

# 1 death, 93 cases in Kuwait; global deaths pass 150,000

## Wuhan raises death toll by 50% • Saudi mufti: Pray taraweeh, Eid prayers at home

### Paper towels may remove virus; drug remdesivir effective

PARIS: People should dry their hands with paper towels to avoid spreading the new coronavirus, according to the authors of a study published on Friday that finds disposable tissues are better than jet dryers at removing pathogens missed by ineffective washing. Global health authorities have highlighted the crucial importance of washing hands with soap and water to protect against COVID-19, which has killed tens of thousands and spread around the world.

Contaminated hands are a major route for germ transmission, potentially spreading pathogens to surfaces - like door handles or taps - and causing infection when people touch their faces. A small study by experts from Britain's University of Leeds and Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust found that if hands had not been properly washed, drying with a paper towel was more effective at removing microbes.

"We believe that our results are relevant to the control of the novel coronavirus that is

Continued on Page 16

KUWAIT/WASHINGTON: The ministry of health yesterday reported 93 new coronavirus infections and one fatality in the last 24 hours, bringing the total number of infections to 1,751 and total deaths to six. In a statement, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 34 patients are in intensive care, 18 of them in critical condition and 16 stable.

He added death cases reached six after confirming the death of a Bangladeshi resident (68 years old), noting that he was in the intensive care unit for nine days. Those currently receiving treatment at hospitals reached 1,465 patients, Sanad said, adding that 20 individuals have completed quarantine in the last 24 hours. Earlier, the ministry announced the recovery of 22 new patients, bringing the total to 280 recoveries.

Coronavirus deaths have surged past 150,000 worldwide with nearly a quarter of them in the United States, where President Donald Trump lent his support to protestors rallying against lockdown orders. Evidence is mounting that social distancing successfully slowed the pandemic after more than half of humanity - 4.5 billion people - were confined to their

homes. Governments around the world are now grappling with when and how to ease lockdowns that have crippled the global economy, even as the COVID-19 death toll climbs further in hard-hit countries. Demonstrators in three US states assembled in public this week to call for an end to the restrictions, with the largest protest in Michigan attracting 3,000 people - some of whom were armed.

Trump has largely left decisions on easing lockdowns to state officials even as he outlined guidelines for a staged reopening of the national economy. But his call to "liberate" Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia in a series of tweets were quickly rebuked by the Democratic leaders of the three states. "I do not have time to involve myself in Twitter wars," said Virginia governor Ralph Northam. The US accounts for nearly a third of the 2.2 million coronavirus infections reported globally.

It has also recorded around 37,000 deaths, more than any other nation, followed by Italy, Spain and France which have all been ravaged by their own outbreaks. However these figures likely reflect only a fraction of

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Sat. 18/04/2020

### Updates on COVID 19



Cases in contact 83

1 case of Kuwaiti national, 64 cases of Indian residents, 6 cases of Bangladeshi residents, 5 cases of Egyptian residents, 3 cases of Pakistani residents, 2 cases of Nepali residents, 1 case of American resident, 1 case of Yemeni resident.

Other cases 10

2 cases of Kuwaiti nationals, 2 cases of Jordanian residents, 2 cases of Filipino residents, 1 case of Omani resident, 1 case of Egyptian resident, 1 case of Afghanistani resident, 1 case of Syrian resident.

I.C.U  
18 cases critical, 16 cases stable.  
last 24 hours: 1 death and 3 cases transferred to I.C.U.

Deaths  
Bangladeshi resident, 68 years old.

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# V O L V O

# STAY SAFE STAY HOME





## Local

# Kuwait mulls coronavirus response with Japan, US

## Kuwait eyes cooperation to address pandemic's repercussions

**KUWAIT:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Friday received a telephone call from his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi dealing with various aspects of the solid relations bonding the two friendly countries. The telephone call tackled means of boosting mutual cooperation, major occurrences on regional and international arenas. Moreover, the Kuwaiti and Japanese ministers discussed rapid developments due to spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) throughout the world and ideas on beefing up cooperation between the two countries for coping with repercussions of the pandemic. Furthermore, the two sides emphasized necessity of international cooperation for facing fallouts of the pandemic and stemming its spread. Sheikh Dr Ahmad renewed the

State of Kuwait support for measures taken by Japan for facing spread of the virus, wishing the nation success in tackling this crisis. His Japanese counterpart hailed measures that have been taken by the State of Kuwait for resisting this pandemic, wishing safety for the Kuwaiti people.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad had received on Thursday a phone call from US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. During the phone call, the

two ministers reiterated the strength and peculiarity of the Kuwaiti-US relations and joint efforts to upgrade them to achieve their common interests. They discussed all regional and international developments of common concern. The two officials also touched upon the latest updates of the novel coronavirus global outbreak, underlining the need to boost bilateral cooperation to address its repercussions. They stressed the importance of international synergy to confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad renewed Kuwait's solidarity with the measures taken by the United States to stop the spread of coronavirus, wishing it safety and near end to the crisis.

Meanwhile, Secretary Pompeo expressed US support and praise to Kuwait's measures to address this global pandemic, wishing safety to all its people from the disease implications. —KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah



### Kuwait's measures receive praise

## Kuwait receives more facemask producing machines

**KUWAIT:** Director General of the Public Authority for Industry Abdulkarim Taqi announced Thursday the arrival of a second shipment of imported medical facemask producing machines. These machines have a total production capacity of more than 300,000 facemasks a day, Taqi said in a statement sent to the press. He noted that the machines will be operated by one plant. The authority has also permitted several other plants to start manufacturing medical facemasks, Taqi added. He stressed that the authority is keen on enhancing local production of personnel protective equipment (PPE) to meet the growing needs of the local market and to help curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. —KUNA

## DGCA: 75 flights to bring home stranded Kuwaitis as of today

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that the national carrier Kuwait Airways and the private Al-Jazeera Airways will operate 75 flights to sixteen airports worldwide to evacuate stranded nationals. In statements to the press, DGCA spokesman Saad Al-Otaibi said the flights, which will start today, make up the first phase of a five-phase plan to repatriate nationals from abroad after the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). He pointed out that the first stage, to last three days, includes flights to Riyadh, Dammam, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Manama, Doha, Muscat, Cairo, Alexandria, Amman, London, Istanbul, Ankara, Geneva and Paris. Last week, the Kuwaiti cabinet adopted a phased process to bring back Kuwaiti citizens abroad. The plan envisaged five phases: First would be due on April 19-20 covering Kuwaitis who completed medical treatment abroad along with their companions, also tourists or those who were on official assignments. The second stage (April 23) covers patients who need medical beds and life support equipment. The third one (April 25-May 1) for students, the fourth (May 3-4) for diplomats and the fifth (May 6-7) for other segments. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** This photo released by Kuwait Airways shows top company officials meeting to discuss preparations to evacuate stranded nationals from around the world.

## Protect them all



By Jamie Etheridge

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Sometimes reality is so shocking, so impossibly unjust, that it's hard to even believe. That is how I felt when I read the news this week that 10 nurses in Santa Monica, California had been suspended for refusing to work with COVID-19 patients without being provided N95 masks. The hospital claimed that the masks were in low supply, but CNN, which reported the story, confirmed that other medical staff including doctors, nurses and lab techs including ones in labor and delivery had access to the masks.

Like so much else, the pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the standard, normalized inequities and injustices that are embedded in our economies and societies. Nurses are among the hardest working, most essential personnel of any hospital or clinic. They may not study as many years as doctors do, but they still spend years in schooling and certainly contribute in real, important and fundamental ways to our healthcare systems.

Don't misunderstand. I absolutely admire and respect doctors and the many years of study and hard work they endure to achieve their education and experience. They are heroes who risk their lives daily to treat patients suffering from this terrible virus. And the shortages of proper medical safety equipment in the United States have hit all medical staff, including doctors. But for hospitals to designate any available supplies for only one category of staff working with COVID-infected patients is grossly unfair.

At the heart of the disparity is also a historical inequity. Traditionally doctors were men and women were nurses. Doctors went to medical school and nurses to nursing colleges. In general, women earn less than men in the same fields even when they have the same or similar qualifications. Known as the gender pay gap, women earned 80 cents for every \$1 earned by a man in the same job as of 2016. In industries where women dominate, salaries - and status - are even lower.

From a hierarchy or authority perspective, doctors take on the final responsibility for the patient's health and welfare. They prescribe (though more nurses nowadays can also prescribe) medications and determine the treatment plan. They are also typically more vulnerable to malpractice lawsuits.

But when it comes to basic safety and exposure to a virus that we still know so little about, all medical staff should be treated equally. Nurses and doctors and lab techs and specialists and COVID-19 ward cleaning staff and anyone else who is putting their lives at risk to care for the sick. They are all heroes and deserve our respect and support equally.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has so far recorded 1,751 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to six deaths. With the exception of 34 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, 280 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,465 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 to test people for possible infection.

### Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am until further notice. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website ([www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop)) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on [www.pai.gov.kw](http://www.pai.gov.kw), and send the form via email to: [Jasiri@moh.gov.kw](mailto:Jasiri@moh.gov.kw).

### 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. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. 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), Bangladesh (April 11-15), India (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 Naecem 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-ehealth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

### 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-Khaldi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
- Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi: 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

# Stories of people living under lockdown in Mahboula, Jleeb

## Residents counting the days under lockdown and curfew

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** It's been more than a month since Kuwait closed its sea, air and land borders to protect the country from the deadly spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown covers the whole country, and to prevent the spread of local transmission, Kuwait has also imposed a curfew from 5 pm to 6 am. Some places needed tougher measures to control the spread of the coronavirus, so a total lockdown was imposed in two areas believed to be heavily infected - Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

Kuwait Times spoke to residents living in these areas after a week of total isolation. Sandy, a beautician at a hair salon in Mahboula, said life is getting tougher each day. "We are okay here in Mahboula, but it's not easy. Every passing day I feel like we are in prison. I am scared and sad for my baby - I fear for his future and for me and my husband. We are helpless and I hope this will not last long," she said.

**'This is for real'**

Sandy's family is among the many currently under complete lockdown after a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases in Mahboula. A few days before the lockdown, around five buildings were cordoned off in the area, and their occupants were eventually transferred to a quarantine facility. "On first day and second days of the lockdown, we were in wait-and-see mode. It hadn't sunk in yet. But now this is for real. I saw people trying to escape being prevented by authorities. I saw some people running out of the area with their bags," she said. "This seems like a bad movie scene, but we just need to follow the authorities," she added.

According to Sandy, since March 1 she hasn't gone



**KUWAIT:** Cleaning workers seen through barbwire in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

to take a walk with her son in her neighborhood, fearing the virus could be anywhere. "Normally every morning I walk with a stroller with my son, and on weekends I walk with him by the seaside. Now I cannot do this and I miss it dearly," she said. Her building is off the main highway and near the entry point of vehicles entering Mahboula.

"I saw everything unfold right in front of my eyes from the fifth floor of my 12-storey residential building in the first few days. I took videos of police placing barbwire and barricades around us. I saw several military vehicles moving in and out of the place and police cars roaming around. I saw almost every day ambulances moving in and out of the area. I saw people with their belongings stopped by authorities. Now we have kind of accepted the fact that we are in isolation," Sandy said. She said she hasn't received any food rations from the government. "We are fine so far; we have food courtesy of our employer, but I hope this crisis will not last longer."

**'Stay at home'**

Rems, another resident of Mahboula who lives across a huge open yard, witnessed the exodus of people trying to evade the lockdown and the chaotic distribution of gas cylinders and bread. "Here in my building, it is as if I am watching the huge screen of a movie theater. I witness several scenes and dramas every day. I cannot imagine why they are all down walking as if nothing is happening. For God's sake - the government is calling on everyone to stay at home, yet they are walking around without social distancing," she said.

As an assistant teacher, Rems' work stopped since the national holidays. "From that day to now, I can count on my fingers the times I went out to the baqala to purchase something to eat. But that was until they totally locked down the area. Since then, I haven't ventured out. I'm at home with my fellow teachers, scared that we will run out of food to eat. We know that we can go out to buy something, but we don't because we are all females and we don't want to get into trouble with anyone we don't know. We are scared to hear the sound of police and ambulance sirens. But our main concern now is until when the lockdown will remain and when the pandemic will end," she said.

Rems said they are counting the days under lockdown and curfew. "The four of us in this flat belong to different Christian denominations, but because of this

pandemic, we pray together, asking God's favor to remove the virus and help us return to normalcy. Many times we cannot help but cry. We have bonded due to this pandemic, and are strongly connected to each other," she said.

They have separate rooms, but many times they come out together from their rooms with swollen eyes. "We all laugh at each other because we know why we have swollen eyes, because we cried all night long talking to our families back home. It's crazy - we pray to God that we do not end up in the mental hospital," she quipped.

**'Scarier than wartime'**

May Suguitan Siapno has been residing in Jleeb for the past 30 years. She has a family here with grown-up children. She said what she is experiencing today is scarier than during wartime. "I came immediately after the liberation - the sky was covered with smoke from burning oilfields. I was scared then, but I am more scared now, because you have to protect your family from an unseen enemy. In addition to this battle, people I know are messaging me all the time because they need food," she said.

Siapno used to help with anything she could to unburden her fellow Filipinos. She is known to the Philippine Embassy as a person assisting undocumented children in their education while awaiting repatriation. After the lockdown, Filipinos who have no work and no pay have been contacting her for assistance, and she serves as a link to hundreds of Filipinos waiting to get food from Filipino NGOs and the embassy. "I coordinated with an official from the Philippines who eventually linked me to a Kuwaiti, who helped us get supplies," she said. "The life of several Filipinos here is really difficult - they were abandoned by their employers in time of need. They have no work, so the employers are not paying them," she said.

Jleeb is barricaded with barbwire and no one is allowed to leave or enter the area without a permit. Various communities are helping each other to obtain immediate needs. "It's almost a week now, but we haven't received any food or supplies from Filipino organizations. We are sharing rice and canned goods, bread, milk, eggs and cheese to survive," Siapno said.

She said a Kuwaiti man, a longtime friend of Siapno who works at the police station in Jleeb, is helping them obtain supplies. "We are proud of some individuals and Filipino organizations who are helping us, besides the help promised by the embassy," she concluded.

“This seems like a bad movie scene”

**News in brief**

**Drivers can receive licenses**

**KUWAIT:** Citizens and residents who renewed their driving licenses online from March 11 to March 29, can receive their licenses from Mubarak Al-Kabeer Traffic Department from 8 am till 1 pm starting today. The department will receive people according to the first letter of their names in the Arabic alphabet.

**Online shopping**

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce added six more areas to the co-ops' grocery shopping website www.moci.shop. Now people can book the date and time to shop at co-ops during curfew hours. The available areas are Al-Faiha, Hadiya, Ishbiliya, Rawda, Al-Zahra, Al-Nuaim, Mishref, Hateen, Kifan, Bayan block 2, Salmiya, Abu Fatira. The allowed shopping time is only 30 minutes.

**Citizens in Jordan**

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait cultural office in Amman, Jordan, announced that in a bid to help them with personal errands, the Jordanian authorities will allow Kuwaiti students studying there to move around various governorates using only vehicles with Kuwaiti license plate numbers in the period starting 10 am on April 19, 2020 until 12 noon on April 22, 2020.

local spotlight

## Wages under fire



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The COVID-19 crisis has revealed to us how governments and companies around the world are handling the issue of salaries. This subject is not only a local concern, but a global one. I believe it can be resolved with some compromises. There are several successful models of companies as well as bad examples, but the dilemma can be resolved.

I know this issue is very sensitive and the first victim is often the junior employee. I think if salaries have to be cut, let it be from the top of the ladder, starting with big executives whose monthly salaries and annual bonuses exceed the wages of all employees, and this is my personal opinion. Unfortunately, there are those who believe that the junior employee is the weakest link and the solution to any problem is made at the expense of this poor person.

I recently read about a great model in dealing with employees - a decision made by a Gulf company, which I think is best in managing the problem professionally and humanely. This company announced the reduction of salaries of its workers, while directing employees to work remotely from their homes.

This procedure seems fair, because it included reduction of the salary of the chairman himself by 100 percent, salaries of senior management by 50 percent, middle management by 40 percent, and junior employees by 30 percent. I think this is a win-win solution. The salaries of employees continuing to work fulltime in supportive jobs were excluded. The allowances of housing and medical insurance were retained.

But not all companies are alike, as some have rushed to end the services of their employees or reduce wages by around half, or asked their employees to take open-ended leave. Personally, I understand the issue of reducing salaries, but I am concerned more about terminating service, because this abrupt ending will be a great shock and cause harm, since the head of the family or anyone cannot deal with the matter in light of the high prices of goods.

A government report issued by the macroeconomic department of the Cabinet revealed that the government faces a monthly bill estimated at \$3.5 billion in the event of a continued holiday granted by the state to citizens and expats in the public sector due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Personally, I am against completely shutting down work, and I see that it is necessary to reopen some businesses and activate the economy, as many European countries have taken the decision to resume work while adhering to the rules of hygiene and social distancing, which is a sound and required step to cope with the virus.

Large sectors of the private sector have been affected by the decision to close, such as cafes, salons, recreational complexes, car maintenance workshops and clothing stores that employ expatriate workers and are owned by citizens. The owners have obligations with banks as well, so the problem is widespread and the repercussions of the crisis will be on the Kuwaiti economy and all workers.

I trust it is time to look at the impact of low oil prices on the state's general budget and the best way out is to activate the economy and bring work back. This crisis is no longer a health issue, but a financial one too. I think government intervention is needed now to save the private sector and everyone's incomes - not only of business owners, but of all workers, expats and citizens.

## Kuwait delivers 1,500 food packs to workers in Mahboula



**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) — in cooperation with the Interior Ministry — delivered on Friday 1,500 food baskets to workers in Mahboula, which is under lockdown due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). KRCS's Public Relations head Khaled Al-Zayed said that operations to hand

foodstuff in Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh was ongoing since the lockdown was announced. He added that KRCS was keen on providing necessities to workers as well as families in need in Jahra and Taima areas. KRCS provided 400 food baskets in aforementioned areas, Zayed affirmed. — KUNA

**Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed**

KuwaitTimes 94488888



# Indian nationals continue to avail amnesty



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



KUWAIT: Indian nationals are heading to centers set up by the Ministry of Interior to receive expatriates without valid residencies who are wishing to avail an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. Indian nationals are allowed

to apply on April 16 - 20, followed by Sri Lankans on April 21 - 25 and other nationalities on April 26 - 30. Bangladeshi nationals were received on April 11 - 15, while Egyptian nationals were received on April 6 - 10, following a five-day period to receive applicants from the Philippines. The Interior Ministry announced that 5,241 Egyptians applied to

avail the amnesty, while over 2,000 Filipinos applied on April 1 - 5.

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-Aslamaya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naeem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

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## MoI prohibits outdoor activities during curfew

KUWAIT: Outdoor activities, such as exercise, is strictly prohibited within the boundaries of residential areas, farms, and chalets especially between 5:00 pm to 6:00 am curfew hours, said the Interior Ministry Friday. A statement by the ministry stressed that efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) meant that all citizens and residents should abide by the rules especially during the partial curfew. Anyone breaking the law will be prosecuted, warned the ministry, which indicated that the imposed curfew also included regional waters and faraway locations such as farms and chalets. Whether on land or sea, the curfew applies, the statement by the ministry affirmed, urging all people to abide by the rules during hours of curfew. —KUNA

## Manpower authority inspects Khaitan workers' residences

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) inspectors went on a regular inspection of residences of workers in Khaitan on Wednesday. The inspectors checked the conditions of their housing, visa validity and other safety measures.

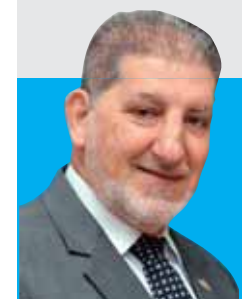
Iman Al-Ansari, deputy general director for planning and development sector at PAM, said more conditions have been set by PAM during the present situation. "This includes disinfecting their housing daily as precaution against the spread of coronavirus. Also, there should be enough space in each unit, so it's not allowed to have more than four people living in a 4 x 4 meter room. Furthermore, bunk beds are not allowed, and it's not allowed to have more than one person using the same bed," she told Kuwait Times.

"If the company notices any worker is suffering from flu-like symptoms, they should isolate him and inform the ministry of health, so he can be taken for medical checks. In case he is not infected with the coronavirus, he can return to the residence. The company is also obliged to provide thermal devices to measure the temperature of the workers daily when they leave the house and when they return," explained Ansari.

"Most coronavirus cases registered in Kuwait were among workers in their residences. So it is the responsibility of their employers to make the workers aware of the precautions they should follow, and they should also provide safety measures for the workers," she concluded. During the tour, a few fines were issued by the PAM inspectors including for a lack of facemasks and gloves for the workers, and having bunk beds in some rooms.

In my view

## Zwara tradition interrupted



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

The weekend has traditionally witnessed an almost "sacred tradition", as people gather at their parents' home for lunch and visits, known in the Kuwaiti dialect as "zwara". But this tradition has been abruptly interrupted by an unwanted visitor - COVID-19 - which kept everyone captive in their homes. Thanks to social media applications that allow people to communicate safely and away from the possibility of being infected with this absolutely dangerous and unwanted ugly visitor.

Yet, we can find things that this coronavirus drew our attention to, and realize that there could be some positives out of the matter, bearing in mind that no epidemic of any type is welcome in any shape or form, as many will be harmed regardless of their backgrounds or affiliations.

