic Committee, its member sports and Japan, faced a series of problems. There was the loss of revenue, from broadcasting, sponsors and tickets that would normally go to federations, many of which were counting on the cash, or pay for the host's expenditure.

There was the issue of athletes who had already qualified. There was also the knock-on impact on other events. World Athletics quickly announced it was rescheduling its world championships, set for Eugene, Oregon, next summer to 2022.

The Olympic flame, meanwhile, was displayed for a week in a lantern and then put in storage in an undisclosed location, ready to burn brightly next summer.

APRIL 1: WIMBLEDON'S NET LOSS

Wimbledon chiefs cancelled the grass-court Grand Slam tournament for the first time since World War II. Wimbledon's move contrasted with the earlier decision by Roland Garros, to reschedule their major to the autumn.

French Open bosses admitted their tournament could face losses of £230 million (\$284 million) but their unilateral decision raised the hackles of the ATP and WTA which have their own events to reschedule.

In contrast, the All England Club had the foresight to take out insurance which will protect it from such losses. The tennis season will not resume until July 13 at the earliest.

APRIL 2: POLITICAL FOOTBALL

As the British government struggled to cope with the spiralling crisis, health minister Matt Hancock pointed at the highly-paid Premier League players

saying they should take a pay cut.

Players reacted furiously, but the decision of leading clubs to use a government scheme to furlough less-well-paid staff and the failure of players to agree to cuts, has made them an inviting political football. Action in the Premier League had been halted in mid-March.

APRIL 6: OPEN AND SHUT FOR MAJORS

For the golf majors, it was a day of scribbling out plans and pencilling in others. The 149th British Open, which was set for Royal St George's Golf Club in Kent in July, was cancelled for the first time since World War II. Less than an hour later, the three US-based major golf championships announced rescheduled dates.

The PGA Championship is now scheduled to be played August 6-9 in San Francisco. It was postponed from May.

The US Open was rescheduled from June to September 17-20 with the Ryder Cup to be contested one week later at Whistling Straits as scheduled.

The Masters, which was to have climaxed at Augusta National on Sunday, has been rescheduled for November 12-15.

APRIL 8: BUNDESLIGA LEADS RACE

The majority of Bundesliga clubs returned to team non-contact training.

With talks continuing over the Bundesliga resuming on May 2, the Germans seem to be leading the race to become first major European league to return to action, even if it is behind closed doors, and offer broadcasters a live fix for sports-starved fans round the world. —AFP

Sports

A month into lockdown, football forced to play waiting game

Premier League must be completed, says Palace's Hodgson

PARIS: A month has now passed since the last football matches were played before packed stadiums in Europe, and the havoc wrought by the coronavirus pandemic means that nobody can say with any certainty when the sport might return.

A crowd of 50,000 filled Ibrox Stadium in Glasgow on Thursday, March 12 to see Rangers lose 3-1 to Bayer Leverkusen in the Europa League. Other matches that night were played behind closed doors, or postponed altogether, as Italy announced its death toll from the virus had passed 1,000.

Fast forward 31 days and the figures make for grim reading throughout Europe, with Italy, Spain, France and the United Kingdom the worst hit. Countries across the continent are now weeks into restrictive lockdowns.

Nobody knows when sport will be allowed to restart behind closed doors let alone before crowds. The psychological impact of the current situation means many people may well now have second thoughts about mixing with vast crowds at a football match in future.

In any case, as Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp admitted when the Premier League season was suspended on March 13: "Today, football and football matches really aren't important at all." Yet his club are among those who have been worst hit by the suspension, given that they stand on the brink of winning the English title for the first time in 30 years.

In England, football will not return until it is "safe and appropriate" to do so, authorities have said. However, UEFA, the governing body for the game in Europe, has remained optimistic about the prospect of finishing the season and is working on the possibility of playing in July and August if need be.

Aleksander Ceferin, the UEFA president, has also said that there is "no way" Liverpool should be denied the Premier League title, and suggested that "in

case the matches cannot be played, we will need to find a way".