We must be convinced that COVID-19 does not recognize any boundaries, nor does it worry about obtaining an entry visa to any country or place and crosses borders at free will. That is why governments are closing down their borders because the virus can take free rides when it infects a person or contaminates goods of all types being shipped from one country to another. Some countries are not even allowing their own citizens to return home until after arrangements are made to ensure they are free of the virus.

The current circumstances have created the opportunity for us to know our neighbors better, being around in the same quarters for a longer time. One important thing that is taking place now is altruism, proving that necessity brings out the good and bad in us. We can see individuals and groups caring for the less privileged expats by distributing foodstuff and meals. Neighbors are asking each other about what they need from the co-ops or markets and share things with each other.

Crises like the one we are in give us the opportunity to remember those who are almost always in need of help, such as the elderly and those with special needs and challenges. As scientific advances are being made, this pandemic, I sincerely hope, will make future epidemics less likely, as lessons are learned from the current calamity. We may become more realistic about the dangers of viruses crossing barriers between species. Furthermore, the pandemic may make us more realistic about medicine.

Medicine is not omnipotent. Recognizing this might make us more aware of our vulnerabilities. The consequences of this are difficult to predict, but living in the world as it really is, rather than in an illusory world, is probably a good thing. And recognizing our own vulnerability might make us more humble and less presumptuous.

Final word: Be thankful for hard times. They are heaven-sent to teach you lessons, make you stronger and ultimately lead you to a better destiny.



Local

# Kuwait Prime Minister tours quarantine sites, field hospitals

Premier grateful for efforts to support government emergency plans



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visits Al-Zour medical center. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other ministers tour Al-Zour medical center.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visited on Thursday Al-Zour medical center, a quarantine center in Al-Zour area, built in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC). His Highness the Prime Minister was accompanied during the visit by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, Minister of Oil and Acting Minister of Electricity and Water Khaled Ali Al-Fadhel, and the Executive Di-

rector of KIPIC Hatem Al-Awadhi. The premier was briefed on the readiness by the staff to receive people in the next few days. His Highness the Prime Minister expressed his admiration and thanks to all exerted efforts by the ministry of Health, and all related agencies.

His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also visited an administrative and living quarantine building setup by Ministry of Defense in Julaiia. His Highness the Prime Minister was accompanied during the visit by Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Sabah, Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-

Khuder, and senior military officials. His Highness listened briefly to a number of leaders in the Ministry of Defense about the health services provided by the project during this crisis, including a tour to examination rooms, in addition to capacity of 582 medical beds as part of the project. In a press release, after the visit, His Highness the Prime Minister praised the great efforts by employees of the Ministry of Defense, to support the government emergency plans and their tireless work.

Moreover, His Highness the Prime Minister visited a field hospital set up by Kuwait National Guard in cooperation with the Ministry of Health in Mahboula. The premier was accompanied by Interior Minister

Anas Al-Saleh, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, and Kuwait National Guard Undersecretary Lieutenant General Hashem Al-Rifai. During his tour, His Highness the Prime Minister listened to a briefing from those in charge for the hospital's medical and health services toured the various specialized clinics and operations centers there. His Highness expressed his appreciation for the great efforts made by Kuwait National Guard leaders, officers and individuals, in supporting the emergency plan, indicating that the national guard represents a fundamental pillar in supporting their brothers in the Ministry of Interior in securing and guarding missions to all government sites under these circumstances. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah witnesses sterilization operations at the defense ministry's quarantine building in Julaiia.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other officials tour the defense ministry's quarantine building in Julaiia.



Kuwait National Guard Undersecretary Lieutenant General Hashem Al-Rifai gives a briefing during His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's visit to a field hospital in Mahboula.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is seen during a tour at a field hospital in Mahboula.

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Coronavirus spreads anxiety among migrants in Istanbul

## Coronavirus response stirs Jerusalem sovereignty struggle

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WUHAN: An aerial view shows the P4 laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology on Friday. — AFP

# Wuhan lab fuels controversy

## US investigates how coronavirus 'got out into the world'

**WUHAN:** Nestled in the hilly outskirts of Wuhan, the city at the heart of the coronavirus crisis, a Chinese high-security biosafety laboratory is now the subject of US claims it may be the cradle of the pandemic. Chinese scientists have said the virus likely jumped from an animal to humans in a market that sold wildlife in Wuhan, but the existence of the lab has fuelled conspiracy theories that the germ spread from the facility. The United States has now brought the allegations into the mainstream, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying US officials are doing a "full investigation" into how the virus "got out into the world". Here are some key questions about the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV):

### What is it?

The institute is home to the China Centre for Virus Culture Collection, the largest virus bank in Asia which preserves more than 1,500 strains, according to its website. The complex contains Asia's first maximum security lab equipped to handle Class 4 pathogens (P4) - dangerous viruses that pose a high risk of person-to-person transmission, such as Ebola. The 300-million-yuan (\$42 million) lab was completed in 2015, and finally opened in 2018, with the founder of a French

bioindustrial firm, Alain Merieux, acting as a consultant in its construction.

The institute also has a P3 laboratory that has been in operation since 2012. The 3,000-square-metre (32,000-square-foot) P4 lab, located in a square building with a cylindrical annex, lies near a pond at the foot of a forested hill in Wuhan's remote outskirts. On a recent visit, AFP saw no sign of activity inside. A poster outside the complex read, "Strong Prevention and Control, Don't Panic, Listen to Official Announcements, Believe in Science, Don't Spread Rumors".

### Is it the source of coronavirus?

Pompeo said Friday that Chinese authorities themselves, when they started investigating the virus, "considered whether the WIV was, in fact, the place where this came from". "We know they've not permitted the world's scientists to go into that laboratory to evaluate what took place there, what's happening

there, what's happening there even as we speak," he said in a radio interview. The Washington Post and Fox News both quoted anonymous sources who voiced concern that the virus may have come - accidentally - from the facility.

US diplomatic cables seen by The Washington Post revealed that officials were especially concerned about inadequate safety standards related to researchers' handling of SARS-like bat coronaviruses in the high-security lab. Fox News said the pandemic's "patient zero" may have been infected by a strain of bat virus being studied at the facility that somehow got into the population in Wuhan. Various conspiracy theories about the alleged origin of the coronavirus in the lab have flourished online. The institute declined to comment on Friday, but it released a statement in February dismissing the rumors.

It said it received samples of the then-unknown virus on December 30, determined the viral genome

sequence on January 2 and submitted information on the pathogen to the World Health Organization on January 11. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Friday rejected allegations that the lab was responsible for the outbreak. "A discerning person will understand at a glance that the purpose is to create confusion, divert public attention, and shirk their responsibility," said Zhao, who himself promoted conspiracy theories the US army may have brought the virus to China.

### What do scientists know?

Scientists believe the virus originated in bats before being passed to humans through an intermediary species - possibly the endangered pangolin, whose scales are illegally trafficked in China for traditional medicine. But a study by a group of Chinese scientists published in The Lancet in January revealed that the first COVID-19 patient had no connection to Wuhan's infamous animal market, and neither did 13 of the first 41 confirmed cases. Institute researcher Shi Zhengli, one of China's leading experts on bat coronaviruses and the deputy director of the P4 lab, was part of the team that published the first study to suggest that SARS-CoV-2 came from bats. — AFP



City at the heart of COVID-19 crisis

## COVID-19 spotlights Swedish segregation

**STOCKHOLM:** People in Sweden with foreign backgrounds are disproportionately affected by the new coronavirus, underscoring the grim reality of segregation and raising fears that a "blind spot" is masking some communities. The wealthy Scandinavian country of 10.3 million has a generous immigration policy, granting asylum and family reunifications to more than 400,000 people in 2010-2019, Migration Board statistics show.

But Sweden has struggled to integrate many of the newcomers, with thousands failing to learn the language proficiently and find jobs in its highly-skilled labor market. Many end up living in disadvantaged neighborhoods outside big cities, where little Swedish is spoken and unemployment and crime rates are high.

Earlier this week, the country's Public Health Agency reported that Somali-born residents in Sweden were over-represented among those in need of hospital care for COVID-19, as were people born in Eritrea, Finland, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. "For us the main signal is really that we need to reach those groups better with different kinds of messages to help protect them," state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell told AFP, conceding that authorities don't know the reason for their over-representation.

Stockholm accounts for over 40 percent of Sweden's more than 13,000 COVID-19 cases. Figures released last week by the capital showed that some poorer neighborhoods had up to three times as many cases per capita. Those municipalities are home to several of Sweden's "vulnerable areas," a designation originally assigned by Swedish police to socio-economically disadvantaged areas with high levels of crime. — AFP

## China under pressure over COVID-19 origin

**WASHINGTON:** China has come under mounting pressure over the coronavirus pandemic from Western powers led by the United States, which said it was probing whether the virus that has infected more than 2.1 million people actually originated in a Wuhan laboratory. The new focus on China's role came as the world wrestles with a crisis that has killed more than 140,000 people and created historic jobless numbers,

## Astronauts land on Earth transformed by virus pandemic

**ALMATY:** Two NASA astronauts and a Russian cosmonaut on Friday made a safe return from the International Space Station to find a "different planet," transformed by the coronavirus pandemic. Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and Oleg Skripochka touched down in central Kazakhstan at 0516 GMT in the first returning mission since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March. Morgan had been on the ISS since July last year, while Meir and Skripochka arrived in September. "TOUCH-DOWN! Welcome home, Oleg Skripochka, Andrew Morgan and Jessica Meir!" Russia's Roscosmos space agency wrote on Twitter.

Unusually, NASA and Roscosmos did not show live footage of the trio parachuting down in their Soyuz landing capsule. This was scrapped "due to technical limitations associated with the epidemiological situation," Roscosmos said. Subsequent footage from the landing site showed recovery crews wearing face masks and rubber gloves as they hauled the crew members out of the Soyuz MS-15 capsule, which was lying on its side. "Please keep your distance," one

with Britain, Japan and New York extending lockdown measures.

President Donald Trump, who initially downplayed the illness whose US death toll has shot past 30,000, has been attacking China for weeks and appeared to gain support after a videoconference among leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized democracies. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab told reporters there could be no "business as usual" with China.

"We'll have to ask the hard questions about how it came about and how it couldn't have been stopped earlier," said Raab, filling in for Prime Minister Boris Johnson who is recovering from the virus. French President Emmanuel Macron warned not to be "naive" in believing China has handled the outbreak well. "There are clearly things that have happened

that we don't know about," he said in an interview with the Financial Times. COVID-19 first emerged late last year in Wuhan, with China saying it was suspected to have been transmitted to humans at a meat market that butchered exotic animals.

The Washington Post and Fox News reported there were growing suspicions the virus in fact slipped out of a sensitive laboratory in Wuhan that studied bats, blamed for the SARS coronavirus outbreak in 2003. Neither outlet suggested the virus was spread deliberately. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said China should have been more transparent about the laboratory. "We're doing a full investigation of everything we can to learn how it is the case that this virus got away, got out into the world and now has created so much tragedy—so much death," Pompeo told Fox News. — AFP



DZHEZKAZGAN, Kazakhstan: Russian cosmonaut Oleg Skripochka and NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan and Jessica Meir rest shortly after landing in a remote area on Friday. — AFP

ground crew member could be heard telling another. While the trio's landing site southeast of the Kazakh town of Dzhezkazgan is the same as for previous crews, the pandemic has forced changes to mission-end protocol. The crew will not be flying back home via Kazakhstan's Karaganda airport as usual because it has been shut down, like so many other airports across the world. Instead, Skripochka will fly from the Baikonur cosmodrome used to launch missions to the ISS while the NASA duo will take off in a plane from the steppe city of Kyzlorda after a drive of

several hours. "Quite a ride home from @Space\_Station today," Meir tweeted late on Friday. "We've returned to a different planet, but it remains a spectacular one." Prior to departure, Meir said it would be difficult to forego embraces with family and friends as she gets to grips with a new culture of physical distancing on Earth. "I think I will feel more isolated on Earth than here," reflected Meir, who made history as one half of the first all-women spacewalk along with NASA colleague Christina Koch in October. — AFP



## International

# Horrors revealed at virus-hit Canada nursing home; 31 die

## Elderly residents left soiled and unfed as caregivers flee

**MONTREAL:** Elderly residents left soiled and unfed after their caregivers fled the premises, 31 deaths in the space of a few weeks: a nursing home in Montreal has become the symbol of the terrible toll coronavirus is taking in Canada's long-term care homes. The bleak situation discovered at the Residence Herron, in the Montreal suburb of Dorval, has triggered an investigation for gross negligence and a national reckoning about the conditions in long-term care homes which account for half the country's more than 1,250 COVID-19 deaths. "I was sick to my stomach, I was really sick to my stomach," Moira Davis, whose father Stanley Pinnell died at the Herron facility on April 8, told AFP.

"All of a sudden these questions started flying through my head, 'What could we have done differently? Why did nobody tell us?... Why, why, why?'" Called to the rescue after most of the staff deserted the facility, health authorities found residents dehydrated, unfed for days and lying listless in bed, some covered in excrement. Others had fallen to the floor. Two deaths had gone unnoticed for several days. At least five of the 31 recent deaths at the home have been officially attributed to the virus, with the others still being investigated by a coroner.

From her home in Creighton, Saskatchewan, Davis said she became concerned about her 86-year-old fa-

ther, who is believed to have contracted coronavirus a week before his death, as he sounded weaker and weaker on the phone each time they spoke. Davis says Residence Herron is a "poster child for what is wrong in our senior health care" - but she is also certain it is not unique. "There are other homes, I am sure, in every country of the world, where families have experienced a similar situation." "It scares me, it terrifies me to think that I am 60 years of age, and I may someday end up in one of these homes."



### Bleak situation triggers probe

**'Gross negligence'**  
In announcing the fatalities this week, Quebec Premier Francois Legault said it appeared to be a case of "gross negligence": just two nurses had been left to care for 130 elderly residents. Further fuelling public outrage, Canadian media also revealed that the home's owner had once been convicted of drug trafficking, fraud and tax evasion. For families, shock and anger mixed with the frustration of having been powerless to do anything, kept away by a ban on visits to the home to avoid contamination.

Local health authorities have now taken control of the facility, and a Can\$5 million class action has been launched against the owner alleging "inhumane and degrading maltreatment" for failing to ensure continued and adequate care. "On April 7, my mother was left in her wheelchair with a full, soiled diaper for three



**DORVAL, Canada:** This photo taken on April 16, 2020 shows flowers outside the Herron private nursing home west of Montreal. — AFP

hours because no one responded" to the emergency button and her cries for help, Peter Wheeland told AFP, adding that she had diarrhea, one of the symptoms of the new coronavirus. "We weren't able to communicate with anyone: We called the nurses' station, we left messages, we did everything we could do to reach them and there was no answer," he said, recalling being

overcome with fear "that my mother could suddenly die." Connie Wheeland has since been transferred to a hospital where she was diagnosed with COVID-19. She will not return to Herron. Rather than continue to pay the home Can\$45,000 each year, once she recovers her son plans to set her up in an apartment and hire a private nurse to care for her. — AFP

## German virus patients are the 'lucky' ones

**AACHEN:** After making it through the first night breathing on her own, 60-year-old Martina Hamacher can only say: "I've been lucky." One of Germany's earliest coronavirus patients, Hamacher is still tangled in some of the tubes and cables that helped keep her alive for 20 days in intensive care. "I've made it this far," she says with a slight smile in Aachen's university hospital. Things could have been worse for Hamacher had she not been treated in Germany, where the response to the crisis has been internationally admired. Despite a high number of infections, the death toll has been much lower than in France, Italy or the United States.

Experts have credited Berlin for widespread testing and ample capacity for patients stricken with the respiratory illness. Such large-scale efforts appear to have paid off, with patients receiving world-class care by medical staff who have stayed on top of the crisis. The hospital in Aachen has even been able to take patients from Belgium and the Netherlands. "I'm very grateful for what the doctors and nurses did, without them I don't think I'd still be here," Hamacher says.

### 'Doing our duty'

Sleeping patients unable to survive without assistance can be seen through yellow sliding doors that open into two-bed intensive care units (ICU) at the hospital. Amid constant beeping at different pitches and volumes from life-support machines,



**AACHEN, Germany:** Medical staff take care of a COVID-19 patient in an intensive care unit at the university hospital of Aachen on April 15, 2020. — AFP

doctors and nurses work in their epidemic armor of masks, gloves, caps and protective suits. "This is part of our duty that we're living up to," said a nurse named Kathi. Aachen has 51 coronavirus patients at present, 35 of them in intensive care. "It's important to me that this isn't only tied up with death and technology," says ICU director Gernot Marx. "We bring most people back to life, not because of all the machines we have but because of people who know what they're doing, who commit themselves so strongly."

### Intense preparations

The Aachen hospital's experience with coronavirus began slowly, Marx recounts. "We understood that we could and must use the time to prepare, because the images

from Bergamo (in northern Italy) were horrifying. We were determined not to let that become the reality here." Within a few days, the number of ICU beds surged from 96 to 136, an increase matched by other German medical facilities.

A further 70 places could be quickly set up if needed, but the country already had 11,000 free intensive care beds from a nationwide total of 25,000. "We were always prepared to take people in," Marx says. More than 3,800 people have died in Germany out of more than 133,000 confirmed infections, a rate well below other big European Union countries such as France or Spain. And since April 12, more people have been declared disease-free each day than new infections have been reported, Health Minister Jens Spahn said Friday. — AFP

## Chinese help gets wary reception

**PARIS:** An operation by France's Chinese community to help the diaspora during the coronavirus outbreak by distributing masks, disinfectant and gloves has prompted questions and legal problems for some of its backers. Sceptical of the French government's response to the epidemic, the Chinese embassy, business leaders and ex-pat associations have handed out so-called "COVID kits", masks and other protective equipment to their compatriots.

But this landed some in trouble with the law. Among the masks given out were the highly sought-after FFP2 type, which in times of critical supply shortages have been reserved for medical personnel on the frontlines of France's coronavirus battle. Early in the outbreak, France had requisitioned all face mask stocks and production for distribution to doctors, nurses and caregivers. Yet on April 5, police in Paris detained two representatives of Chinese associations for possession of some 15,000 masks.

Two days later, three students were arrested while handing out Chinese embassy-sponsored "COVID kits" in the Paris suburbs, an operation which caused people to amass in contravention of France's strict social distancing regulations to stem the virus spread. FFP2 masks were included in some of

the kits, along with protective gloves, disinfectant wipes and Chinese traditional medicine. The Chinese embassy in Paris insisted in a statement that there was nothing illegal. It was doing "its best... to defend the rights and legitimate interests of Chinese compatriots in France."

### 'Chinese health diplomacy'

The health crisis has strained ties between Paris and Beijing. France this week summoned the Chinese ambassador to protest a string of controversial comments by Beijing's embassy in Paris on France's handling of the coronavirus. And French President Emmanuel Macron told the Financial Times that things "happened that we don't know about" in the response to the virus by China, where the pandemic originated. The "COVID kit" initiative came in response to a letter dated March 31, in the form of an urgent appeal signed by about 20 bodies representing France-based Chinese people, whom they judged to be "in danger".

Faced with "the inability (of the French authorities) to take appropriate protective measures", said the authors of the letter, penned in Mandarin, they were launching an appeal for "certain protective products and medical materials". Two days after it was sent out, the Chinese embassy in Paris launched a distribution program of "COVID kits", using students who organize deliveries with the help of popular Chinese messaging app WeChat. There are 125,000 Chinese nationals living in France on residency permits, a small proportion of all foreigners residing in the country. — AFP

## Will Italy's virus epidemic fuel far right?

**ROME:** Italy is staring down the barrel of the worst recession since World War II, which could bolster the far-right and damage the country's love affair with the European Union, analysts say. Much will depend on how Rome handles the easing of the national lockdown, how quickly it manages to get liquidity to suffering businesses, and how much solidarity it is seen to get from the EU at a key meeting next week.

The coronavirus emergency in Italy has fuelled not only national pride but also eurosceptic and populist narratives. That brew could play right into the hands of Matteo Salvini, whose League party governed Italy in a coalition for a year until summer 2019 and who is determined to return quickly to power, to rule alone. "The (economic) blow is going to be extremely hard, that's clear. But it can be merely extremely hard, or it can be exceptionally hard," Giovanni Orsina, professor of politics at Rome's LUISS University, told AFP.

"If people begin to suffer seriously, rage could spread throughout the country... at which point far-right propaganda becomes very effective", he said. At the height of the health crisis, which has killed over 22,000 people and infected around 169,000, largely in the country's wealthy northern powerhouse, Italy's warring political parties called a temporary truce of sorts. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's popularity shot up to a record high of around 63 percent, polls showed.

### Bitter spats

But as preparations for relaunching parts of the economy begin, cracks have emerged in the already

fragile ruling coalition, made up of the centre-left Democratic Party and anti-establishment Five Stars Movement. And opposition leader Salvini has resumed his virulent attacks on the government, along with Giorgia Meloni, head of the small far-right Brothers of Italy party, which has been enjoying a sharp rise in popularity. Bitter spats have broken out over the length of the economically-crippling lockdown, which has been extended by Conte and is currently due to be lifted on May 4, after a near two-month stoppage. Millions of Italians are either furloughed or have lost their jobs, and the northern regions - League strongholds - are champing at the bit to re-open.

A delay in shutting several virus hotspots in the Lombardy region, home to the financial capital Milan, allowed the virus to spread and has sparked a row between the government and League - with each blaming the other for failing to act. The anti-populist, youth-driven Sardines movement - founded last year to try and stop Salvini's rise - is one of many left-wing voices calling on Conte to put the region under special commission for woeful crisis management.

The economic fallout forecast is mind-boggling. The International Monetary Fund expects Italy's economy to shrink by 9.1 percent in 2020 - the worst peacetime decline in nearly a century. The Confindustria big business lobby has said every week of the shutdown chops another 0.75 percent off GDP. Yet Conte has hesitated over entering the so-called "Phase Two", the easing of the lockdown, amid advice from top scientists that the epidemic could flare up again, forcing him to shut down the country a second time. He is banking on help from the EU to weather the storm.

### Anti-EU backlash

Eurogroup finance ministers have approved a 500-billion-euro rescue package to help European countries hit hard by the pandemic - but some Italians fear that the cross-border solidarity will come with strings attached. The ministers have so far refused to counter

a proposal from Italy, Spain, and France for a joint borrowing instrument, dubbed a "coronabond", that would have raised money towards a recovery after the outbreak. The bonds could reduce Italy's borrowing costs, but northern nations say they unfairly help countries that had been spending beyond their means for years.

That has incensed many Italians. Italy also felt abandoned at the start of the crisis, with European countries reluctant to share much-needed medical supplies, for which the EU Commission president offered a "heartfelt apology" this week. A Tecne poll from April 9 and 10 found the share of Italians that would vote to leave the EU in a referendum was up by 20 percentage points to 49 percent, compared to a previous poll from the end of 2018.

Rome is reluctant to use the rescue plan, which includes loans from the financial-crisis-era European Stability Mechanism (ESM), despite an easing of the tough economic and fiscal reform usually tied to it as requirements. The ESM evokes bad memories of Brussels dictating policy to bailed-out Greece, and Salvini and Meloni have both said Conte would be stripping Italy of its sovereignty if he uses it. They also complain Italy is being offered a fraction of the money it pours into the EU, and will have to pay interest. "It's stealing," Salvini said, sneering at the suggestion Italy had got a good deal in terms of the reduced conditions.

Meloni said using the mechanism was "worthy of a totalitarian regime" and "a democratic point of no return". The government hopes it will score an important win on the question of joint bonds to finance reconstruction at a videoconference meeting of EU leaders next Thursday - perhaps allowing it to avoid using the ESM. Former Italian prime minister Enrico Letta implored Brussels, Berlin and Paris "not to underestimate... growing euro-frustration" among Italians. It would be "a big mistake", he tweeted.

### Risks

Conte's problems are not limited to the far-right.



## International

# Qatari charity feeds expat workers in COVID-19 limbo

## Qatar reports 3 new virus cases at World Cup sites

DOHA: Volunteers stack thousands of trays of steaming curry in a Doha kitchen, readying them to be distributed to low-income migrant workers facing food shortages while under lockdown due to COVID-19. The NGO Qatar Charity launched an initiative in recent weeks to deliver daily meals to around 4,000 migrant workers, many confined in the working-class Industrial Area in the south of the capital Doha.

Tens of thousands of residents were quarantined in the area after cases of the novel coronavirus were confirmed among the community last month. The area faced food shortages in the early days of the lockdown, according to residents, diplomats and NGOs, with reports that stores hiked prices to unaffordable levels.

In response to a government request, Qatar Charity started distributing meals out of four kitchens, one of which was lent to the group by a restaurant better known for fine dining. "We want everyone to feel there are people who care about them, that they're not alone," said Qatar Charity volunteering supervisor Mohammed Ali Al-Ghamdi, as around him over a dozen volunteers packed meals and loaded them onto a decontaminated delivery van.

"Laborers in Doha do an amazing job, this is thanks from the community," Gas-rich Qatar - home to hundreds of thousands of foreign workers - has reported seven deaths from the COVID-19 disease

and 4,103 cases so far. Qatari officials have said they are considering easing the lockdown on the Industrial Area after undertaking widespread testing, detection and treatment. The district has been ringed with police checkpoints and a sterilization unit deployed to disinfect delivery vehicles.

### Cases at World Cup sites

Meanwhile, Qatar has detected three more coronavirus cases among workers on World Cup stadiums, organizers said, bringing the number of infections among those involved in 2022 tournament construction to eight. The Gulf nation has reported seven deaths from the COVID-19 disease and 4,103 cases in total, announcing the first infections in stadium workers on Wednesday.

Building work for the stadiums and infrastructure to stage the tournament has continued through the crisis even as non-essential retail has been halted and mosques, parks and restaurants have closed. "The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) has confirmed that two staff members who work for a SC contractor have tested positive for COVID-19," organizers said in a statement. "In addition, six workers on SC projects have tested positive." On Wednesday the SC said that staff at three of the seven stadiums being built from scratch for the 2022 tournament had been affected.

“Laborers do an amazing job, this is thanks from the community”



DOHA: Qatar charity workers prepare food parcels for migrant laborers living under quarantine on April 16, 2020 amid the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

The SC was following health ministry guidance to respond to the cases and all those affected would continue to be paid and receive free healthcare, the statement added. The timings of the competition, due to be held in November and

December of 2022, remain unchanged by the coronavirus pandemic which has already forced the postponement of the European football championships and the Tokyo Olympics. Both will now take place in 2021. —AFP

## South Africa scrambles to isolate prison virus cases as virus spreads

PORT ELIZABETH: But it was already too late. The virus had already invaded her workplace, and was cutting a swathe through prisoners and staff alike. In the past two weeks, more than 55 inmates and 29 workers at the correctional facility in East London have been diagnosed with the potentially deadly disease. "This is a ticking time bomb," said Ayanda Botha, whose nephew is serving a 10-year term at the overcrowded jail in eastern South Africa. "There is no physical distances in prisons, none at all," he told AFP. "So how do you expect to contain the spread?"

The tale encapsulates the problem facing the world's jails, where close confinement is a red-carpet invitation to a respiratory virus. Overcrowding and poor sanitation have prompted a growing number of countries to release low-risk prisoners after coronavirus was detected among inmates. Botha hoped South African authorities would follow suit. The country has registered the highest number of coronavirus cases in Africa, with 2,605 infections, including 48 deaths.

Its 242 jails house around 160,000 inmates, according to official figures, although data on overcrowding is not available. So far, only four prisons say they have detected the disease, prompting government to opt for prevention rather than release. The authorities are taking steps to disinfect facilities, reduce cell numbers and ensure infected inmates can isolate. Some of the East London cases - which has more than 300 inmates and employs some 80 staff - will be treated in hospital.

Justice Minister Ronald Lamola assured that all infected prisoners had been put in single cells on a separate quarantine site. "We have absolute confidence in our Covid-19 measures and we are confident that they will lead to recoveries that will 'give birth' to a correctional services free of the virus," Lamola told reporters earlier this week. Family visits have also been restricted and testing ramped up in all detention centers. "Even with the testing, I am not convinced that the net will catch each and every prisoner," said Botha, who remained worried.

### 'Not taking it likely'

Coronavirus outbreaks in detention centers are often traced back to prison officials who contracted the disease outside office hours. The first case at the East London facility was a staff member who fell ill after attending a funeral in the nearby city of Port Elizabeth. South Africa's correctional services department said it was considering how best to deal with "officials attending gatherings and movements from their residences to places of work".

Two suspected coronavirus cases were meanwhile reported by the St Albans correctional centre, on the outskirts of the city of Port Elizabeth in the same Eastern Cape province. Testing on Friday revealed that all inmates were negative. But a prisons social counselor said inmates had panicked at prospect of a Covid-19 outbreak. —AFP

## Tunisian researchers use AI, X-rays to create online virus scan tool

TUNIS: Tunisian engineers have created a web-based platform that scans lung X-rays and evaluates whether patients are likely to be suffering

## COVID-19 spreads anxiety among African migrants in Istanbul

ISTANBUL: With a list of names in his hand, Alfa Barrie is on the phone to an African migrant, one of Istanbul's undocumented workers looking for help as the coronavirus pandemic hits Turkey's largest city. "Where is the house? Send me the location. I am coming," he says. Barrie's three-member team, works with a voluntary group called Tarlabasi Solidarity Network which normally helps drug addicts and the homeless but has now redirected its attention to migrants, mostly Africans, to protect them against the spread of the coronavirus in Turkey.

"We call the head of the house. They come down to pick the package. We give them shopping cards, hand sanitisers, masks and gloves," Barrie said. Because of the social distancing rules Barrie, from Sierra Leone in west Africa, does not go inside the homes. Instead, he hands the aid bags over outside their apartment building. Wearing face masks, the group tours Istanbul neighborhoods densely populated by African migrants in a car loaded with aid packages, visiting at least 300 addresses per day.

"We have close to 5,000 beneficiaries on our list waiting for help. We have completed almost 25 percent of it," Muhammed Siddik of the Tarlabasi Solidarity Network said. The network operates with donations from the volunteers as well as from manufacturers. Some 80,000 African migrants from Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea and elsewhere - most of them undocumented - live in Istanbul, according to

## Virus response stirs Jerusalem struggle

JERUSALEM: Israel's arrest of senior Palestinian officials for "illegal" efforts to contain coronavirus and the Jewish state's closure of a clinic have exacerbated a long-running row over the status of east Jerusalem. Since the onset of the health crisis, Palestinian officials allege the Arab population of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem has been overlooked by Israeli efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

Israeli police recently shuttered a COVID-19 screening facility in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan-the testing was unauthorized, they said, because it was only overseen by the Palestinian Authority, and not Israel. "Our goal is to provide aid to the people of east Jerusalem who are intentionally being neglected" by Israel, Fadi al-Hadami, the Palestinian government's minister for Jerusalem affairs, told AFP.

But meetings with "hospital doctors in Jerusalem, interviews with media calling on people to stay at home to fight corona(virus) - they (Israel) con-

sider these things violations," he lamented. Earlier this month, Hadami and Adnan Ghath, the Palestinians' governor of Jerusalem, were detained by Israeli authorities amid their on-the-ground response to the coronavirus crisis. Both men were released within 24 hours. But the spread of COVID-19 in predominantly Palestinian east Jerusalem risks exacerbating political tensions that could put lives at risk.

At the heart of the dispute is the status of Jerusalem-one of the thorniest issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel captured that part of the city in a 1967 war and later annexed it in moves considered illegal under international law. It views the entire city as its undivided capital, banning any Palestinian government activity there.

The Palestinian Authority considers east Jerusalem the capital of its own future state and tries to maintain a presence on the ground. The city's status was meant to be resolved as part of a final peace agreement between the two sides, but the diplomatic process between Israel and the Palestinians has long been dormant. Israeli police meanwhile enforce the prohibition of Palestinian political activity in east Jerusalem.

development agency GIZ, the Italian Society of Medical Radiology and US tech giant IBM.

Thousands of X-rays of the lungs of both healthy people and COVID-19 patients have been fed into the platform, allowing artificial intelligence to learn to recognize the marks of the virus on the lungs. Improvements still need to be made for patients presenting with few symptoms, but the technology "allows the classification of a large number of images in a very short time, at low cost," Mustapha

Hamdi, an academic and one of the platform's developers, told AFP on Friday.

"The more images we upload to the platform, the more exact and reliable it becomes." It is still in the test phase, under evaluation by Tunisia's health ministry. But if approved, the technology would be particularly useful in areas of the country that lack major hospitals and specialist doctors. "The initial idea was to allow the remote interior regions (of Tunisia) to do mass analysis", Hamdi said. —AFP

the network. Officials say the city of 16 million people has recorded almost half of the nearly 80,000 coronavirus cases nationwide. A reported 1,769 people have died of the virus in Turkey.

### 'How to survive?'

Idriss Camara from Sierra Leone comes down from his building in the Aksaray neighborhood, where diverse migrant groups including Syrians live, to pick up the aid package. The voluntary group also provides instructions about the deadly virus. "All instructions are in here, so you can follow in both French and English," Yasir, a Turkish volunteer with the Tarlabasi Solidarity Network, tells the group of Africans in the street before he hands them the leaflets.

"There's a Whatsapp number you can call or send message when you feel sick or your friends are sick. You can call immediately this number and we'll try to help you," he says. Idriss looks happy to get his aid package but he is worried how long he can continue. "Imagine we are in a pandemic. You know what's important for you to be in a pandemic, you need a lot of things for life to go on," he told AFP. "We are foreigners, we are immigrants ... We are actually looking to the government at least to take care of our own interests," he said. Idriss lost his job in the textile business after the coronavirus struck the job market. "I am not working. Everything is shut down. How could I survive?" he said desperately.

### 'Future tough'

Siddik of the Tarlabasi Solidarity Network called for measures to protect migrants before it is too late. "All the migrants including undocumented ones are the most disadvantaged group victimized by the pandemic," he said. "They live in crowded groups



ISTANBUL: Members of a solidarity network hand out disinfectant, gloves and facemasks as well as food cards to African migrants on Friday. —AFP

like five, six people in a small house. If the disease spreads among them in the very near future, we will be unable to generate a solution," he warned. The migrants don't have easy access to hospitals because of language problems and some are even sent away at the door, Siddik said. Last week, an African man died of COVID-19 in his house because he couldn't get hospital treatment, he added.

In a small dark underground flat, nine African men live in squalid conditions in the Aksaray neighborhood. "Nine of us are living here. We are taking measures. We don't go outside. All of us wash our hands regularly," one resident, called Christian Williams also from Sierra Leone said. "We economize on our food, because we don't have much food stuff. I am worried about our bills: electricity bills, water bills. We don't work now," he said. "The future is very tough because things are hard right now. We can't predict the future." —AFP



JERUSALEM: Newly-wed Palestinians Yazen Abu Ramoos and Iman Ghaith walk in the neighborhood of Beit Hanina in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem on Friday. —AFP

### Test clinics doubled

A total of 81 people have tested positive for coronavirus in east Jerusalem, according to the Palestinian health ministry. Israel recently doubled the number of its screening centers in Palestinian neighbourhoods in east Jerusalem from three to six following a petition to the supreme court by a rights group.

The detention of the senior Palestinian officials this month was not-

ing new-Ghaith has been arrested seven times in two years, Hadami four times. But this time, the men said, they were not asked about political activities but their work spreading awareness about the coronavirus among Palestinians in Jerusalem. The two men are from Jerusalem, but due to Israeli restrictions they work in Al-Ram, on the other side of an Israeli wall separating the city and the occupied West Bank. —AFP



## Business

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**10** Africa 'still needs' \$44 bn to fight coronavirus pandemic**11** US halts sale of bleach touted as a 'miracle' coronavirus cure**11** Ooredoo - the first to launch education Learning Platform

LOS ANGELES: A woman wrapped in facial covering walks past apartments for rent in downtown Los Angeles, California. 'Rent strike' is a nascent movement in the US among the newly unemployed, caught between a rock and a hard place during the forced shutdown of economic activity, orchestrated to halt the progress of COVID-19. — AFP

# To pay the rent or to eat?

## Suddenly jobless Americans face dilemma

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Terra Thomas, one of the millions of Americans who have lost their income due to the coronavirus pandemic, was stuck between a rock and a hard place - pay her rent or put food on the table? "Looking at my finances, it was, 'do I give the last little bit of my money to my landlord - who has a billion-dollar corporation - or do I save this for necessities like food and health care?'" said Thomas, who lives in Oakland in the San Francisco Bay area.

Thomas is participating in a "rent strike" with four other residents in her building, a growing movement across the US among people who face the same dilemma. "I risk a lot," said Thomas, but "I don't have a choice but to strike." She works as a freelance florist for events, particularly weddings, so Thomas's income depends completely on the resumption of group activities. Refusing to pay her \$833 rent "feels like a pretty common sense decision. It feels like a matter of survival," she told AFP.

Over the past month, a staggering 22 million Ameri-

cans have lost their jobs as stores, restaurants and other businesses deemed non-essential were forced to close, shedding legions of workers. The shutdown of all this non-essential activity, an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19, has had serious consequences in a country where many people struggle with debt and lack a financial safety net.

In 2018, 40 percent of Americans said they had less than \$400 saved for emergencies, without selling belongings or borrowing, according to a report by the Federal Reserve. Some small-scale landlords have proposed repaying rent via installments. Several cities and states, including California, have passed executive orders prohibiting eviction of tenants affected by the

coronavirus crisis. But when the lockdown lifts, the moratorium will end. And tenants will have to pay their back-rent or move out.



**A staggering 22 million Americans have lost their jobs**

omy. It makes no sense at all." With other local elected officials, she called on the governor of California, Gavin Newsom, on Congress and on President Donald Trump to cancel rents and ex-

### Indebted

"We can't have people accumulating debts during this time so when this is all over, they might end up on the street. They're working to pay off debts as opposed to getting their life back together and up and running," said Hillary Ronen, a San Francisco district supervisor. "It's going to stall the econ-

omy. It makes no sense at all." tend mortgage payments for landlords. Washington's plan to jumpstart the US economy includes checks of about \$1,200 or more for many Americans, particularly lower-income and middle-class households. But the checks often won't be enough to cover fixed expenses, particularly in cities with high rent. In San Francisco, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is "around \$3,500-3,700 a month. It's obscene," said Ronen.

"We need either a mass infusion of cash directly to renters, or we need cancellation of rents during the period of stay-at-home order. If we do not have one of those two things, we will have a mass eviction crisis where individuals and families will end up homeless on the streets of this country, in huge large numbers," said Ronen. About 2,000 people have pledged not to pay their next month's rent to the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, which provides legal aid to rent strikers as one of several organizations overseeing the movement. It is not known how many people are taking part overall. — AFP

## Africa billionaires urged to help in coronavirus fight

**KANO:** Workers in the northern Nigerian city of Kano set out rows of new hospital beds inside two cavernous tents that have been hastily erected on the pitch of an empty football stadium. The facilities have been built to become an isolation centre for COVID-19 patients as Africa's most populous nation braces for a potential surge in infections. The person behind this project is Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man, who was born in Kano and has built up a personal fortune on the back of his concrete empire that Forbes estimates at some \$8 billion.

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and biggest economy, boasting a handful of billionaires whose super yachts can be seen bobbing on the waters of megacity Lagos. But it is also a land of vast inequality where almost half of the 200 million population live in dire poverty and years of neglect has left the health system in tatters. Now those who have made it big in Nigeria's cutthroat business world are being called on to help tackle a crisis that experts warn could overwhelm the country.



JOHANNESBURG: Pedestrians cross the road as they walk past a closed store in Berea, Johannesburg. — AFP

At the end of February, a coalition of some 50 leading businesses spearheaded by Dangote's foundation and Nigeria's Access Bank pledged around \$57 million (53 million euros) to bolster capacity. "If everyone does their own thing then it creates a cacophony," Zouera Yousoufou, the managing director of the Dangote Foundation, told AFP. "So everyone puts in what they can depending on their size and they can pool resources." The private sec-

tor is building seven emergency isolation centers in key cities and looking to help increase testing rates which currently languish at around just 5,000. Around the globe, wealthy individuals from Bill Gates to Twitter's Jack Dorsey have promised major contributions to take on the global pandemic. China's richest man Jack Ma, the founder of online retailer Alibaba, has dispatched over a million test kits and protective equipment to Africa. — AFP

## Whistleblower wins millions in Dubai case

**LONDON:** A London court on Friday ordered accounting giant Ernst & Young to pay millions of pounds in damages to a whistleblower auditor who raised concerns about a Dubai gold refiner client. Amjad Rihan was awarded £8.6 million (\$10.8 million, 9.9 million euros) after claiming the firm had tried to suppress a report that uncovered various problems with the refiner, Kaloti Jewelry International.

Lawyers for Rihan, a former partner at Ernst & Young, said the problems included billions of dollars worth of cash transactions and attempts to deceive authorities by importing large quantities of gold which had been coated with silver. It was also alleged that the Gulf-based company was involved in buying gold from conflict zones.

Rihan claimed he lost his job with EY, the accountancy firm's new name, after he raised concerns about the violations. On Friday, the High Court in London agreed with him, handing down its ruling following a three-week trial earlier this year. In a statement, Rihan said: "Almost seven years of agony for me and my family has come to an end with a total vindication by the court. My life was turned upside down as I was cruelly and harshly punished for insisting on doing my job ethically, professionally and lawfully in relation to the gold audits in Dubai.

"The court ruled in my favor and found that EY breached its duties towards me, for which I am very grateful." EY told the BBC it was "surprised and disappointed by the judge's decision" and would appeal. In a statement, EY said: "It was the work of an EY Dubai assurance team that uncovered serious irregularities and reported them to the proper authorities. — Reuters



## Business

# Africa still needs \$44 billion to fight pandemic: World Bank, IMF

## Leaders warn, 'Africa short of funds to fight pandemic'

WASHINGTON: International financial institutions and African leaders warned on Friday the continent needs tens of billions of dollars in additional money to fight the coronavirus pandemic despite debt freezes and massive pledges of support. In a joint statement, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund said they had each contributed to the \$57 billion mobilized by official creditors to support healthcare and economic recovery on the world's poorest continent, while \$13 billion came from private funds.

"This is an important start, but the continent needs

countries. Africa is seen as particularly vulnerable to the disaster, which the IMF has dubbed "The Great Lockdown" as it warns of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

Experts fear the continent's notoriously weak health systems may not be able to stop the spread of COVID-19 while the combined effects of a slump in demand for minerals and tourism together with lockdowns to stem the contagion could wallop economies. "This pandemic has already had a devastating impact on Africa and its effects will deepen as the rate of infection rises," South African president and African Union chairman Cyril Ramaphosa said in the statement. "It is a setback for the progress we have made to eradicate poverty, inequality and underdevelopment."