Scrapping a season that was close to its conclusion would not make sense, but it remains to be seen if the campaign can resume.

"No match, no competition, no league is worth risking a single human life," FIFA president Gianni Infantino has said. "It would be more than irresponsible to force competitions to resume if things are not 100 percent safe."

The damage caused by COVID-19 has been dramatic. Even players are not worrying about returning to action. "It's not the thing I am worrying about. I am thinking about my family first and foremost and then about getting this sorted. This is a critical situation," Paris Saint-Germain's Pablo Sarabia told AFP.

Leading football players and figures — from Juventus and France star Blaise Matuidi to Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta — have tested positive for the virus. Former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz died.

Euro 2020 was postponed by a year, as was the Copa America. Players at top sides have taken pay cuts, of 70 percent in the case of Barcelona. There has been an unseemly dispute in England after UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock called for Premier League players to accept wage cuts.

Wealthy English clubs have also faced a backlash for tapping into a government scheme allowing them to furlough non-playing staff. Liverpool performed a U-turn and apologised for having applied.

However, those wealthy clubs cannot afford to do without the income they get from broadcasters. That is at the core of their desperation to complete this season. In England, the cost to Premier League clubs of having to reimburse broadcasters for matches not played has been put at 762 million pounds (\$951m).

helped him develop the skill.

"I started playing reverse sweep when I first came to London as a 16-year-old and signed up at Middlesex," Morgan said in a video posted on the website of the Kolkata Knight Riders, his Indian Premier League team.

"Playing at Lord's, the boundaries were very short square of the wicket and they are really long straight. "When I played in the first team as a 17, 18-year-old, trying to clear the long straight boundary at Lord's was very difficult for me.

"So I started playing a lot more sweeps than probably your average player just because they

Meanwhile only Bonetti's former team-mate Ron Harris has made more Chelsea appearances, with the defender playing in 795 games for the Blues. "He (Bonetti) was about 5ft 10in (1.77m), ever so slim, and acrobatic. He pulled off some unbelievable saves," Harris told Sky Sports News on Sunday.

"I'm not knocking any of the present day keepers but ask any Chelsea supporter who's been around for some time and I bet they'd say the number one keeper at Chelsea was Peter Bonetti." With Bonetti's career overlapping those of Gordon Banks and Peter Shilton, he made just seven appearances for England. Paying tribute on Twitter, Shilton said Bonetti was "a hero of mine, a tremendous player and a true gentleman".

Bonetti was a member of England's victorious 1966 World Cup squad, but such was Banks's form he did not play during the tournament. It was not until 2009 that Bonetti received a winners' medal, the rules at the time meaning only the playing XI in the final were so honoured. His England career, however, is destined to be remembered for one unfortunate match at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. With Banks having suffered a case of food poisoning, Bonetti was called up into the side beaten by West Germany in the quarter-finals.

Alf Ramsey's team were 2-0 up but lost 3-2 in extra-time, with Bonetti criticised for being at fault for the first two goals England conceded. But at club level he helped Chelsea win the 1965 League Cup, the 1970 FA Cup —

previous month. Such was Cronje's standing at home and abroad, the initial reaction was one of "shock and disbelief" according to one of South Africa's leading cricket writers.

It was a sentiment shared by Dr Ali Bacher, the managing director of the United Cricket Board, the forerunner of today's Cricket South Africa.

"When AFP broke the story before the official press conference by the Delhi police, I remember the office receiving a call from Dr Bacher blasting the agency for ruining the reputation of one of South Africa's most iconic personalities," recalled Kuldeep Lal, the Delhi-based cricket reporter behind the scoop. "He threatened to sue us. I thought to myself that if the story is incorrect, a few of us may need to look for another job."

But Cronje's partial confession a few days later led to a "feeling of relief" in AFP's Delhi bureau, with Lal adding: "To his credit, Dr Bacher called the office to apologise for his earlier outburst."