### Dire forecasts

Deaths from coronavirus hit 1,000 across Africa on Friday, according to an AFP tally, with 19,334 cases recorded. The IMF expects the continent's gross domestic product to shrink by 1.6 percent in 2020, "the worst result ever recorded," and the World Bank has warned that the region could slip into its first recession in 25 years.

With many African countries both poor and deeply indebted, the World Bank and IMF this week rolled out new financing tools and beefed up existing ones while also emphasizing debt relief. The G20 grouping of the world's largest economies agreed on Wednesday to a standstill in debt payments for the world's poorest



JOHANNESBURG: A volunteer from the Rays of Light NGO carries bread packs for a free distribution in Alexandria, Johannesburg. — AFP

nations, many of which are in Africa.

Using its redesigned Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT), debuted in 2015 to help west African countries hit by the Ebola epidemic, the IMF approved on Monday a six-month debt payment standstill for 25 countries, with African nations making up the bulk of the relieved. The World Bank has meanwhile pledged to roll out \$160 billion over

the next 15 months for health care and economic recovery projects worldwide, while the IMF said 102 countries as of Thursday had asked to tap its \$1 trillion lending war chest.

On Friday, the IMF Executive Board announced it had disbursed \$886.2 million to Ivory Coast where the economic impact of the coronavirus is expected "to be substantial, with the near-term outlook deteriorating quickly." The funding is meant to help the country "meet the urgent balance of payment needs stemming from the outbreak." It similarly rolled out a \$111.6 million disbursement to Haiti.

### Progress undone

Despite the billions of dollars allocated for the fight in poor countries, Malpass warned "it's clear that it won't be enough." "If we don't move quickly to strengthen systems and resilience, the development gains of recent years can easily be lost," the World Bank chief said.

For the debtor countries partaking of the bank's \$160 billion in financing, "there will be a monitoring of how the governments are using the fiscal space that is created by the debt relief," Malpass said. The expectation is that such countries would spend their freed-up funds on healthcare, education and bolstering their economy. "If they're transparent, they're much more attractive to profitable investment coming in from around the world and from private sectors around the world," he said. — AFP



### Worst financial crisis since the Great Depression

an estimated \$114 billion in 2020 in its fight against COVID-19, leaving a financing gap of around \$44 billion," the statement said. The Washington-based institutions finished up their spring meetings this week, rolling out a slate of financing programs directed at combating the pandemic, which World Bank President David Malpass said could undo development in poor

## Trump announces \$19 billion relief for farmers amid virus

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Friday announced a \$19 billion financial rescue package to help the agriculture industry weather the staggering economic downturn sparked by measures to defeat the coronavirus. Trump told a press conference the government "will be implementing a \$19 billion relief program for our great farmers and ranchers as they cope with the fallout of the global pandemic." The program will include direct payments to farmers, ranchers and producers who Trump said have experienced "unprecedented losses during this pandemic."

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said US farmers have been hit hard by a sharp shift in demand, as schools and restaurants close and more Americans eat at home. That has disrupted the food supply chain, forcing farmers in many places to destroy dairy output and plow under crops that no longer have buyers. "Having to dump milk and plow under vegetables ready to market is not only financially distressing, but it's heartbreaking as well to those who produce them," Perdue said.

Perdue said some \$3 billion of the money would go to buying produce and milk from such farmers, and redistribute it to community food banks. Millions of Americans have recently turned to food pantries for meals and groceries after losing their jobs. The US farm and food industry has been hit in numerous ways by the coronavirus epidemic. Farmers are having trouble finding seasonal laborers to prepare and harvest crops; some meatpacking plants have been hit hard by COVID-19 outbreaks. But the change in the way consumers eat has had a huge impact.

"Shuttered schools, universities, restaurants, bars and cafeterias are no longer buying milk, meat, fruits, vegetables and other food, causing a downward spiral in crop and livestock prices," the American Farm Bureau said recently. Perdue praised farmers, who have enjoyed billions of dollars in support payments over the past two years due to the impact of Trump's trade war with China, as "heroic." "Our farmers have been in the fields planting and doing what they do every spring to feed the American people, even with a pandemic, as we speak." — AFP

## Guinea's prized dam project under fire over village displacements

SOUAPITI: Village elder Naby Soumah stands beneath a lone mango tree, looking at the grey blot on the horizon where builders are putting the finishing touches to West Africa's largest dam. Around him lies a destroyed peanut field he says was flooded when engineers from the uncompleted dam experimented with closing the stop gates. The inhabitants of Bouramaya Sousou, an impoverished village in central Guinea, now say they struggle to feed themselves and have not received any compensation — complaints echoed by hundreds of others in the area.

"There are no traders or intellectuals here. Our children who have studied don't have jobs... We live from this land," Soumah said. "We're hungry." When the Chinese-financed Souapiti hydroelectric plant comes online, originally planned for the end of the year, it will represent a political coup for Alpha Conde, Guinea's 82-year president. For decades, leaders of the West African state have dreamt of building a dam straddling the Konkoure River, to power homes and businesses in a country where most people have no mains electricity.

For now the final schedule is unclear as the coronavirus pandemic forces Guinea to introduce measures to stop the spread, including a night-time curfew, shutting borders, banning large gatherings, and closing schools. Still, the builders of Souapiti dam say once operating it will meet demand for power, even allowing export of surplus electricity to neighboring states. But some 16,000 people must relocate first: the dam's reservoir is set to flood the remote bush where they live.

Resettlement has begun, but many of the displaced people say they await compensation for losses and complain that the new villages lack water and suitable farmland. In a mark of failure, hundreds have returned with their livestock to their old villages of low-slung mud huts. "They didn't plan anything," said Oumar Aissata Camara, the spokesman for the Souapiti Victims' Association, referring to the dam project.

The displaced villagers are "excessively poor," he added, warning that a botched resettlement could have dire consequences. A government agency overseeing the process says it is committed to helping the displaced people. "You can't just come and tear people from their ancestral land," said the agency's spokesman, Alphakaba Diakite, adding that compensation would be paid.

### West Africa's water tower

Dubbed West Africa's water tower, Guinea's highlands are the source of the region's major rivers, includ-

ing the Gambia, the Senegal, the Niger and the Konkoure. "The potential is enormous," said Jean-Michel Natrelle, a hydroelectric engineer with Tractebel, an energy firm supervising the Souapiti dam. But fresh water is scarce in the nation of some 13 million people. Power cuts, for those with electricity, are also rampant. The 450-megawatt dam is meant to respond to mounting frustrations over power supply.

"There was no choice but to develop this sector," said Natrelle. French colonial administrators first earmarked the site for hydropower back in 1944, 14 years before Guinea became independent. Periodic attempts to revive the project over the following decades fell through, often because of lack of money. Conde won his second presidential election in 2015 - partly on promises to deliver electricity nationwide - and the following year, a subsidiary of the China Three Gorges Corporation started building the dam.

Nearing completion, the vast concrete structure now stands over one kilometre (a thousand yards) long and about 120 meters high. Diakite said Conde had been instrumental in securing the roughly \$1.3 billion (1.2 billion euros) in financing from China. "It was Alpha who showed much more leadership," he said, comparing him to past rulers. Conde is expected to run for president again this year, after controversially changing the constitution in a move that critics brand as a power grab by an increasingly autocratic leader.

### 'We suffer'

Many of the families who have been displaced by the dam say they have been neglected and are uncertain about the future. In the new settlement of Madina Tayire, near the dam, a dozen residents gathered on a terrace outside the mosque to criticize the lack of water supplies. There is one, barely functioning, pump for scores of families in the village of yellow concrete houses, off a tarmacked road.

"We suffer from a lack of water," said one man, who did not want to give his name. He said there were positive sides to living in the new village, but life had been easier before. "In the bush we had the shade, we had our fruit trees," he said. Human Rights Watch (HRW) says it has recorded a litany of similar complaints - ranging from poor water access to uncompensated losses for fruit trees and farmland - in dozens of interviews.

"These people used to drink river water," said Diakite, explaining that they are better off in the modern villages. "Our contract is social... it's to change the lives of displaced people," he said. Guinea's energy ministry and China Three Gorges Corporation did not respond to requests for comment. Camara, the Souapiti Victims' Association spokesman, said that grouping strangers into villages and failing to meet their needs created a potential tinderbox. "What will happen after 10 years?" he asked. "It's a time bomb." — AFP

## Virus throttles Florida's lucrative ornamental plant industry

HOMESTEAD: The palm trees that line many US boulevards, the orchids sold in supermarkets, the bushes that form park hedges - many of these plants come from Florida. And sales have collapsed due to the coronavirus lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a sudden halt to this year's crop, throttling the industry just as it was reaching high season with the beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere.

"This is the period that the hibiscus is blooming. If we don't sell them, we're going to have to eat it in our salad," said Francisco Gonzalez, the owner of Primavera Nursery, a small nursery in Homestead, just south of Miami. Florida and California produce nearly half of all ornamental plants in the United States - plants sold to builders, landscapers, supermarkets, and Home Depots and Walmarts across the country. Traditionally March - precisely when coronavirus lockdowns began in the US - is when American buyers begin to focus on landscaping and gardening. "The whole year we've been waiting for this moment and we're faced with this calamity," sighed Gonzalez, 46, a native of Guatemala. Across six hectares Primavera Nursery produces 70 different types of ornamental plants, including ficus, croton, clusia and heliconia, hardly essentials for those in lockdown across the US. "Sales for April are nearly 60 percent below where we should be," said Gonzalez, who had invested money to expand production for this season. "We should be... about 125 percent above compared to last year," he said.

### Rampant unemployment

Gonzalez has cut working hours for his 11 employees, hoping to extend their jobs for two more weeks. But he fears he will have to let them go if the market doesn't recover. "With this disease, the last thing that people are going to worry about is buying these kinds of plants," said Antonio Tovar, general coordinator of the Farmworkers Association of Florida. "The whole market has collapsed." As for ornamental plant growers, "90

percent of the workers have lost their job," Tovar said. It is hard to know how many farmworkers have been affected in Florida because the vast majority are undocumented - an open secret in the agricultural world. These workers are off the books, with no access to unemployment benefits or the emergency federal aid check for employees. Since the coronavirus pandemic struck the US in mid-March some 22 million Americans have been left without a job. — AFP



FLORIDA: A farmer loads plants on a truck at an ornamental plant nursery in Homestead, some 40 miles north of Miami. — AFP

## Boost for Kenya farmers; children assist amid virus

NAIROBI: At the start of the planting season, Lily Langat, 41, was busy sowing maize with her husband and four of their six children on their family farm in the remote Kenyan village of Kaptich. As cases of COVID-19 rise in the East African country - now at about 250 with 11 deaths - the government has taken measures to control the spread of the new coronavirus by closing schools and universities, and restricting people's movements.

"Though my children aren't in school, they are really very resourceful during this time, mostly helping us on the farm," Langat said in a phone interview. The area where they live in west-central Nakuru County belongs to the productive Great Rift Valley, which has fertile soil and generally reliable rainfall that favors agriculture. The family depend for their income on farming maize, potatoes, beans and vegetables on their 5 acres of land, as well as livestock rearing.

In the short growing season, Langat earns a profit of 40,000-50,000 Kenyan shillings (\$400-500) from selling her produce, with which she pays high-school fees for her four daughters. UNESCO, the UN agency in charge of education, has estimated that more than nine out of 10 enrolled learners, from schools to universities, in 192 countries have seen their establishments closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

For now, many parents in this Kenyan farming community welcome the additional help from their children lending a hand on the land. Daniel Langat, Lily's husband, said this year's maize planting had been a success as it was done quickly and they didn't need to spend much on labor, thanks to their children. Each season, he pays out 10,000 shillings per acre for additional labor - but this time he plans to use that money to buy books and other items for his children when schools reopen.

Gilbert F Houngbo, president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, said that in Africa's rural areas, children tend to help their parents with farming activities - and it could be seen as positive in the current circumstances. But he warned such practices may increase child labor, and harm young people's education if they continue longer term. "The danger is that once the (COVID-19) crisis is behind us, the risk of some of the children not going back to school becomes higher," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

### No free lunch

So far, the COVID-19 control measures imposed by the government are mostly affecting urban areas, residents said. Dorothy Achieng, a mother of four boys who is a casual domestic worker living in Kibera slum in the capital Nairobi, said her daily hustle for chores was badly affected. "I'm so worried about how life is treating us now - getting food is a challenge," she said in a telephone interview.

Staying at home with her children out of school makes daily life more expensive, as she has to give them lunch, stretching her budget. She also worries they have little to occupy them. "It is very difficult to contain them indoors, so I fear they might be exposed to anti-social behaviors such as drug abuse," she added. Alexander Owino, a Nairobi-based independent financial analyst, said severe disruptions to transport and supply chains from the coronavirus restrictions would deal a blow to economically fragile city populations such as street vendors. "COVID-19 will hit the incomes of the informal sector with a demand-side shock arising from the near-collapse of purchases from customers," he said.

### State support

Back in rural Kenya, Langat explained how her family is following government directives to combat the virus. Her husband has installed containers for hand-washing around the farm. And learning has not stopped for her children, who work on the land until 2 pm, then go indoors to listen to educational programs broadcast on the radio and study, she added. "In the evening hours, I ensure that the children also have time to study (and) do their school assignments," she said, adding the family has solar panels to provide light and power. — Reuters



## Business

# China suffers 'historic contraction' as coronavirus paralyzes economy

## A blow to Communist Party's pledge of continued prosperity

**BEIJING:** China's economy shrank for the first time in decades last quarter as the coronavirus paralyzed the country, in a historic blow to the Communist Party's pledge of continued prosperity in return for unquestioned political power. Gross domestic product in the world's second-largest economy fell 6.8 percent in January-March from a year earlier, according to government figures—a stunning turnaround for a generation of Chinese consumers raised on super-charged growth rates.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data marked the first contraction since the government began logging quarterly performance in the early 1990s, and a sharp reversal from the six-percent expansion during the fourth quarter of 2019. The figure beat an 8.2 percent decline forecast by an AFP poll of analysts before the news was released. But economists have long harbored suspicions that official Chinese economic data is massaged for political reasons. "The actual contraction in the first quarter, especially in March, could be worse than headline numbers suggest," Nomura analysts said Friday.

Experts warn that growth is unlikely to rebound soon,

with depressed demand for Chinese goods in overseas markets that are also grappling with the pandemic. Fears of a second outbreak are also dragging on efforts to fully fire up China's economy, a major engine of global growth. "We are now facing rising pressure in the prevention of imported epidemic infections, as well as new difficulties and challenges for resuming work and production," NBS spokesman Mao Shengyong told a press conference.

### Grim picture

Full-year GDP growth expectations have fallen to 1.7 percent, according to AFP's poll, in what would be the worst annual performance since 1976. But the International Monetary Fund, which has pegged China's 2020 full-year expansion even lower at 1.2 percent, is predicting a strong rebound to 9.2 percent growth in 2021. Mao said only that if the pandemic can be brought under control, "the second half of the year should be better than the first".

The economic figures are deeply significant in China due to the tacit political compact between the Communist

Party and the country's 1.4 billion people. More than four decades since Beijing abandoned radical Maoism in favor of authoritarian capitalism-achieving spectacular growth-Chinese citizens have largely acquiesced to the party's monopoly on power, in exchange for continued prosperity.

China analyst Jean-Pierre Cabestan of Hong Kong Baptist University said the current situation puts a nail in the coffin of the party's stated goal of doubling GDP from 2010-2020. But he saw no immediate peril for the all-powerful regime, especially if it can maintain stability and steer the country through the health crisis while other countries struggle. "I think that's a very important set of achievements which the party is going to promote in order to remain legitimate," Cabestan said.

### Policy support

Despite travel restrictions being eased and businesses stirring again, Friday's data showed a 1.1 decline in Chinese industrial output for March as factory shutdowns lingered, and retail sales also plummeted 15.8 percent as consumers played it safe at home. More pain is expected, according

to Capital Economics chief Asia economist Mark Williams. "Public records suggest that at least half a million firms were dissolved in the first quarter and more are likely to close shop," he wrote in a report this week.

Williams added that surveys pointed to more layoffs in March, unemployment will likely remain higher in coming months, and depressed overseas demand could reduce Chinese exports—which account for 15 percent of national GDP—by as much as half. Shrinking export demand may have shaved 1.8 percentage points off real GDP growth in the first quarter, Nomura's chief China economist Lu Ting had said earlier.

Nomura expects a "large stimulus package" consisting of financial relief targeted at businesses, banks and households. Beijing already has ramped up stimulus for smaller enterprises and low-income individuals. Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the coronavirus outbreak was first detected, announced Friday it would begin handing out vouchers worth 500 million yuan (\$70 million) to boost consumption in the city of 11 million people, state media reported.—AFP

## US halts sale of bleach touted as a 'miracle' cure

**WASHINGTON:** The US Justice Department on Friday moved to halt sales of a chemical agent marketed by a self-described church group in Florida as a "miracle" coronavirus cure. The department filed a complaint early in the day against the Genesis II Church of Health and Healing, and several of its key members, for their promotion of "Miracle Mineral Solution" (MMS).

A federal judge in Florida quickly granted a temporary injunction halting its sale and distribution. The church had claimed MMS would help "cure, mitigate, treat, or prevent coronavirus, which includes COVID-19, as well as other diseases including Alzheimer's, autism, brain cancer, HIV/AIDS, and multiple sclerosis," the Justice Department said in a statement.

"MMS is a chemical product which, when combined with the included activator, creates a powerful bleach product," the department said. The US Food and Drug Administration had warned years ago that the product could cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and symptoms of severe dehydration. Authorities issued a final warning to Genesis on April 8, but so far, the group has refused to stop selling MMS, primarily through its websites.

In a statement, Genesis said: "They are attacking a Church Sacrament. This is something that is 'sacred' or 'holy' to us as a Church." "The Genesis II Church of Health has continued to actively place consumers at risk by peddling potentially dangerous and unapproved chlorine dioxide products," FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn said in a statement.—AFP

### KAMCO Report

## GCC's net profits decline by 15.4%

**KUWAIT:** Total earnings for GCC-listed companies declined by 15.4% in 2019 to reach \$149.3 billion from \$176.3 billion in 2018. Aggregate earnings for Dubai-listed companies saw the biggest y-o-y increase at 13.5% to reach \$10.3 Bn. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, which made up 72.8% of the GCC's total 2019 net profits, reported the biggest decline in earnings by 20.5% during 2019 that reached \$108.6 billion led by an equivalent decline in profits for Aramco during 2019.

Excluding Aramco's results, 2019 earnings for Saudi Arabia declined by 20.7%, whereas that for the overall GCC it declined by 6.6%. Bahraini and Qatari companies also reported fall in net profits during 2019 by 7.1% and 5.5%, respectively. Large-cap sectors including Energy, Materials and Real Estate reported steep decline in earnings during 2019.

Profits for the Energy sector dropped by 20.3% to \$89.2 billion in 2019. Energy stocks in Saudi Arabia posted a profit decline of \$23.0 billion that more than offset marginal gains in the sector in Abu Dhabi, Oman and Qatar. The Materials sector reported an even bigger decline of 68.6% or \$6.9 billion to reach \$3.2 Bn in profits in 2019. Companies in the Materials sector in Saudi Arabia once again reported the biggest profit decline of \$6.7 billion or 73.1%.

For the Real Estate sector, the decline was 20.0% during the year with profits reaching \$4.5 billion. This was also a broad-based decline like the Materials sector with Real Estate sector in almost all the GCC countries reporting aggregate decline in profits in 2019. These declines were partially offset by the resilience of the banking sector that reported a 10.0% increase in profits that reached \$37.2 billion in 2019 vs. \$33.8 billion during 2018.

Net profits for Q4-19 witnessed a y-o-y decline of 18.6% and total profit was the lowest in the past eight quarters at \$31.0 billion that came primarily on the back of a fall in earnings for key sectors.

Companies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait reported decline in earnings during the quarter that was partially offset by higher profits in the rest of the GCC countries. The Energy sector in the GCC and particularly in Saudi Arabia saw the listing of Aramco in December 2019 which increased the market cap and the earnings for the listed companies in the sector manifold. That said, the sector has seen consistent decline in profitability due to the fall in oil price that has particularly affected oil exploration and marketing companies in the region, whereas most of the oil transport and refining companies reported higher profits during the year.

Total profit for the sector declined by 20.3% in 2019 that came primarily on the back of an equivalent decline in profits of Aramco. Excluding Aramco's full year results from the group showed a profit growth for the sector of around 13.1%. The y-o-y profit growth for the Telecom sector was marginal at 1.3% in 2019 reaching \$7.7 Bn. Qatari telcos reported the biggest increase in earnings at 11% after both Ooredoo and Vodafone Qatar reported double-digit growth in net profits during the year.

Kuwaiti telcos were next with a profit growth of 5.5% followed by telcos in Oman and Bahrain with profit growth of 4.7% and 4.3%, respectively. This growth in sector profits was partially offset by a decline in profits for UAE-listed telcos. The GCC Real Estate Sector, the fifth largest sector by market-cap, witnessed a 20.0% decline in yearly profits that reached \$4.5 billion in 2019. The decline came after a broad-based decline in profits across the key real estate markets in the GCC. The decline in profits for Dubai-listed real estate companies was the biggest in absolute terms at \$724million or 20% followed by Saudi Arabia with a decline of \$200million or 87.1%. Qatar and Kuwaiti real estate aggregates also showed a decline during the year.

GCC Materials sector witnessed a 68.6% yearly decline in profits in 2019 that reached \$3.2 billion vs. \$10.1 billion in 2018. Out of the 78 companies in the sector in the GCC, 50

companies recorded a decline in profits during 2019. The biggest profit decliners in the sector included SABIC, Tasnee and Maaden with the combined profits declining by \$5.8 billion. On the other hand, cement companies showed significant improvement in profits during the year.

The GCC banking sector once again outperformed other large-cap sectors in the region by reporting a 10% increase in net profits during 2019. This helped partially offset the overall decline in profits in the GCC. Dubai-listed banks reported the biggest profit growth during the year at 25.3% but a large part of it came from the inorganic route following the acquisition of DenizBank by ENBD. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's profit growth of 13.3% during the year were largely organic.

Net interest margins (NIM) remained largely flat across the GCC countries during 2019 resulting in flat NIM at the GCC level at 3.1%. Saudi Arabia recorded the highest NIMs in the GCC at 3.7% led by a relatively higher loan-to-deposit ratio as well as a vibrant lending activity due to the active project market in the Kingdom. Meanwhile, non-interest income declined in four out of the six GCC markets. Saudi Arabia and UAE reported double digit q-o-q declines of 12.9% and 11.9%, respectively, in Q4-19, whereas Bahrain and Omani banks reported growth of 27.2% and 10.4%, respectively.

### Kuwait

Bursa Kuwait-listed companies reported a net profit decline of 11.9% during Q4-19 that reached \$1.26 billion compared to \$1.43 billion during Q4-18. The major sectors ie Banks, Real Estate, Telecommunication and Diversified Financials contributed to the decline of profitability of the exchange. Transportation was the only sector that reported marginal improvement in profits of 3.9% y-o-y during Q4-19, while the smaller insurance sector posted a much stronger profit growth of 24% y-o-y.

Net profits for the Kuwaiti Banking sector declined by 15.7% y-o-y during Q4-19 as losses reported by CBK and a decline in profits for KIB, ABK and Warba Bank more than offset growth in profits for the rest of the banks in the country. Notably, NBK reported a Q4-19 net profit of \$327.03 million, a marginal profit of 0.8% primarily due to higher non-interest income and lower provisions charges for credit losses and impairment losses.

Similarly, GBK reported a net profit of \$87.5 million in Q4-19 compared to a profit of \$46.4 million in Q4-18 driven by higher net interest and non-interest income which were partially offset by the increasing operating expenses. The net profit of Burgan Bank surged by 48.3% for Q4-19 to reach \$56.8 million compared to \$38.3 million for Q4-18, due to lower operating expenses and provision charges for credit losses.

Islamic lender, KFH, recorded a net profit of \$199.7 million in Q4-19 against \$192.4 million for Q4-18 up by 3.8%. CBK posted a loss of \$54.6 million, against a profit of KD 160.1 million in the same period a year earlier, due to increase impairment and other provisions, which were partially offset by higher net interest and non-interest income. Profits for the Telecom sector declined by 4.5% to reach \$270.3 million for Q4-19 compared to \$283 million for Q4-18. Zain recorded a net profit of \$211 million in Q4-19 compared to \$196.06 million in Q4-18 supported by increase of 26% in revenues.

On the other hand, OOREDOO, Viva and AAN Digital reported a decline in profits during Q4-19. The Insurance sector recorded a profit growth of 24% that reached \$22.2 million in Q4-19 compared to \$17.9 million in Q4-18. Gulf Insurance Group reported the biggest increase in profits in the sector for Q4-19 of \$8.7 million compared to \$4.3 million for Q4-18 mainly due to the increase in net operating income and Gross Premium written.

More over, Ahleiah Insurance Co posted a net profit of \$7.9 million for Q4-19 against \$5.8 million up by 36% supported by the increase in operating revenues. Among the top three real estate names in Kuwait, Salhia Real Estate Co posted the biggest increase in absolute profits in the sector that reached \$33.03 million for Q4-19 compared to a profit of \$10.43 million in Q4-18. Meanwhile, Mabaneer reported 6% increase in the profit for Q4-19 that reached \$46.5 million and Arab Real Estate posted \$9.5 million for Q4-19.

### Saudi Arabia

Aggregate net profits for Saudi Arabian

listed companies witnessed a steep decline of 24.1% to \$22.8 billion in Q4-19 against \$30.1 billion in Q4-18. Out of the top three sectors of the exchange namely Energy, Banks, and Telecommunication Services, only the Banking Sector reported an increase in profitability during the quarter. The decline in Q4-19 earnings was mainly driven by a plunge in profits for the Energy Sector that declined by 28.6% to \$20 billion as compared to \$28 billion during Q4-18. Profits for the other key sectors like Utilities, Insurance and Diversified Financials also declined during the quarter. On the other hand, the Retailing, Consumer Services, and Health Care Equipment & Services reported a growth in profits during the quarter that partially offset the overall decline.

Oil giant Aramco reported a net profit decline of 28.2% during Q4-19 led by declining oil prices and production volumes, coupled with declining refining and chemical margins and a \$1.6 billion impairment charge associated with Sadara ChemicalCo. Excluding the profits of Aramco from the aggregate profits of Saudi Arabia showed a significant y-o-y increase in profits of around 26.6% for the rest of the listed companies primarily led by growth in profits for the Banking and Retailing sectors.

Profits for the banking sector more than doubled y-o-y during Q4-19 to reach \$2.8 billion. Al Rajhi Bank recorded a profit of \$573.8 million for Q4-19 against a loss of \$940.7 million for Q4-18 driven by higher gross operating income, and increased commission income. Riyad Bank reported a 186.4% increase in the net profit that reached \$296.2 million in Q4-19 compared to \$103.4 million in Q4-18 on the back of high fee and commission income.

Meanwhile, NCB reported a 28% y-o-y increase in net profit to \$903.7 million in Q4-19 as compared to \$705.8 million in Q4-18. Net profit for the Telecom sector declined by 32.5% y-o-y to \$612.04 million in Q4-19 as compared to \$906.8 million during Q4-18. STC reported a 25.3% y-o-y decline in net profits that reached \$619 million. On the other hand, Mobily reported losses during Q4-19 as against profits during Q4-18. Zain KSA profits tumbled 74% to reach \$28.8 million for Q4-19 versus a profit of \$106.4 million in Q4-18.

### Dubai

Net profits for Dubai-listed companies jumped 19% to \$1.8 billion in Q4-19 up from \$1.5 billion in Q4-18. The increase came primarily on the back of higher y-o-y profits for the Telecom sector (+25.8%) further supported by lower reported losses for the Consumer Services sector (loss of \$38.1 million in Q4-19 vs loss of \$488.5 million in Q4-18) as well as profits of \$19.7 million for the Transportation sector during Q4-19 as compared to losses of \$268.4 million during Q4-18.

The Banking sector's Q4-19 net profits fell 20%, the second largest percentage fall among the GCC Banking Sectors, to reach \$956.3 million down from \$1.2 billion during Q4-18. The decline in profits for the sector was broad based as all the listed banks in Dubai, barring Commercial Bank of Dubai, reported y-o-y decline in net profits during the quarter. Profits for ENBD declined by 15.3% y-o-y to reach \$550.1 million, whereas Dubai Islamic Bank reported a 19.5% drop in net profits that reached \$279.8 million. Real Estate Sector net profits declined by 28.1% y-o-y in Q4-19 to \$743.6 million from \$1.03 billion in Q4-18. Two of the six companies in the sector, namely Damac Properties and Union Properties, recorded Q4-19 losses of \$46.1 million and \$16.4 million, respectively.

### Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi-listed companies saw an overall increase of 31.4% in their Q4-19 net profits recorded at \$2.3 billion compared with \$1.7 billion in Q4-18, the biggest increase in profits in the GCC. Only one out of the five top largest sectors of the exchange by market-cap registered a decline in Q4-19 net profits.

The Banking Sector registered a 12.1% rise in Q4-19 profits to reach \$1.3 billion from \$1.1 billion in Q4-18. The Food, Beverage & Tobacco sector followed the Banking Sector as the second largest absolute earnings contributor in the exchange with 188.3% increase in profits in the quarter to reach \$154.3 million. In the Banking Sector, FAB saw its Q4-19 net profits rise 5.1% to \$838.9 million from \$798.5 million in Q4-18. The profits increase was due to an increase in non-interest income.

On the other hand, ADCB reported a

20.5% y-o-y decline in net profits during Q4-19 led by lower operating income. Of the eleven banks listed on the exchange, only two declared losses in Q4-19. United Arab Bank registered a loss of \$111 million in Q4-19 due its recognition of over \$46 million provisions including legacy issues. Moreover, Invest Bank posted a Q4-19 loss of \$95.5 million compared with a loss of \$351.3 million in Q4-18. Invest Bank's decrease in net losses was attributed to a fall in operating expenses and impairment provisions.

Profits for the Food, Beverage & Tobacco sector increased to \$154.4 million in Q4-19 vs. \$53.5 million in Q4-18 mainly due to record profits reported by International Holdings Company. IHC's Q4-19 net profits reached \$130.5 million up from \$0.1 million in Q4-18 attributed to sales increase in the quarter. The Real Estate sector's Q4-19 earnings rose 29.9% to reach \$151.4 million largely due to the robust performance of Aldar Properties Co. which saw its Q4-19 earnings jump 81% to \$157.1 million up from \$86.8 million in Q4-18. Aldar's surge in profits was largely credited to higher revenue and improving environment.

### Qatar

Total Earnings for Qatari-listed companies declined by 23.9% during Q4-19 to reach \$2.03 billion primarily led by decline in profits reported by the Real Estate and Utilities sectors in addition to losses for the Capital Goods, Insurance and Diversified Financials sectors. Banks continued to outperform other sectors with an overall 28.7% surge in Q4-19 net profits that reached \$1.8 billion in Q4-19 accounting for 88.6% of the overall exchange profits during the quarter. QNB reported a 19% y-o-y increase in Q4-19 that reached \$969.2 million due to 10% increase in loans and advances.

Quarterly net profit for Commercial Bank of Qatar increased by \$3.8% to \$209.1 million in Q4-19 up compared to \$113.8 million in Q4-18 on the back of higher operating income which grew 34% after loans and advances increased by 4.0%. Qatar Islamic Bank also saw strong growth in its net profit at 40% y-o-y to reach \$288.4 million in Q4-19 compared to \$206.01 million supported by income from financing and investing which registered a strong growth of 15.5%.

The Qatari Telecom sector also witnessed strong gains in net profit that grew 36.0% y-o-y in Q4-19 to \$192.5 million compared to \$141.5 million in the Q4-18. Ooredoo recorded a net profit of \$173.8 million in Q4-19 compared to \$129.9 million in Q4-18 up by 33.8%. Q4-19 net profit for Vodafone Qatar stood at \$18.7 million in Q4-19 compared to \$11.6 million in Q4-18 a rise of 61.1% y-o-y.

### Bahrain

Total net profits for Bahraini companies increased 24.2% in Q4-19 to \$411.5 million from \$331.3 million in Q4-18. Among the largest three sectors by market cap only the Banking sector saw its Q4-19 net profits decrease. The Banking Sector's Q4-19 net profits fell 9.6% to \$303.3 million from \$335.6 million in Q4-18, whereas the Telecom sector registered 59.3% rise in profits to \$23.5 million. The Materials sector also contributed to profit growth during the quarter with a profit of \$37.4 million during Q4-19 as compared to a loss of \$46.2 million during Q4-18.

The decline in profits for the Banking sector was largely attributed to Al Khaleeji Commercial Bank's quarterly loss of \$25.8 million in Q4-19 compared with \$2.9 million loss in Q4-18. On the other hand, National Bank of Bahrain increased its Q4-19 net profits by 21.3% to \$48.3 million, the highest increase in absolute profits among the banks in the sector. NBB's robust performance was credited to a growth in operating income and lower provision charge.

### Oman

Total net profits for listed companies in Oman increased 22.6% to \$323.3 million compared with \$263.6 million in the corresponding quarter in 2018. The Banking Sector, the biggest sector in the exchange by market cap, saw its Q4-19 net profits decline 19.3% to \$200.9 million down from \$249 million in Q4-18 while the second biggest sector by market cap, the Telecom Sector, saw its Q4-19 profits jump by 50.4% to \$83.2 million. The Energy sector, also saw its profits grow by 41.3% during Q4-19 to reach \$30 million. Only three out of the fourteen sectors of the exchange saw increases in their total Q4-19 profits.



# Confusion, seizures, strokes: How COVID-19 may affect the brain

WASHINGTON: A pattern is emerging among COVID-19 patients arriving at hospitals in New York: Beyond fever, cough and shortness of breath, some are deeply disoriented to the point of not knowing where they are or what year it is. At times this is linked to low oxygen levels in their blood, but in certain patients the confusion appears disproportionate to how their lungs are faring. Jennifer Frontera, a neurologist at NYU Langone Brooklyn hospital seeing these patients, told AFP the findings were raising concerns about the impact of the coronavirus on the brain and nervous system.

By now, most people are familiar with the respiratory hallmarks of the COVID-19 disease that has infected more than 2.2 million people around the world. But more unusual signs are surfacing in new reports from the frontlines. A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association last week found 36.4 percent of 214 Chinese patients had neurological symptoms ranging from loss of smell and nerve pain, to seizures and strokes.

A paper in the New England Journal of Medicine this week examining 58 patients in Strasbourg, France found that more than half were confused or agitated, with brain imaging suggesting inflammation. "You've been hearing that this is a breathing problem, but it also affects what we most care about, the brain," S Andrew Josephson, chair of the neurology department at the University of California, San Francisco told AFP. "If you become confused, if you're having problems thinking, those are reasons to seek medical attention," he added. "The old mantra of 'Don't come in unless you're short of breath' probably doesn't apply anymore."

### Viruses and the brain

It isn't completely surprising to scientists that

SARS-CoV-2 might impact the brain and nervous system, since this has been documented in other viruses, including HIV, which can cause cognitive decline if untreated. Viruses affect the brain in one of two main ways, explained Michel Toledano, a neurologist at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. One is by triggering an abnormal immune response known as a cytokine storm that causes inflammation of the brain - called autoimmune encephalitis. The second is direct infection of the brain, called viral encephalitis.

How might this happen? The brain is protected by something called the blood-brain-barrier, which blocks foreign substances but could be breached if compromised. However, since loss of smell is a common symptom of the coronavirus, some have hypothesized the nose might be the pathway to the brain. This remains unproven - and the theory is somewhat undermined by the fact that many patients experiencing anosmia don't go on to have severe neurological symptoms. In the case of the novel coronavirus, doctors believe based on the current evidence the neurological impacts are more likely the result of overactive immune response rather than brain invasion. To prove the latter even happens, the virus must be detected in cerebrospinal fluid. This has been documented once, in a 24-year-old Japanese man whose case was published in the International Journal of Infectious Disease. The man developed confusion and seizures, and imaging showed his brain was inflamed. But since this is the only known case so far, and the virus test hasn't yet been validated for spinal fluid, scientists remain cautious.

### More research needed

All of this emphasizes the need for more research. Frontera, who is also a professor at NYU School of Medicine, is part of an international collaborative



FRANCE: A patient infected with COVID-19 is transferred back to intensive care from an especially created Post Resuscitation Unit after his condition worsened on Friday. — AFP

research project to standardize data collection. Her team is documenting striking cases including seizures in COVID-19 patients with no prior history of the episodes, and "unique" new patterns of tiny brain hemorrhages. One startling finding concerns the case of a man in his fifties whose white matter - the parts of the brain that connect brain cells to each other - was so severely damaged it "would basically render him in a state of profound brain damage," she said.

The doctors are stumped and want to tap his spinal fluid for a sample. Brain imaging and spinal taps are difficult to perform on patients on ventilators, and since most die, the full extent of neurologic

injury isn't yet known. But neurologists are being called out for the minority of patients who survive being on a ventilator. "We're seeing a lot of consults of patients presenting in confusional states," Rohan Arora, a neurologist at the Long Island Jewish Forest Hills hospital told AFP, saying that describes more than 40 percent of recovered virus patients.

It's not yet known whether the impairment is long term, and being in the ICU itself can be a disorienting experience as a result of factors including strong medications. But returning to normal appears to be taking longer than for people who suffer heart failure or stroke, added Arora. — AFP

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## Lifestyle | Features



These photos taken on February 19, 2020 show Afghan artists from "Peace of Mind Afghanistan" performing on stage about war trauma and depression in Kabul. — AFP photos

## Traumatized by war: Theatre's role in healing Afghanistan

As he watched the play about two girls wrestling with lingering trauma, Afghan student Hussain began to sob, the performance igniting memories of his own brush with death. "I couldn't stop crying," said the 22-year-old, who survived a suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 57 people in 2018. "I still have nightmares about the scene, blood, body parts and injured people crying for help." Hussain, who only wanted to give his first name, spoke to AFP after seeing "Tanhayee" ("Loneliness"), a play that tells the story of two girls — a suicide blast survivor and a victim of sexual assault.

In a conservative country that has seen decades of war, displacement and poverty, the producers hope the play — which was touring just before the coronavirus pandemic hit but now is paused — will raise awareness about psychological stress and the enduring impact of traumatic events. "Every individual in this country has been somehow affected by mental trauma from the war or related violence," said Jebrael Amin, a spokesman for Peace of Mind Afghanistan, which is sponsoring the play. "Theatre is a good way to raise awareness, as people witness the pain they per-



haps didn't know many around them share", he said.

A 2018 European Union survey found that 85 percent of Afghans had experienced or witnessed at least one traumatic event, while data from the health ministry shows that roughly one in two Afghans suffer from psychological distress. "No doubt the war and related violence are the biggest factors in mental distress and trauma in Afghanistan," said Bashir Ahmad Sarwari, head of the ministry's Department of Mental Health.

### Social stigma

However, fewer than 10 percent of Afghans have received sufficient psychosocial support from the state, accord-

ing to a recent Human Rights Watch report based on government data. The situation is even worse outside major cities, with large parts of rural Afghanistan now under the control of Taleban extremists and lacking health infrastructure. The Afghan government has trained around 850 mental health counselors over the past decade, but the fear of social stigma in a conservative patriarchal culture means many people refrain from seeking help. "This is a big problem as people suffering from mental health problems are labelled as weak, stupid or even crazy," Sarwari told AFP. The impact can be devastating.

Najib, who declined to give his full name due to the stigma associated with mental illness, began suffering from depression and anxiety after losing his mother to a truck bombing in Kabul in 2017. When he opened up about his struggles, people dismissed it as a sign of frailty. Some called him a madman. "I... even thought of suicide", he told AFP. Najib felt helpless and isolated for years, until a friend persuaded him to meet a psychologist. With many Afghans still suffering in secret, mental health professionals are now turning to unconventional



means to raise awareness, including public art projects and theatrical performances. Peace of Mind Afghanistan has so far sponsored 15 performances of "Tanhayee", which showcases the life-changing impact of therapy when its two protagonists meet a psychologist.

### 'We cannot keep up'

More than two million Afghans in the

country of 35 million visited mental health clinics last year, up from a few thousand a decade ago, according to Afghanistan's health ministry. "We are on the right path", Wahid Majroh, a senior advisor in the ministry, told AFP. "But the pace of services or the awareness of mental health cannot keep up with the level of trauma from the conflict here." The experience of trauma is so widespread that the suffering portrayed in "Tanhayee" moved many in the Kabul audience to tears.

The catharsis cut both ways. Actress Jamila Mahmoodi, who portrayed the victim of a terror attack, said the performance helped her come to terms with narrowly escaping a suicide bombing. The 21-year-old battled post-traumatic stress disorder for months, haunted by the aftermath of the attack. "I feel like performing on stage helps me", she told AFP. "I feel at peace while playing the role that I and thousands of others have painfully experienced in real life." — AFP



In this file photo taken on August 30, 2019, (from left) Ronnie Wood, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones perform at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP

## Rolling Stones to perform during global event supporting health workers

The Rolling Stones will perform during a star-studded special event also featuring Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish, set to broadcast globally Saturday in support of health care workers combatting coronavirus. The event put on by the international advocacy organization Global Citizen in collaboration with the World Health Organization and superstar Lady Gaga intends to "provide a moment of global unity in the fight to end COVID-19," said its CEO Hugh Evans. A-listers including Celine Dion, Elton John, Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder are all set to participate.

A six-hour streamed event will precede the prime time televised broadcast, with a laundry list of celebrities set to appear including pop star Christine and the Queens, actors Don Cheadle and Samuel L. Jackson, and renowned soccer player Megan Rapinoe. A Global Citizen publicist confirmed to AFP that all four Stones — Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Charlie Watts and Ronnie Wood — would perform during the event. "We are honored to be invited to be part of the One World: Together at Home broadcast — from our homes in isolation," the group said in a statement. The coronavirus pandemic that's killed more than 145,600 people worldwide and crippled the global economy has dealt a serious blow to the entertainment industry, halting concerts and festivals including The Stones tour. The band was set to play 15 shows across North America starting May 8, but all have been postponed due to the pandemic.

### 'In this together'

Chris Martin of Coldplay kicked off Global Citizen's "Together, At Home" series last month, playing an Instagram live show. In recent weeks Lady Gaga teamed up with the organization to help campaign for funds to fight COVID-19, and collaborated to curate the special, which will be hosted by American late-night television personalities Jimmy Fallon, Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel. "I want to highlight this global, kind community that's coming together right now," Gaga told Fallon. "It's this valiant effort that we're all witnessing,

this triumph that is the medical community." "This is a global pandemic, but take a second to marvel at the bravery."