Cronje later confessed to several allegations at the South African government-appointed King Commission, including attempts to bribe Herschelle Gibbs and Henry Williams to underperform in a one-day international against India.

He also admitted to receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars from bookmakers to prearrange certain conditions — cricket's complexity means gambling coups are possible without 'fixing' the result — with his Centurion effort netting him some \$6,000 and a leather jacket. Cronje, who insisted he'd never thrown a game, was later given a life ban from cricket yet his reputation remained high with both his former



MANCHESTER: File photo shows Manchester City's English defender Kyle Walker gestures during the UEFA Champions League football Group C match between Manchester City and Shakhtar Donetsk at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England. —AFP

While idle players are stuck at home, trying to follow fitness programmes in their front rooms or gardens, many wonder if football will be profoundly changed because of the financial impact of this crisis. "The economy will be different and so will football. Maybe it will be better," Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti told Italy's Corriere dello Sport. That remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the Premier League season must be played to a finish after the COVID-19 shutdown is over instead of using "artificial means" to decide the champions as well as relegation and Champions League spots, Crystal Palace manager Roy Hodgson has said.

With football in England suspended since March

13 due to the pandemic, Hodgson said teams might have to accept increased safety restrictions and having to play more games in a shorter period when play resumed.

"Everyone is in total agreement we need an end to this season," the 72-year old told the club's website <https://www.cpfc.co.uk/news/2020/april/roy-hodgson-a-message-to-supporters>.

"We don't want artificial means of deciding who wins the league, who gets into the Champions League, who gets relegated and promoted.

"Ideally our players would have three or four weeks minimum to prepare for the first match back, but I accept there may have to be a squeeze on that timeframe.— Agencies

Morgan credits Lord's for helping in reverse sweep

NEW DELHI: The reverse sweep has long been a high-yield shot in Eoin Morgan's batting repertoire and England's limited-overs captain says having Lord's as his home ground early on in his career

Ex-Chelsea goalkeeper 'The Cat' dies at 78

LONDON: Former Chelsea and England goalkeeper Peter Bonetti has died at the age of 78 following a long-term illness, the Premier League club announced Sunday, with tributes describing him as a "hero and a gentleman". Nicknamed "The Cat" because of his agility, Bonetti was a mainstay of the west London side for close on 20 years throughout the 1960s and 1970s. "Our former goalkeeper had been suffering from long-term illness," said a club statement.

"All at Chelsea wish to send our heartfelt and deepest condolences to Peter's family and friends." Relatively short by modern standards for a goalkeeper at under six feet (1.82 metres) tall, Bonetti made 729 appearances for Chelsea and kept 208 clean sheets.

His Chelsea career started in 1960 and finished in 1979, with his two spells at Stamford Bridge separated by a 1975 stint in the North American Soccer League at the St Louis Stars. It took until 2014 for Petr Cech to surpass Bonetti's shut-out record.

Twenty years on, cricket still reeling from Cronje scandal

LONDON: It may be two decades since the Hansie Cronje corruption scandal rocked cricket, but even now the ripples are still being felt. This month marks the 20th anniversary of Cronje being stripped of the South Africa captaincy following an extraordinary sequence of events earlier in 2000.

In January, come the last day of a 'dead' Test against England (South Africa had already won the series) a draw seemed inevitable after rain had washed out three days' play. Yet Cronje contrived a positive result by getting England captain Nasser Hussain to agree that both sides would forfeit an innings. England were left with a target of 249 for victory after Cronje declared and eventually won by two wickets. Traditionalists were aghast at the interference with the 'proper' course of a Test, yet few were prepared for what was to come.

In April, Cronje's image as a religious sportsman — he wore a bracelet inscribed with the words 'What Would Jesus Do?' — was shattered for all time.

An AFP report, later confirmed by the New Delhi police, said the force had phone recordings of Cronje and an Indian bookmaker discussing predetermined Proteas' performances during their tour of India the

were more effective at our home ground," said the versatile batsman.