More than 100 artists are scheduled to participate in Saturday's event, said Evans, who added that many of the performers — including the Stones — had heard of the effort and contacted Global Citizen wanting to take part. Evans said he "honestly couldn't believe it" when the British rockers reached out. "Music provides this moment for us to pause to reflect to unite as one humanity," he said, to "come back together and say you know what, we truly — it's not just hyperbole — we truly are all in this together."

It's not the first time celebrities have gathered to highlight a crisis: 1985's Live Aid benefit concert held simultaneously in London and Philadelphia assembled some of the world's top musicians, including Queen, to play in support of famine relief in Ethiopia. Global Citizen intends Saturday's event as a "rallying cry" to support health workers and action for charities on a local level. It is also urging philanthropists, companies and governments to support the WHO in its coronavirus response efforts, saying it already raised \$35 million for local organizations and the international health body's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund.

"This is really an important age that we live in, where people are grappling with — do they become more isolationist or do they become global citizens?" CEO Evans told AFP. "I think if COVID-19 has taught us anything it's that a disease anywhere can mean a disease everywhere." The global concert in support of the WHO would appear particularly symbolic considering US President Donald Trump's announcement that he is halting US funding of the UN body, accusing it of mismanaging the COVID-19 crisis. Without directly referencing the US leader, Evans said now is the time to support the WHO, "not to walk away." "Multilateralism is the only way to fight pandemics," he said. "You can't fight a global pandemic one nation at a time." — AFP

## 'First Blood' actor Brian Dennehy dies aged 81

Brian Dennehy, the versatile Tony and Golden Globe-winning actor known to wider audiences for blockbuster movies "First Blood" and "Romeo + Juliet," has died aged 81. His career spanned four decades, including early television roles in "Dynasty" and "Dallas," acclaimed Broadway performances such as in "Death of a Salesman," and voice work on the Pixar hit movie "Ratatouille." Dennehy passed away from natural causes not related to coronavirus at his Connecticut home Wednesday evening, with his wife Jennifer and son Cormac by his side, his agent said in a statement to AFP. "Larger than life, generous to a fault, a proud and devoted father and grandfather, he will be missed by his wife Jennifer, family and many friends," tweeted daughter Elizabeth, also an actress.

After a recurring role in "Dynasty" in 1981, Dennehy came to prominence the following year playing the overzealous sheriff who takes on Sylvester Stallone's John Rambo in "First Blood." He appeared as an alien leader in 1985 sci-fi "Cocoon," and played the father of Leonardo DiCaprio's Romeo in the 1996 hit Shakespeare reimagining "Romeo + Juliet." He also starred alongside Robert De Niro and Al Pacino in the 2008 cop drama "Righteous Kill." Known for his broad physique and imposing presence, Dennehy won two Tony awards for stage performances in Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" and Eugene O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey into Night." — AFP



In this file photo taken on December 5, 2009, US actor Brian Dennehy speaks during a rally by the 9/11 Never Forget Coalition in New York. — AFP

## CELINE DION SALUTES 'HEROIC' WORKERS IN PANDEMIC FIGHT

Canadian singer Celine Dion has posted a heartfelt thanks to the "heroic" workers on the frontline in the coronavirus fight, and urged fans to respect stay-at-home orders. The video shot in the superstar's kitchen — two versions, in English and in French — had more than 2.5 million views across her social media feeds as of mid-morning Thursday. "Let's take care of each other and I know we will get through this together," she told her fans in the English version of the clip. "There are so many heroes out there around the world who are going to work every single day, risking their lives — and sometimes sacrificing their lives for the rest of us," she said. "These people have families and loved ones who they're worried about, but they still go out to work to save us, to serve us."

Dion went on to list "health care professionals, first responders, social workers and essential services providers" such as grocery store staff and delivery workers, saying: "We cannot thank all of you enough." "We salute your bravery and we pray for you. Thank you so very much for the heroic work that you are doing for our world. We are eternally grateful." Dion herself is self-isolating. In September, she kicked off her first world tour in a decade to promote her new album "Courage" — the first without her husband-manager Rene Angellil, who died from cancer in 2016.

In mid-March, she announced the tour was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with 17 shows in



In this file photo Canadian singer Celine Dion performs on the opening night of her new world tour "Courage" at the Videotron Centre in Quebec City. — AFP

the United States and Canada postponed. On Saturday, Dion will join other stars including Stevie Wonder, Jennifer Lopez and Paul McCartney for "One World: Together At Home," a virtual global concert. The event presented by Global Citizen and the World Health Organization aims to celebrate and support health care and other frontline workers in the virus battle. — AFP

## Trailblazing jazz saxophonist Lee Konitz dies at 92

The groundbreaking jazz saxophonist Lee Konitz, perhaps best known for his work on the pivotal Miles Davis album "Birth of the Cool," has died following coronavirus complications. He was 92. Konitz, a prolific artist celebrated for his improvisation savvy over a seven-decade career, died after a battle with COVID-19, according to his Facebook page. Born Leon Konitz in Chicago on October 13, 1927, the musician was the youngest of three in a Jewish immigrant family.

He started playing the clarinet as a child before switching to saxophone, the instrument he used to cultivate a singular, unreflected style that set him apart from the era's dominant Charlie Parker, whom Konitz considered a friend. "The blues never connected with me," he told The Wall Street Journal in 2013. "I knew and loved Charlie Parker and copied his bebop solos like everyone else." "But I didn't want to sound like him. So I used almost no vibrato and played mostly in the higher register. That's the heart of my sound."

Konitz was the last surviving musician who played in Davis's "Birth of the Cool" sessions, which he later described as far more arranged than the improvisational style with which he would make his name. Far more influential to Konitz's trailblazing path were his studies with the pianist Lennie Tristano, which he said made him "take music more seriously." "I was just a kid with some

kind of natural facility," he told NPR in 1980. "And he indicated to me the direction the music was really in." Konitz is the latest jazz musician to succumb to COVID-19, with trumpeter Wallace Roney, pianist Ellis Marsalis Jr and guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli all passing after complications from the fast-spreading virus.

Veteran afro-jazz star Manu Dibango also died after contracting the infection. "More heartbreaking news for the jazz community," said Blue Note Records following news of Konitz's death. "What a remarkable life in music." Konitz continued to play and tour into his 90s. He made a modest living as a jazz great, never hiring agents or publicists but never compromising his direction, either. "I've always been about the music, not the show biz," he told The Wall Street Journal. "I've also been fortunate to spend my entire life creating music. Now, that's cool." — AFP



Jazz saxophonist Lee Konitz



Lifestyle | Features



Tailor Thomas Rae (right) and volunteer Tony McGlynn (left) work at Thomas Rae's workshop producing free scrubs for the National Health Service (NHS) in Glasgow.



Volunteer Helen Seddon works to produce free scrubs for the National Health Service (NHS).



Tailor Thomas Rae poses for a photograph at his workshop producing free scrubs for the National Health Service (NHS).

## Glasgow tailor gathers volunteer army to make medical clothing



Volunteers work to produce free scrubs for the National Health Service (NHS) at Tailor Thomas Rae's workshop in Glasgow.—AFP photos

Scottish tailor Thomas Rae snips a strip of cloth from what will soon be clothing worn by a nurse, carefully placing the material under a sewing machine for stitching. Rae, 56, owns a string of tailoring stores across Scotland's industrial capital Glasgow and until six weeks ago his work mainly involved mending trousers, jackets and dresses. But these days he spends his time working with a small army of volunteers to create the hygienic clothing, known as scrubs, worn by the nurses and doctors on the frontline of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The lockdown had been announced and so I sat in the house and I thought what could I do to help these nurses out or the NHS, the frontline workers," he said, referring to Britain's state-run National Health Service (NHS). "I started making masks and then I started getting emails and messages from nurses that work on the front line asking me would I be interested in making scrubs." Rae posted an appeal on social media for machinists, cutters and people with extra sewing

machines to see if he could "set up a small factory" to make scrubs to NHS standards. His call was answered with a level of enthusiasm he had never encountered before.

### 'Like a family'

Glasgow's local authority was among the first to respond, giving Rae an empty shop to use opposite his dry cleaning and alterations store in a shopping centre in the Easterhouse suburb on the city's eastern edge. Once the work space was set up, the volunteers started to arrive. Nurses, retired tailors and seamstresses all offered their services to get the project rolling. One of the first to sign up was former dressmaker Tony McGlynn, 62. "I retired three years ago," he said. "I answered the call from Tommy because I had machines, I had fabric that was lying back home doing nothing." Donations of cotton cloth — the material required by the health service — and food keep on coming as the volunteers put in long days. Fashion companies across

Britain are also helping to fight the coronavirus. At the end of March, Burberry — famous around the world for its trench coats — started using its factories in Yorkshire to manufacture hospital gowns and masks for patients.

Meanwhile, David Nieper, a fashion firm in England's East Midlands region, this week urged other British manufacturers to switch production after receiving its first order to make scrubs for NHS trusts. The Derbyshire-based company is set to make an initial 5,000 sets of scrubs for a local trust running hospitals. For Rae, the devastation caused by the pandemic has in some ways been countered by the kindness shown by people. "For me it is quite overwhelming — the kindness — especially the volunteers that have come on board and the other store owners here," he said. "They've been making sure we have enough food to get us through the day. We are like a family now."—AFP

## Chilean author Luis Sepulveda dies of virus in Spain

Chile's celebrated author Luis Sepulveda, who died Thursday aged 70 from COVID-19, was a committed writer exiled by the Pinochet dictatorship for his political activities. Best-known for his 1992 novel, "The Old Man Who Read Love Stories", Sepulveda was particularly successful in Europe, where he had been based since the 1980s. His works, appreciated for their simple humor and depictions of life in South America, have been translated in some 50 countries and range from novels, chronicles and novellas to children's stories.

### Dark times under Pinochet

Sepulveda was born on October 4, 1949, at Ovalle, north of the Chilean capital Santiago. From a young age he was a political activist, first for Chile's Communist Youth, and then for the Socialists. He was arrested and jailed for treason for two-and-a-half years in 1973 under the military regime of Augusto Pinochet. He wrote of this dark period in "La locura de Pinochet" (2003), (Madness of Pinochet and other articles). "I write because I believe in the militant force of words", he said in the book.

Pinochet imposed a right-wing dictatorship that lasted 17 years, during which at least 3,200 people were killed or disappeared. Around 38,000 were tortured. After rights group Amnesty International intervened, Sepulveda was freed and escaped, living underground for nearly a year before being recaptured and sent into exile in 1977. He never returned to live in Chile and it was only in 2017 that he regained his Chilean nationality, which had been stripped from him decades earlier. After leaving his home country he travelled around Latin America, where he founded theatre troupes in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia. In Nicaragua, he fought with the Sandinista revolution, which would overthrow the dictatorship in force at the time.

### Amazon tribe and environmentalism

In 1978 Sepulveda spent a year living under a UNESCO study program with the indigenous Shuar people in the Amazon. They would feature in his first novel, published in 1992, "The Old Man Who Read Love Stories", a rallying call to redefine man's relationship with nature. Translated into 35 languages, the novel was a global success and in 2001 it was adapted to the cinema by Rolf de Heer and starring Richard Dreyfuss in the main role.

Among Sepulveda's other most popular works was "The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly" (1996), a book "for young people from 8 to 88 years old", according to the subtitle on its original Spanish edition. From 1982, Sepulveda settled in Europe, firstly in the German city of Hamburg, where he became a journalist and sailed the seas for several years on environmental activist group Greenpeace's boats. With his first wife, the poet Carmen Yanez, who had been tortured under the Pinochet dictatorship, he settled down in 1996 at Gijon in Asturias, northern Spain.—AFP



In this file photo taken on March 30, 2010 Chilean writer Luis Sepulveda attends the signing of his book "L'ombre de ce que nous avons été" (The Shadow of What We Were) during the Paris book fair at the Porte de Versailles exhibition center in Paris.—AFP



Members of Qatar's Philharmonic Orchestra perform from their balconies to punctuate the monotony of social distancing as the weekend begins in Doha during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.—AFP photos



## Qatar musicians give balcony gig to banish virus blues

Strains of Bizet's Carmen reverberated around Doha's man-made Pearl island as members of Qatar's philharmonic orchestra performed from balconies to punctuate the monotony of lockdown. Bars, restaurants, cinemas and mosques are shut to contain the spread of coronavirus. But those within earshot of the musical neighbors have been treated to renditions of numbers including Elton John's "Can You Feel the Love Tonight", both this Friday and last. "Everyone plays a bit. We are four in total," said Nicole Pressler, the QPO's principal flautist who was joined by a harpist, a trumpet player and a violinist.

Pressler lifted her son up to hear applause and cheers from residents and passersby during a break in the performance as a couple embraced and swayed on a nearby balcony. More accustomed to playing to packed crowds at the ultra-modern Qatar National Convention Centre and the Katara Opera House, the artists decided to play from home "very spontaneously", Pressler said. "But still it gives us joy to play. We come together as friends and colleagues with distance but united. In the same moment I even miss my orchestra more," she said. The acclaimed orchestra, whose scheduled performances were among the first events

to be cancelled as Qatar sought to contain the virus, was founded in 2007 and has since toured the world.

There's "not too much echo and the audiences are getting bigger and bigger. It was nice tonight," said the orchestra's director Kurt Meister who attended the 30 minute concert. Qatar reported its largest single-day jump in coronavirus cases with 560 confirmed on Friday, bringing the total to 4,663. Seven people have died and 464 have recovered, according to official statistics.—AFP

## Young guitarist enchants locked down Rome

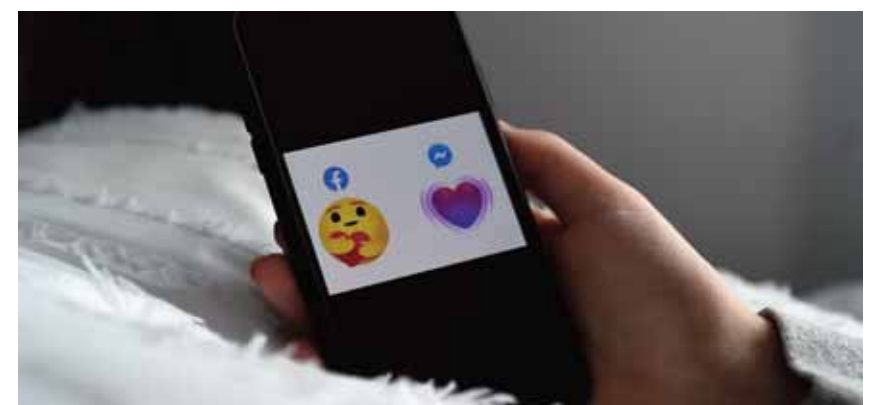
The melodic theme music from "Cinema Paradiso" soars over a completely still and silent Rome every sunset. It provides an enchanting end to surreal days in lockdown living through a pandemic that has claimed over 22,000 lives in Italy and 145,000 worldwide. The 18-year-old guitarist behind the performances has turned into a social media star for his impromptu covers of Ennio Morricone classics. He plays from the terrace of his luxurious flat overlooking the fountains of Rome's now-empty Piazza Navona. The Vatican's dome stands to the left of the setting sun and the sea gulls flutter overhead as he plays. "We decided to lend a hand to Italians: a message of hope," Jacopo Mastrangelo tells AFP from his patio. "We are accustomed to always seeing Rome full, teeming with people. Now the grass is growing between the cobblestones, everything has been left abandoned, and we decided to help."

Mastrangelo's father is a senior accountant and the teenager lives an admittedly privileged life in one of Rome's most exclusive neighborhoods. The Rome mayor heard about the teen and invited him to play a special Easter Sunday performance from the hilltop Piazza del Campidoglio that rises above the Forum. "He moved us when he played from his terrace overlooking Piazza Navona," Raggi said in her introduction to his Easter concert. "Today,

from Rome, we want to pay homage to Romans, Italians and the whole world." Mastrangelo said the mayor phoned him up one day and they agreed that he would perform three songs. "I was nervous. Because it's one thing to play here with my father, like it's my hobby, and quite another when it's the mayor looking straight into my eyes," he recalls. "I was stressed." He says that he still worries about his high school exams this year — but his sudden popularity does not hurt. "Nothing is impossible now, with this popularity," he says. "I did not expect it. Everything happened very quickly."—AFP



Jacopo Mastrangelo plays the guitar from his terrace overlooking Piazza Navona in Rome during a lockdown in Italy to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the new coronavirus.—AFP



In this photo illustration, the two new 'care' emojis which show support for the fight against coronavirus, in Facebook and Messenger are displayed on the screen of an iPhone.—AFP

## Facebook offers a hug — from a distance — with emoji update

Facebook is reaching out to give the world a hug — in the form of an emoji people can share while staying safely apart. The lineup of characters available to express feelings in the social network will be expanded next week to include a well-known round yellow cartoon face with arms that gently embrace a red heart. The move to express "care" adds to the existing emojis including the well-known "like" button and more recent icons to express love, laughter, sadness, anger and awe. "We're launching new care reactions on Facebook app and Messenger as a way for people to share their support with one another during this unprecedented time," spokesman Alexandru Voica said in a

series of tweets Friday. "We hope these reactions give people additional ways to show their support during the #COVID19 crisis."

It has been about five years since Facebook expanded its emoji options for expressing feelings by tapping on a character and sharing it with a friend. The new symbol "will start rolling out next week globally and you can use it to react to posts, comments, images, videos, or other content on the app and Facebook.com," Voica said. Facebook's mobile Messenger service is getting a new emoji as well, this one a multi-hued bluish red heart drawn as though it is beating.—AFP



# Pandemic worsens plight of Middle East prisoners

**CAIRO:** As governments in the Middle East isolate their populations to prevent the spread of coronavirus, attention is turning to the region's jails, where detainees face a more punishing form of lockdown. "Because of the pandemic, confinement is an additional punishment for the prisoners," said Kaddour Chouicha, 63, an engineering professor at Algeria's University of Oran and a human rights activist. Chouicha was detained in December. He is part of an anti-regime protest movement that toppled longtime autocrat Abdelaziz Bouteflika more than a year ago.

Some Middle Eastern governments have released prisoners as part of their response to the novel coronavirus pandemic, while others have ignored pressure to do so. Iran has temporarily released 100,000 detainees, while Bahrain freed hundreds last month and Morocco and Tunisia have announced pardons that affect thousands of prisoners. Algeria too has pardoned some 5,000 inmates. But for those still languishing in jails, incarceration is a brutal experience. "You have to plan for the future," Chouicha said of surviving the prison time. "It's the only way."

Egyptian authorities have rejected pleas to free up overcrowded jails, continuing to imprison dissidents even as COVID-19 infections in the country rise. Rights group Amnesty International last month urged Egypt to release "all activists and human rights defenders detained solely for peacefully expressing their views", along with pre-trial detainees and vulnerable prisoners. One former detainee, who preferred not to be identified out of fear of repercussions, said there was a "catastrophe brewing in prisons" in the country because of unsanitary conditions and overcrowding.

"We used to dream of having the metal door to the cell opened even though it led to a hallway with a prison guard. Psychologically, that meant a lot to us," the ex-detainee and writer told AFP. He spent around two years in a cramped cell with some 25 other men in the Borg al-Arab prison, near the northern city of Alexandria, and recounted how a hole in the ground functioned as a rudimentary bathroom for showering and as a latrine.

"We had a tattered blanket that we used as a door for privacy, and the little running water we had... would wash away all the filth on an already dirty cement floor," said the former inmate, who was released in late 2015. "We slept on our 'swords', meaning we lay on the floor next to each other on our sides. You couldn't sleep on your back, that was out of the question because of the lack of space," he added.

He expressed fear that the fragile health of some prisoners would have been further strained by the authorities' decision to suspend family visits from last month, as many depend on such visits for medication supplies. The move would be taking a psychological toll too, he added. "Imagine you're in a room all by yourself with no access to the outside



**CAIRO:** In this file photo taken during a guided tour organized by Egypt's State Information Service on Feb 11, 2020, an Egyptian police officer stands at the entrance of the Tora prison. — AFP

world," he said. "That's the feeling of a detainee... and it destroys you psychologically."

## Not a priority

In war-torn Syria, the pandemic has put a spotlight back on the plight of political prisoners and long-term detainees. Syrian activist Wafa Mustafa is part of a group that wants the United Nations to pressure Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to free detainees. Last month, on Twitter she said it had been "2,464 days for my dad in #Assad prisons. Almost 7 years in fear, sadness, anger, and hope. I've always tried to avoid thinking: is he alive? Is he fine? Is he hungry? Will I ever see him again? With the #Covid\_19 disaster now, it's more difficult than ever to resist the pain," she wrote in English, posting an old photo of herself with her father.

In Iran, Reza Khandan, husband of jailed human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, described on Facebook the situation in Tehran's Evin prison, where family phone calls have been limited. "The crowded meeting room is an ideal place for the virus to spread," he wrote, since many families have been forced to visit in person. Khandan said that according to his wife, there was an acute shortage of face masks and gloves to prevent the spread of the virus in the facility. — AFP

ical staff were overwhelmed in the early days as infections climbed, leading to "late reporting, omissions or misreporting". It also cited insufficient testing and treatment facilities, and said the deaths of some patients at home were not properly reported.

Signs that the outbreak could be easing in parts of Europe prompted Switzerland, Denmark and Finland to begin reopening shops schools this week. Germany's health minister said infection rates had "sunk significantly" after 3,400 deaths in his country, which is now beginning the delicate task of lifting some restrictions without triggering a secondary outbreak. Some small shops will be allowed to reopen Monday, and some children would return to school within weeks. Parts of Italy also began emerging from lockdown, with Venice residents strolling around quiet canals. But Japan, Britain and Mexico all expanded their current movement restrictions.

Signs of the economic damage of the pandemic are mounting, with China reporting its first contraction in GDP in several decades. The Trump administration pledged another \$19 billion in relief for farmers reeling from a massive jolt to the agricultural markets with schools and restaurants shuttered across the country. Part of the funds will be used to buy up surplus dairy products and produce that farmers have been destroying, unable to get it to consumers or food processors.

"Having to dump milk and plow under vegetables ready to market is not only financially distressing, but it's heartbreaking as well to those who produce them," agriculture secretary Sonny Perdue said. African state leaders and global financial bodies warned on Friday that the continent needed tens of billions of dollars in additional funds to fight the outbreak. The IMF also warned the virus could spark another "lost decade" in Latin America and backed debt moratoriums to free up spending for the region's fragile economies.

Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh, the highest religious authority in the country, said prayers during Ramadan and for the subsequent Eid al-Fitr feast should be performed at home if the coronavirus outbreak continues. Saudi's Okaz newspaper reported on Friday. "Ramadan's taraweeh (evening) prayer can be performed at home if it cannot be performed at mosques due to the preventive measures taken to fight the spread of coronavirus," he said in response to a question, adding that the same applies for Eid prayers, according to the paper.

The holy fasting month of Ramadan begins next week. Saudi Arabia in mid-March stopped people performing their five daily prayers and the weekly Friday prayer inside mosques as part of efforts to limit the spread of the coronavirus. On Thursday, the Prophet's Mosque in the holy city of Madinah said it was banning events which dispense evening meals in the mosque to those in need during Ramadan to break their daily fast. — Agencies

## Poor students miss out as e-learning sharpens divide

**LOS ANGELES:** As a member of the 2020 "class of coronavirus," Kenia Molina needed to find a laptop in order to graduate high school - a technology gap that has caused thousands of poorer students to miss out on weeks of education. With many US schools and universities shut for the academic year, the Los Angeles student will be completing her final year via virtual learning on a home computer donated by her district.

"This is really important... for students that don't have any access to the internet or even have any devices, they can't even afford any devices," said Molina, wearing a protective mask and gloves as she collected her laptop. The free computers handed out by Los Angeles school district - second largest in the nation - "help us to be there and connected to one another," she added. But California's Department of Education estimates nearly 240,000 more computers are needed.

Some 7,400 of Los Angeles' 120,000 high school students have not logged in since quarantine began. That number is down from 15,000 absentees in the first two weeks of lockdown, when at least 40,000 students had no daily contact with their teachers. "This is something we should have been ready and prepared for years ago," said Rafael Balderas, principal of the school in Los Angeles suburb Bell where Molina studies.

"You can't take away from face-to-face learning - it is the best form of instruction for kids," he told AFP. "But this now has become our new normal," he added, with the pandemic and advances in technology spurring the school system to "move our kids to the 21st century."

The closures have caused particular challenges in poor or rural areas where families often lack computers or internet access. Molina was one of 400 students at her school who received computers

for viewing classes, turning in assignments and taking tests. For families lacking internet, the school district is also working with technology providers to get them online. In the school zone overseen by Andres Chait, one-in-five Telfair Primary pupils do not even have a home of their own.

Many of them live in motels or at the homes of other families, with no "desk in a quiet space" free from distractions, said Chait. Parents who still have to work to pay the bills are making huge sacrifices to ensure their children have the opportunity to log in to lessons, or at times entrusting the supervision of young children to older siblings. Teachers have also been forced to rapidly adapt, learning to use YouTube channels and video call applications like Zoom.

"They're keeping (students) within that educational space so that we don't have a whole generation that loses six months of instruction," said Chait. The closure of schools also affects free meals on which poor families depend. Los Angeles school district has set up 63 drive-through distribution points, handing out half a million meals per day.

## 'Changed forever'

California was one of the first US states to shut schools, in mid-March, under a containment policy that experts say has helped to contain the deadly coronavirus. Even though the state has avoided the fate of eastern hotspots like New York, California has lost almost 900 people to the disease so far. When schools finally reopen, Governor Gavin Newsom has warned that floorplans may need to be spaced out and start times staggered to maintain social distancing.

"It's safe to say that education has changed forever," said math teacher Andrew Rowland, who created education app Classkick. "Many more teachers will have now been educated on how they can use virtual teaching more effectively." For Molina, those changes are likely to continue through university. But even before then, she faces another seminal real-life moment transplanted to computer screen - her high school graduation, which will now be celebrated virtually. "It's a memory that I'm never going to be able to experience," she said. "But we really can't do much about it." — AFP

## 1 death, 93 cases in Kuwait; global...

Continued from Page 1

the actual number of infections, because many countries are testing only the most serious cases. Virtually no corner of the world has been left untouched, with deaths in Africa passing 1,000 overnight. Nigeria announced the death of President Muhammadu Buhari's top aide on Saturday, the highest-profile person to succumb to the virus in Africa's most populous nation.

China sharply raised its own death toll to 4,636 on Friday after adding another 1,290 fatalities for the city of Wuhan, where the respiratory disease first emerged late last year. Trump, who has angrily shot back at claims he reacted too slowly to the virus threat, has accused Beijing of downplaying the impact of the virus within its borders. "It is far higher than that and far higher than the US, not even close!" he tweeted.

Trump did not offer evidence, but pressure has mounted in recent days on Beijing to come clean over its handling of the original outbreak. Leaders in France and Britain have also questioned China's management of the crisis but Beijing hit back, saying it had not concealed information about the illness.

Wuhan's epidemic control headquarters said in a social media posting on Friday that it had added 1,290 deaths to the tally in the city, which has suffered the vast majority of China's fatalities from COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. That brings the total number of deaths in the city to 3,869. But the city government only added 325 cases, raising the city's total number of infections to 50,333. The change also pushes the nationwide death toll up by nearly 39 percent to 4,632, based on official national data released earlier on Friday. The official toll in the country of 1.4 billion people, however, remains well below the number of fatalities in much smaller countries such as Italy and Spain.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian acknowledged that the virus's rapid spread had contributed to undercounting, but added: "There has never been any concealment, and we'll never allow any concealment." There however has also been some domestic discontent over the authorities' handling of the outbreak, especially in Hubei province and its capital, Wuhan.

A civil servant in Yichang, which is in Hubei, said he had filed a lawsuit against provincial authorities for covering up the epidemic. "Someone must be held accountable for this," Tan Jun, the civil servant, said on social media. He later said police ordered him not to talk about the matter. Wuhan cited several reasons for the missed cases, including that med-

## Paper towels may remove virus; drug...

Continued from Page 1

spreading at pace worldwide," said the authors, led by Ines Moura from the University of Leeds. "Paper towels should be the preferred way to dry hands after washing and so reduce the risk of virus contamination and spread."

Four volunteers had their hands contaminated using a bacteriophage - a virus that infects bacteria and is harmless to humans - and then did not attempt to wash the microbes away. They then dried their hands either with paper towels or a jet air dryer in a hospital toilet and went on to touch various surfaces including door handles, stair rails, phones and stethoscopes. Researchers found that using both paper towels and jet dryers reduced the contamination on hands.

But for 10 out of 11 surfaces sampled, the jet method left "significantly greater environmental contamination". Microbes were found on all surfaces touched after using the jet dryer, with contamination on average 10 times higher than after the use of paper towels. The authors said the study was particularly relevant for hospital settings.

They noted that while the NHS and World Health Organization (WHO) recommend the use of disposable towels after hand-washing - as well as using them to turn off taps - healthcare facilities in the UK were increasingly using jet dryers. "Clearly how much virus remains on peoples' hands after washing depends to a large extent on how efficiently people are at washing their own hands," said Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, in response to the research.

"If people do not wash their hands properly then other people may be at risk if standing close to

someone using such a jet dryer. This study reinforces the need to wash hands properly so as much virus is removed as possible before drying." The study was due to be presented at this year's European Congress on Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ECCMID) in Paris this month, which was itself cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Meanwhile, the experimental antiviral drug remdesivir has proven effective against COVID-19 in a small experiment involving monkeys, US government scientists reported Friday. The study, which is preliminary and has not yet been peer reviewed, was designed to follow dosing and treatment procedures used for hospitalized COVID-19 patients in a large human trial. It involved two groups of six rhesus macaques that were deliberately infected with SARS-CoV-2.

One group received the drug, which was developed by Gilead Sciences, and the other group did not. The group receiving the drug got their first intravenous dose 12 hours after infection then every day subsequently for six days. The scientists timed the initial treatment to occur shortly before the virus reached its highest levels in the animals' lungs. The treated animals showed significant improvement 12 hours after the first dose, a trend that continued over the week-long study.

One of the six treated animals showed mild breathing difficulty, while all six of the untreated monkeys had rapid and difficult breathing. The amount of virus found in the lungs was significantly lower in the treated group compared to the untreated group. The treated group also had less lung damage. Remdesivir was among the first drugs mooted as a treatment for the novel coronavirus and its randomized clinical trials are at an advanced stage. The health news website Stat on Thursday reported the drug had shown great efficacy at a Chicago hospital where patients who are part of those trials are being treated. Remdesivir causes the virus to add mutations that can destroy it. — Agencies



Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

very hard

Friday's Solution

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

medium

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Be careful of people who talk a great deal and promise the world but have a difficult time delivering the goods, Aries. You might get trapped today if you rely on people who simply don't come through the way they said they would. Feel free to engage in social activities with partners, but don't sign any major business deals with them at this time.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Making decisions today is apt to be nearly impossible for you, Libra. That's why you should leave them up to someone else. Walk with your partner so you don't have to really think about where you're going. Your job is to focus on the emotional side of things and make it safe for everyone to dream. Your loving, caring nature is a valuable commodity these days. Protect and cherish this gift.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your positive strength is especially noticeable today. You may find that you're radiating gloriously to the people around you, Taurus. This is due to your polite, gentle, and peaceful nature. You're the jewel that isn't always noticed or appreciated as much as it should be. More than likely, you leave it up to others to make the first move. Consider being the instigator today. The world is in your hands.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is going to be one of those days when you get annoyed if someone takes too long to make up his or her mind about something, Scorpio. You aren't going to have the patience to abide anyone who continues to go over every single detail of an issue. You're more likely to want to simply make a decision, for better or worse.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, instead of digging deep into the barrel looking only for the misshapen, bruised, and rotten apples, concentrate on bringing up the shiny, bright red ones. This way you'll bring laughter and smiles to the company around you rather than miserable frowns. Whatever you bring to the surface will be distributed far and wide, so make sure you reach for the good times instead of the sour ones.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Use the power of words as an artistic medium to express yourself, Sagittarius. You have a magic way with words that often goes unrecognized. Your sensual nature is poetic. You shouldn't deprive others of this talent, so show it off to the world. Perhaps you're moved to write a love poem to a partner who means a great deal to you. As true as this may sound, it's actually very romantic.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today there are many areas in which you can shine, Cancer. You need only be yourself to win over the hearts of others. There is a graciousness to your manner that draws people close to you, whether or not you've ever noticed it before. Realize this, and know that it isn't a fluke. You need not take much action. It will come to you.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Whatever you're working on at this time can be expanded tremendously with the help of a partner, especially a creative project or written work, Capricorn. Watch as one seed of an idea blossoms into a whole field of creativity. There is more than meets the eye as you find yourself soaring higher and higher. Remember that you're only restricted by your own imagination, so dream big.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

If you're feeling needy today, you might consider seeking counsel from others, Leo. Close partners might make light of the situation, so if you're looking for deep metaphysical advice, you might want to look elsewhere. Most of all, pamper yourself with some relaxing downtime. This day is well suited for playing board games, watching a movie, or reading the latest edition of your favorite magazine.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Take advantage of the lighthearted, flighty feeling of the day instead of getting annoyed by it, Aquarius. You can't hide in your bedroom forever. Well, you could, but you'd end up wasting away and no one would even notice. This is a good day to get out and have fun with friends. Make wishes for people instead of cursing them. Make connections. Remember to laugh as often as possible.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

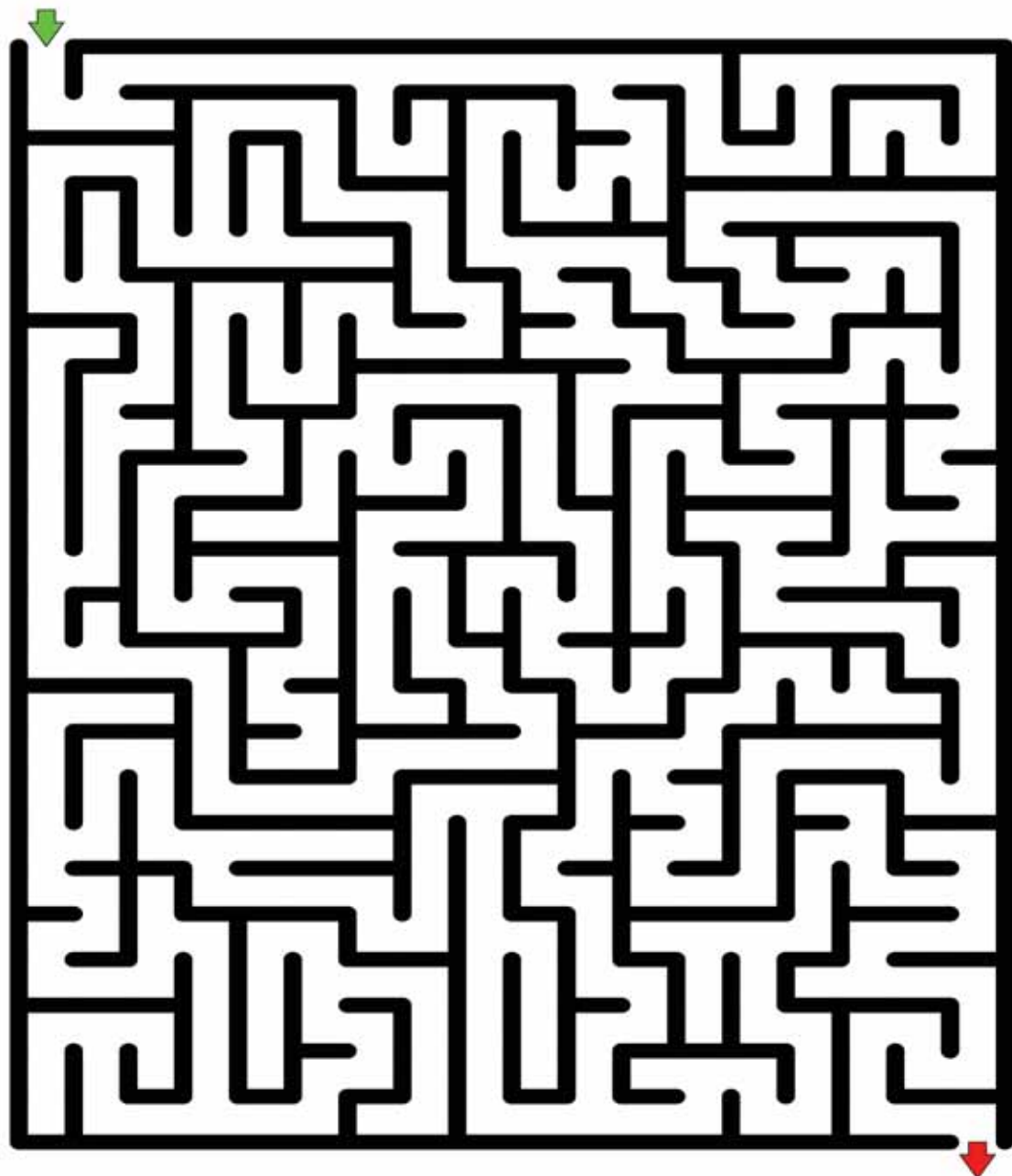
Get out in the fresh air today in whatever way suits your fancy, Virgo. It's important to exercise your body with some brisk physical activity, or at least refresh your spirit with a ride in a convertible. This is a terrific time for you. You feel alive and joyous about your life. Join with others to recognize all that you have, and give thanks for your meal tonight.



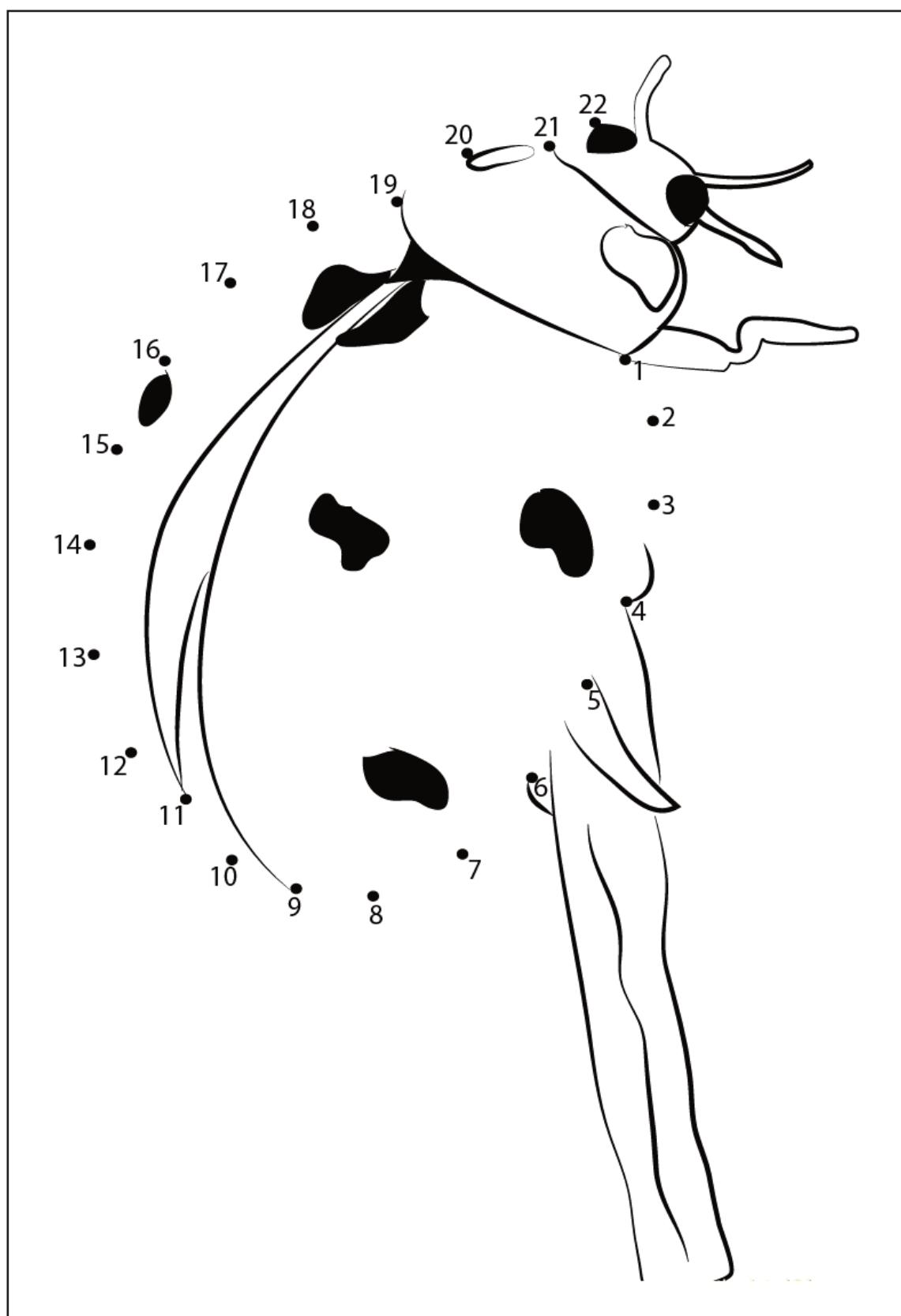
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The more you talk to people, the more successful you'll be, Pisces. Everyone is a valuable resource, so tap in to this boundless well. Your agility with words and facts is impressive, so use it to your advantage. Friends are a source of great joy, and this is a wonderful time to be with them. For the most part, it doesn't matter what you're doing. The person you're with is what is important.