Often employed against spinners, the unorthodox reverse sweep is an effective shot to negate field placings but the World Cup-winning captain said he was not using it as often these days as opponents had become wise to it.

"The reverse sweep has been one of my favourite shots because it's been so effective over the years," added the 33-year-old.

"I probably play it less and less now because things have changed and people have started setting fields for that." — Reuters



MALTA: File photo shows Italy's Ruggiero Rizzitelli (L) attempts to score as England goalkeeper Peter Bonetti grabs the ball as part of a soccer match held between Italy and England Legends in the framework of the Malta Music Festival, in Ta' Qali National Stadium in Malta. — AFP

after the Blues beat bitter rivals Leeds United in a final that went to a replay — and the 1971 European Cup Winners' Cup.

One of the pioneers of specialist gloves for goalkeepers, Bonetti also had spells with Dundee United and Woking. He later became a goalkeeping coach, working with both Chelsea and the England squad as well as Kevin Keegan at Newcastle, Manchester City and Fulham. — AFP

team-mates and the South African public alike.

For example batsman Daryll Cullinan, testified Cronje, who died in a 2002 plane crash, had offered the team \$250,000 to throw a match before adding he still thought of him "as a great captain and a great leader".

Meanwhile separate national hearings and investigations led to life bans for Pakistan's Saleem Malik and India's Mohammad Azharuddin.

Yet their suspensions were among several punishments subsequently overturned, although for Malik and Azharuddin the initial sanctions effectively ended the careers of two world-class batsmen.

The International Cricket Council responded by creating a new anti-corruption unit led by Paul Condon, the former head of London's Metropolitan Police. But it was desperately under-staffed and 10 years ago it was Britain's now defunct News of the World tabloid that exposed the willingness of Pakistan captain Salman Butt and bowlers Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir to engage in spot-fixing.

Since then a beefed-up ACU, respected for its work in educating players about the dangers of corruption, has had a greater impact, with its investigations leading to New Zealand batsman Lou Vincent receiving a life ban for match-fixing in 2014.

But the rise of Twenty20 franchise leagues and the development of the sport beyond top level men's cricket have created new targets for fixers.

As has happened in tennis, they can now turn their attention to less high-profile areas of the game, where the financial rewards for players are far less and the temptation to cheat potentially all the greater.—AFP

NBA has '25-day plan' to return to game action

LOS ANGELES: The NBA may not know when — or if — play will resume this season, but the league reportedly has a plan to get players into game shape and onto the court should that day come. According to ESPN's Brian Windhorst on Sunday, the league has a "25-day plan" that would kick in after the league sets a return date from the coronavirus-induced layoff and would conclude with players ready to play regular-season games again.

"They're spending a lot of time getting a back-to-basketball plan ready," Windhorst said during a TV interview of what league officials have been working on in recent days. "What they're looking at is a 25-day return-to-basketball window," he continued. "... An 11-day series of individual workouts, where there'd be social distancing for a period of time, and then hopefully ... a 14-day training camp."

The NBA halted its regular season on March 11. Commissioner Adam Silver has previously said the league doesn't plan to make any decisions regarding the calendar until at least May 1.

The regular season had about a month remaining when it was suspended, and the playoffs typically take about two months to complete. The 2020-21 regular season typically would begin in October, although Silver acknowledged that could be affected as well.

Earlier, Allie Quigley is a three-time WNBA All-Star who knocks down 3-point shots with ease. Yet her status skyrocketed on Sunday for simply winning a game of H-O-R-S-E.

The Chicago Sky star ousted 10-time NBA All-Star Chris Paul in the quarterfinals of ESPN's NBA H-O-R-S-E Challenge, standing out on the makeshift cobblestone court complete with chalk lines at her home in Deerfield, Ill.

Quigley was at H-O-R when she finished off the triumph over Paul. She sealed the win with a banked free throw and Paul missed his equalizing attempt at his home in Encino, Calif. Also advancing were Zach LaVine of the Chicago Bulls, former NBA star Chauncey Billups and Utah Jazz guard Mike Conley.

LaVine swept former NBA star Paul Pierce, Billups (H-O-R) rallied to knock off Atlanta Hawks star Trae Young and Conley (H) defeated former WNBA star Tamika Catchings. LaVine's win makes for an intriguing battle of Chicago with Quigley being his semifinal opponent on Thursday.

"I'm excited. Both of us play for Chicago," Quigley said on ESPN's broadcast. "That's pretty cool that we're both representing in the next round." Billups and Conley meet in the other semifinal. The championship match will follow the semis. The 33-year-old Quigley stole the show on Sunday by methodically putting away Paul. She made one bank shot while seated on the ground and only had an H when Paul was at H-O-R-S. Paul attempted a comeback but Quigley extinguished it with the free-throw bank to end the quest of the Oklahoma City Thunder point guard.— Reuters

18 No kicks in Kashmir: Stranded soccer players turn to video games and gym



19 A month into lockdown, football forced to play waiting game



19 Ex-Chelsea goalkeeper 'The Cat' dead at 78



Motorsport 'icon' Stirling Moss dead



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on October 22, 2001 British motor-racing legend Stirling Moss (L) and his wife Susie Moss (R) pose beside their 1957 Maserati 200 SI prior to the start of the vintage car rally festival, La Festa Mille Miglia 2001 in Tokyo. — AFP

LONDON: Stirling Moss, widely-regarded as the greatest motor racing driver never to win the world title, has died aged 90 following a long illness.

"It was one lap too many," his wife Susie Moss told Britain's Press Association on Sunday. "He just closed his eyes."

Tributes flooded in from the world of motorsport and beyond to the gifted and revered driver who never won the Formula One title, finishing runner-up four times and third three times.

"Today we say goodbye to Sir Stirling Moss, the racing legend," reigning world champion Lewis Hamilton wrote on Instagram.

"Two people from massively different times and backgrounds but we clicked and ultimately found that the love for racing we both shared made us comrades," added the six-time world champion.

Meanwhile, three-time world champion Jackie Stewart, who came into Grand Prix racing shortly after Moss's injury-enforced retirement in the early 1960s, told the BBC: "I think he's probably the best example of a racing driver there's ever been.

"He walked like a racing driver, he talked like a

racing driver, he behaved like a racing driver should behave." Former England striker Gary Lineker posted on Instagram: "Sir Stirling Moss has reached life's checkered flag, and what a race he drove. Wonderful driver and a lovely man. RIP."

British media reported Moss had succumbed to a chest infection he caught in Singapore in December 2016 that saw him retire from public life two years later.

There is no suggestion his death was linked to the coronavirus.

In an era when it was common for drivers to race in different disciplines, Moss won 212 of the 529 races he entered over a 14-year career that started in 1948.

His victories included the 1955 Mille Miglia, where he set a course record in the 1,000 mile event, which took place on public roads in Italy.

In Formula One, Moss won 16 races, with his first victory coming in the 1955 British Grand Prix at Liv-

erpool that saw him become the first British winner. Moss had the misfortune to compete in the same era as the great Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio, who won the F1 championship five times.

His renowned sportsmanship cost Moss the 1958 title when he defended the conduct of British rival Mike Hawthorn following a spin at the Portuguese Grand Prix.

Moss's action helped spare Hawthorn a six-point penalty, with Hawthorn winning the title by a single point.

"I had no hesitation in doing it," Moss recalled. "I can't see how this is open to

debate. The fact that he was my only rival in the championship didn't come into my thinking. Absolutely not."

His top-level career in motorsport came to an end in 1962 following a crash at the Goodwood track in Sussex, southern England, that left Moss in a coma for a month and partially paralysed for six months.

But such was the enduring fame of the debonair driver that, for decades afterwards, the rhetorical phrase "Who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?" was supposedly the standard question all British policemen asked speeding motorists.

"Yes a policeman did once ask me," Moss told the Daily Telegraph in a 2012 interview.

"But I couldn't work out if he was taking the mick (joking)."

He was knighted in the New Year Honours list in 2000 for services to motor racing.

For F1 pundit and former driver Martin Brundle, Moss was "a mighty racer and gentleman".

"He had a press on style on the track and in life," Brundle posted on Twitter.

"Remarkable man. Survived the most dangerous era of motorsport and died today aged 90. He had such great stories to tell, and it was a privilege to know him." Former world heavyweight boxing champion Frank Bruno revealed that Moss had "privately supported me over many years".

"My thoughts are with his family and all that had the pleasure of knowing him". — AFP

“ It was one lap too many ”

MMA shows shelved after new virus clampdown

SINGAPORE: Two mixed martial arts (MMA) events planned behind closed doors in Singapore this month have been postponed after the city-state tightened restrictions to fight the coronavirus, organisers said yesterday.

A spokeswoman for Asia's biggest MMA promotion, One Championship, confirmed that the events, on April 17 and 24, have been postponed.

Two more closed-door events next month could also be shelved because of the tougher restrictions imposed by the city-state, she told AFP.

The worldwide sporting calendar has been left in tatters because of the pandemic, which has killed more than 110,000 people and infected nearly two million. It was still unclear about the fate of another

One Championship event scheduled for May 29 in the Philippines capital Manila, which is also under a government lockdown.

"We are living through the most extraordinary of times. The good news is that these short-term restrictions will undoubtedly slow down the coronavirus, and flatten the curve," One Championship chairman and chief executive Chatri Sityodtong said in a Facebook post last week.

One Championship initially hoped to hold the Singapore events without fans, but decided to delay them after the city-state last week ordered the closure of schools and non-essential businesses, and asked people to stay home.

Singapore won praise for keeping its outbreak in check in the early stages but has seen a surge in cases this month, with many linked to foreign workers' dormitories. Health authorities have reported 2,532 COVID-19 cases, including eight deaths. Last week the US-based UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) was forced to scrap controversial plans to stage a fight card behind closed doors at a secret location next weekend after broadcasters pulled out. — AFP

ITTF chief mulls scrapping world championships

SYDNEY: International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) chief Steve Dainton has suggested the sport's annual individual world championships be scrapped, with champions instead decided by the winners of the new "Grand Smash" mega tournaments.

The world championships were held for the first time in 1926 and individual titles have been decided every year since the team events were hived off into a separate tournament in 2003.

In a wide-ranging open letter, largely addressing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the sport, Dainton suggested keeping the team championships and Olympic tournaments as they were but doing away with the individuals. "The idea is simply that ... we plan to eventually have three to four 'Grand Smashes' per year," he wrote. "These events will be equal to or larger than a world individual championships (so) we would be overstretching

and confusing the calendar and market if we also have a world individual championships.

"The three to four major events held on the international stage throughout each year will reach a larger audience and will perform much better than once every two years. From these events, we would also be able to define an individual world champion."

The "Grand Smash" tournaments, with top class fields playing for purses of up to \$3 million at dedicated venues, are part of the World Table Tennis initiative to make the sport more commercially successful. Dainton said the pause to sport caused by the coronavirus crisis was an opportunity to "reflect and work on all the areas that we know have been underperforming, needed to change and adapt but were not tackled because priorities lay elsewhere". Table tennis, as with all professional sports, has taken a big hit financially from the COVID-19 shutdown and despite ITTF staff agreeing to salary cuts Dainton said more savings would be needed to keep the sport going.

"Despite some tough sacrifices needed, we will ensure that the ITTF survives this difficult period," he added. The Australian said that with the Tokyo Olympics now moved back to 2021 and the postponement of a raft of tournaments, it would probably be a couple of years before everything on the table tennis circuit settled down again.—Reuters