Find the way

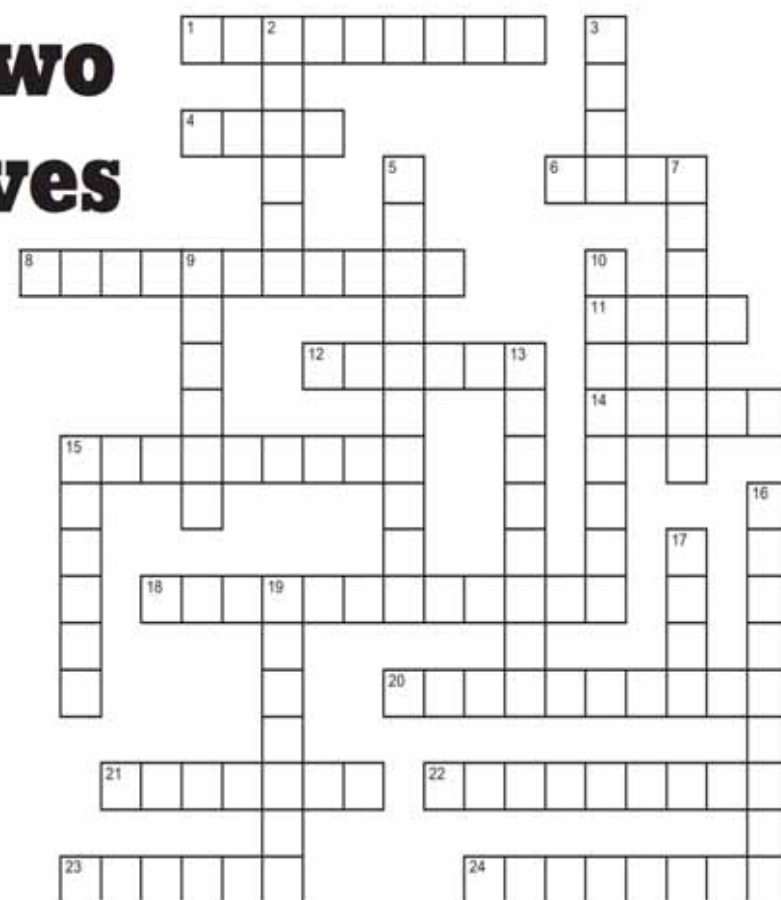


Join the dots



Crossword

A Game of Two Halves



ACROSS

- 1. Area of play behind the line of scrimmage.
- 4. Drop kick used to relinquish possession.
- 6. Hike.
- 8. Tom Brady's position.
- 11. Any offensive play that does not involve a forward pass.
- 12. Broadway Joe.
- 14. An offensive series of plays.
- 15. Three point play.
- 18. Results in a turnover.
- 20. Defensive player.
- 21. Game opener.
- 22. Number of teams in the NFL.
- 23. Team gathering.
- 24. Site of annual college game played on January 1st.

DOWN

- 2. He snaps the ball.
- 3. A team gets four of these each time they have possession.
- 5. Pass that hits the ground before possession.
- 7. Nickname for a football.
- 9. Take a player to the ground.
- 10. Field of play in American football.
- 13. Intermission with entertainment.
- 15. When a player loses the ball during a play.
- 16. Championship game.
- 17. Tackling the quarterback.
- 19. Area past the goal line.





## Sports

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Mohammed Burbayea performs during a training session in Kuwait. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Patriots DT Butler signs restricted free agent tender

NEW YORK: New England Patriots signed restricted free agent defensive tackle Adam Butler to a contract, the team announced Friday. Butler, who was tendered at the second-round level, is now set to make \$3.26 million during the 2020 season. He made a base salary of \$645,000 last season, per spotrac.com.

Butler, 26, spent the past three seasons with the Patriots since signing with the club as an undrafted free agent out of Vanderbilt on May 5, 2017. Butler recorded career-high totals in tackles (26), sacks (six) and passes defended (five) in 16 games, two starts, last season. He has recorded 62 tackles, 11 sacks, seven passes defended and one forced fumble in 48 career games, eight starts, with the Patriots.

Meanwhile, Cleveland Browns running back Kareem Hunt signed his second-round tender as a restricted free agent, multiple media outlets reported on Friday.

Hunt is now set to make \$3.26 million during the 2020 season. He made a base salary of \$341,471 last season, per spotrac.com. The 24-year-old Ohio native rushed for 179 yards and two touchdowns in eight games last season. Hunt also had 37 receptions for 285 yards and a score.

Hunt missed the first eight games after serving a suspension for violating the NFL's personal-conduct policy. He was banned after video surfaced of Hunt kicking and shoving a woman at a Cleveland hotel.

Hunt, who was a third-round pick of the Kansas City Chiefs in the 2017 NFL Draft, led the NFL with 1,327 rushing yards during his rookie season. He has recorded 3,448 yards from scrimmage (2,330 rushing, 1,118 receiving) and 28 total touchdowns (17 rushing, 11 receiving) in 35 career games with the Chiefs (2017-18) and Browns. —Reuters

# Change has to be a part of the game, says Veloce CEO

## Formula One and IndyCar drivers found mixing with gamers

LONDON: Esports moved fast to fill the space when the coronavirus pandemic brought motor racing to a standstill but the novelty of watching real-life drivers compete in the virtual world may be wearing off.

Formula One and IndyCar drivers can be found mixing it with gamers, professional sim racers and sports celebrities in various formats and across multiple platforms every weekend.

Rupert Svendsen-Cook, CEO of Veloce Esports, says change has to be part of the game for those wanting to stand out from the crowd, with his focus more on entertainment than the competitive element.

"Every man and their dog is trying to run their own esports series now but the novelty of just watching some real world drivers compete in a virtual race has worn off," he told Reuters.

"It's like 'I've seen that now'. It's got to be quite engaging, which is why we changed our format."

Veloce, an established esports presence with Formula E champion Jean-Eric Vergne as a co-founder, were quick off the mark when Formula One's March 15 opener in Australia stalled and the season was put on hold.

They put on virtual replacements for the Australian

and Bahrain races under the #NotTheGP hashtag but changed the format from round three, doing a deal with Formula One and moving to Saturdays to avoid any clash with F1's own virtual offering.

"We don't actually have a race. We go head-to-head. It's 16 drivers with a bracket league and knockout rounds to a finale head-to-head," said Svendsen-Cook.

"We had to carve out our own format and identity because it's quite messy already, so many series."

"It will certainly be always evolving. That's the beauty of esports. Nothing stands still. It's not like you lock that in and that's what you do from now on. Things continue to change. You've got to be agile."

Those competing in Veloce's 'NotTheGP' event on Saturday, to benefit the UN children's charity UNICEF, include McLaren's Lando Norris, Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Williams' George Russell.

All will be racing again on Sunday in Formula One's official virtual Chinese Grand Prix after already competing on Friday in a '#racefortheworld' in aid of the World Health Organisation's COVID-19 relief fund.

Three former F1 world champions will meanwhile be in action this weekend in the Legends Trophy race



BROOKLYN: (This image was computer generated in-game) Felix Rosenqvist, driver of the #10 NTT Data Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, crashes during the IndyCar iRacing Challenge Chevrolet 275 at virtual Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn, Michigan. —AFP

organised by Torque Esports and www.the-race.com as part of The Race All-Star series.

The all-electric Formula E series is also launching its 'Race at Home' challenge on Saturday with most of its real-life drivers taking part.

"The real life Formula One drivers are going to go

back to driving Formula One cars. You can't rely on that for your product and format going forwards, but it's great to have them involved at this point," said Svendsen-Cook. "But we have a format and a product that can continue to roll. There's no reason why #not-theGP can't continue forever." — Reuters

## Carter says sayonara to Japanese club

WELLINGTON: Three-time world player of the year Dan Carter announced yesterday he is leaving his Japanese club Kobe Steelers, but the 38-year-old gave no indication whether his illustrious career is over.

Carter, who holds the world record for the most points in Test rugby and was a World Cup winner in 2011 and 2015, confirmed on Instagram that with the Covid-19 pandemic bringing the Japanese season to an end his time with the club was over.

"I've gone a bit quiet since the JRU announced they are cancelling all their competitions this season," Carter said. "I know it's the right decision with what the world is going through at the moment but I would have loved to try help my @kobelcosteelers\_official family win another top league, and I'm gutted I can't do this."

"I want to thank the club, fans and my team mates for welcoming me and making the last two seasons some of the most enjoyable rugby I have ever played."

The champion fly-half first played for French club Racing 92 after retiring from Test rugby following the 2015 World Cup, before signing a two-year deal with Kobe Steelers in 2018.

He made no mention of his next move, leaving open the possibility he may play one more domestic season in New Zealand where he is waiting out the pandemic with his family.

Carter played the first of his 112 Tests for the All Blacks in 2003, scored a record 1,598 points during his international career and was the world player of the year in 2005, 2012 and 2015. — AFP

## Kelly Holmes, highly respected mentor of young athletes

LONDON: Six days in August 2004 redefined the life of British middle distance runner Kelly Holmes but only in the aftermath of her double gold-medal winning display at the Athens Olympics did the price she paid to scale such athletic heights truly emerge. Colonel Dame Kelly Holmes, who turns 50 on Sunday, is now a highly respected mentor of young athletes, the proud recipient of myriad awards for her service to the community and in the forefront of the battle for improved mental health.

Back in 2004, as plain old Kelly, life was anything but glamorous, as, at the age of 34, she prepared for what would almost certainly be her final crack at global gold. She had come close before with two world championship silvers and a bronze at the Sydney Olympics.

However, so much seemed to be conspiring against her that to the wider British public she seemed destined to be known better as "the former army sergeant and lorry driver" than one of the best athletes the country had ever produced.

In her autobiography "Black, White and Gold" Holmes estimated that she had suffered 37 major injuries in the previous decade, including ruptures, tears and stress fractures. Whenever she managed to drag her battered body to the start line, Holmes then faced the further challenge of going up against an Eastern European doping culture on the one hand and testosterone-fuelled intersex athletes on the other.

Those injuries and the lack of a "level playing



Kelly Holmes

field" led to mental pressure that manifested itself in depression and self-harm, as Holmes took to cutting herself daily with knives and scissors then scrambling desperately to hide the results.

Somehow, she kept on training and, for once, arrived in Athens injury-free. Up against her former training partner and defending champion Maria Mutola in the 800 metres final, Holmes ran the perfect tactical race to storm to gold.

Her wide-eyed, disbelieving face as she crossed the line became an iconic image of the Games, with BBC commentator Steve Cram excitedly shouting: "You've won it, Kelly, yes, you've won it."

"I thought something would go wrong again. Something always goes wrong. It was totally unreal," Holmes said in the aftermath.

Five nights later, running on a cloud of confidence, she roared through the field again, posting

a national record to win the 1,500 metres and become the first Briton to take a double Olympic Games gold in 84 years and the first, and still only, British woman to win two athletics golds. Having been crowned BBC Sports Personality of the Year, she retired in 2005 and threw her energy into motivating the next generation, forming "On Camp with Kelly" athletics camps to train junior athletes.

Made a Dame by the Queen and an honorary colonel by her former regiment, Holmes went on to use her public persona to speak out about the challenges of mental health, revealing the details of her secretive self-harming and suicidal thoughts.

She has written several books, worked as the government's "school sports champion" and remains an in-demand motivational speaker. These days, however, her subject matter is less what happened in Athens than what preceded it. —Reuters



## Sports

# NBA has no timetable to restart says, Adam Silver

## Players to receive 25% less pay from May 15

WASHINGTON: The NBA isn't close to making any decisions on a potential restart, and it isn't setting any deadlines, commissioner Adam Silver said Friday.

The league has been shut down since Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19 on March 11. Silver addressed the league's state amid the coronavirus pandemic in a Friday conference call with media members, but he offered no firm answers regarding the future.

"Based on the reports that we got from varied outside officials, current public health officials ... we are not in a position to make any decisions, and it's unclear when we will be," he said.

Regarding what could prompt a decision on a potential resumption of NBA action, Silver said, "I think we're looking for the number of new infections to come down. We're looking for the availability of testing on a large scale. We're looking at the path that we're on for potentially a vaccine. We're looking at antivirals."

"On top of that, we're paying close attention to what the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) is telling us on a federal level and what these various state rules are that are in place."

"There's a lot of data that all has to be melded together to help make these decisions, but that's part of the uncertainty. I think we're not even at the point where we can say, 'If only A, B, and C were met, then there's a clear path.' I think there's still too much uncertainty at this point to say precisely how we move forward."

Silver confirmed recent media reports that the

NBA has considered the possibility of teams being quarantined and playing games in empty arenas.

"We are looking at all those things right now," he said. "I'd say that in terms of bubble-like concepts, many of them have been proposed to us and we've only listened. We are not seriously engaged yet in that type of environment because I can't answer what precisely would we need to see in order to feel that that environment provided the needed health and safety for our players and everyone involved."

"I know it's frustrating — it is for me and everyone involved that I am not in position to be able to answer the question. ... There is still enormous uncertainty around the virus as well." Silver also said the league could consider adjusting its regular-season or playoff format depending on when play can resume.

"The direction that the league office has received from our teams is, again, all rules are off at this point given the situation we find ourselves in, that the country is in," Silver said. "If there is an opportunity to resume play, even if it looks different than what we've done historically, we should be modeling it."

Silver quoted Disney executive chairman Bob Iger, who recently spoke to the NBA's owners, as saying, "From his standpoint, it's about the data and not the date." Meanwhile, NBA has reached an agreement with the National Basketball Players Association to withhold 25% of each player's salary from May 15 due to the shutdown of the sport because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The deal would provide a gradual reduction in

two rounds of matches at the end of March could not be played due to football being suspended on the continent over the deadly virus.

"For the moment, the start fixed by (FIFA) for its celebration is September 4-8 in the format already established," said CONMEBOL. All 10 teams are due to play each other home and away in a round robin format. That amounts to 18 matches, far more than most other continental federations organize.

The first two rounds need to be rearranged but CONMEBOL said any new dates would have to be ratified by FIFA. And with the Copa America being postponed until next year, the opportunities to fit in an extra two rounds of matches appear few.

As it is, two rounds of World Cup qualifiers are

"I think I'd probably be ready (to play Test cricket) now, to be honest. Clearly I would have to be playing well and win a spot back on merit," Moeen told the Guardian. "But in terms of being available - and obviously I'm speaking hypothetically - if there was a Test match tomorrow and I got the call, I'd say 'yes'."

"We're all missing cricket right now and coronavirus makes you realise what you love. It could take out the whole summer and that would be a big thing," Moeen was dropped after the first Test against Australia last year and admitted to feeling like a scapegoat. He has played 60 Tests for England, scoring five centuries and taking 181 wickets. "When you find yourself surrounded by a few negative comments, somehow it's all you can focus on. You have to be mentally stronger and filter more of it out," Moeen said.

"It's almost been a case of forgiving anyone who has ever said anything I didn't like and now looking to start afresh when we get back playing. 'I may have felt a scapegoat at times in the past but I'm over it now. It's time to move on.'" — AFP

## Italian football to resume play in late May

ROME: The Italian football federation (FIGC) said on Friday that club matches should resume "in late May, early June", saying those advocating cancellation of the season "do not like football, or Italians".

The president of the FIGC, Gabriele Gravina, said it would take three weeks to prepare after the end of the coronavirus lockdown in the country, currently scheduled for May 4. "So at the end of May, early June, we can start," he told Italian radio on Friday.

"Those who talk today about cancelling the season do not like football or Italians, because they take away hope for the future and for recovery," Gravina said. "There will be a monitoring period to guarantee the that all those taking part are free of the virus. If they are all negative, there is no problem of distancing or contagion," said Gravina.

"I hope that everyone will be able to play in their own stadium, if that is not possible we will find other solutions," he added.

"It's a complex moment for our country, for the economy and for football, which is one of the most important industries," he said, adding that he was confident "we will find the right way".

According to the Italian press, Brescia and Torino are the last two clubs to openly oppose the resumption of the league. The city of Brescia is one of the hardest hit by the pandemic which has killed nearly 23,000 people in Italy.

Meanwhile, Kevin De Bruyne is recovering from



NBA commissioner Adam Silver

player salaries in case a "force majeure" event, such as the pandemic, wipes out the rest of the regular season.

The money will be placed in escrow and paid back to players if all of the remaining regular season games are played, ESPN reported.

If only part of the season can be played, the

amount paid out would be on a pro rata basis based on the number of games completed.

The salary reductions will continue through the first two months of the 2020-21 NBA season, ESPN said. The NBA has not held a game since March 11 and it is unclear when it might return to action. — Reuters

## CONMEBOL confirms WCup qualifying to begin in September

ASUNCION: South American qualifying for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, will begin in September, the region's governing body CONMEBOL said on Friday.

Last month, CONMEBOL asked FIFA to delay the start of the qualification campaign as the first

## England's Moeen ready to return to Test action

LONDON: Moeen Ali says he is ready to return to Test action for England after a self-imposed exile from the red-ball game despite having been made to feel like "a scapegoat" in the past.

All-rounder Moeen missed the Test matches during England's winter tours of New Zealand and South Africa after taking a spell away from the longest format of the game.

The 32-year-old, who continued to play limited overs matches for England, has been reflecting on his absence during the coronavirus lockdown and suggested he would be willing to return to Tests if selected when cricket eventually resumes.

due to be played on June 3 and 8, 2021, with the Copa now set to begin on June 11.

Meanwhile, CONMEBOL said that no restart date could yet be fixed for its flagship club competitions, the Copa Libertadores and Copa Sudamericana.

However, it reiterated its "determination" to complete the 2020 editions of both tournaments — the South American equivalents of the UEFA Champions League and Europa League.

During a video conference meeting with the presidents of its member associations, CONMEBOL insisted that "the priority remains preserving the health of the great South American football family." — AFP

## Cricket Australia faces cash crisis amid virus: Reports

SYDNEY: Cricket Australia Chief Executive Kevin Roberts has told staff that the governing body faces a financial crisis and would not have been able to pay its bills at the end of August without layoffs, local media reported yesterday.

Cricket Australia announced plans to lay off almost 80% of staff on Thursday, putting them on 20% pay until June 30 when it is hoped more will be known about how long government curbs put in place to control the coronavirus will last.

The Australian and The Age newspapers have reported that Cricket Australia's financial reserves had been hit by a slump in the world's stock markets caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

No one at Cricket Australia was immediately available for comment on Saturday.

On Thursday, Cricket Australia had said in a statement that the "impacts on the sports industry of the coronavirus pandemic are bigger than any one sport".

"We are conscious of the impact this will have on Australian Cricket and are working hard to manage that proactively. We will continue to seek advice from medical experts and relevant government agencies to ensure the health and safety of our people, volunteers and communities, and to return to business as soon as possible."

The coronavirus has infected more than 6,500 people in Australia and killed 65, a Reuters tally shows. All sports in Australia have been hit hard by the coronavirus lockdown but cricket was expected to weather the storm better than most given the season was all but completed by the time the restrictions came into force.

The first of three matches in a one-day series against New Zealand was played behind closed doors at the Sydney Cricket Ground on March 13 before the final two fixtures were postponed.

Cricket Australia would have expected two big paydays this year when the country hosts the men's Twenty20 World Cup in October and November before India arrive for a blockbuster four-test tour around the New Year.

Any impact of the coronavirus shutdown on those events would clearly have a major financial impact on Cricket Australia. While, according to The Australian, national team coach Justin Langer was informed on Friday that he was now a part-time employee, the players have not yet concluded negotiations over any wage losses they might suffer.

The players retained a revenue share model with Cricket Australia in their last negotiations over pay in 2017 and test captain Tim Paine said last month that he and his team mates were braced for cuts. — Reuters

## MLS extends hiatus until 'June 8'

LOS ANGELES: Major League Soccer won't resume before June 8 the league said on Friday, and is exploring multiple scenarios for completing the 2020 season.

The league is also discussing changes to player compensation because of the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic that has brought sports to a standstill worldwide.

"We are seeking to work collaboratively with the MLS Players Association to find a solution that provides a safety net for all players, opportunity to earn full salary in the scenario where all matches are played with fans, and in particular provides protection for the players at the lower end of the salary scale," the league said in a statement.

ESPN reported Friday that the league has suggested most of its players take as much as a 50% pay cut in a shortened season — depending on how many matches must be cancelled.

Playing games without fans in attendance could also affect the extent of player paycuts, the sports site reported, although to what degree remains unknown. MLS has been on hiatus since March 12, and had already acknowledged earlier this week that it's hoped for return in mid-May looked "extremely unlikely."

"MLS remains focused on exploring a wide variety of formats for playing the entire 2020 season including pushing back the MLS Cup into December or later," the league said Friday.

"Based on the most recent government guidance, we have extended the moratorium on matches until at least June 8." — AFP



Moeen Ali

an illness, but the Manchester City star says he is not sure if he had coronavirus. De Bruyne and his family felt ill for around two weeks, but the Belgian international did not find out whether or not it was the virus.

"I am doing well, to be honest," De Bruyne told Sky Sports on Friday. "The first two weeks my family was sick so it was a little bit like up and down, but now they are all healthy. 'We don't know if we had it (coronavirus) or not but I think we're doing well now.'"

With De Bruyne recovered, the midfielder is trying to keep as fit as he can while adhering to social distancing rules. The Premier League is suspended indefinitely because of the pandemic, but there remains a chance play will resume this season. "Well, the first two weeks was a little bit weird because I don't know what's going on," De Bruyne said. "Then I managed to get a treadmill. I was swimming a little bit because I'm lucky to have a pool downstairs."

"I was doing a couple of lengths but now mostly I'm doing a run and I would say every other day I would choose between swimming and doing some exercise, so I'm keeping fairly good for what we can on our own, I guess."

Asked if City are sending through information and drills, he said: "They send us like a fairly big programme. 'I think at the beginning of lockdown some of the gym physios went to the club and made videos of what we can do, different types of exercises."

"But there's a few things that I like to do, obviously it's more the running and the swimming exercise. 'I do a little bit in-between but I'm not one for sitting like an hour or two hours in a gym."

"I get bored of doing stuff on my own anyway so I prefer to do running, where I keep busy for myself and listen to some podcasts and all that stuff." — AFP



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## Djokovic shares Oly regrets with Murray



Novak Djokovic (left) and Andy Murray.

**LONDON:** Live tennis action is a fading memory during the coronavirus shutdown but 20,000 fans tuned in to watch old rivals Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray chew the fat on Instagram on Friday. Sitting on their sofas at home, the duo spent an entertaining hour reminiscing about some of the classics in their 36-match series, painful losses and even came up with the perfect tennis player.

The knockabout banter offered some candid reflections on their glittering careers — both on hold as tennis awaits the end of the pandemic which has claimed more than 150,000 lives globally.

Asked which losses hurt the most, both selected matches against each other. “For me it was the French Open final against you in 2016,” Murray, who has also finished runner-up at the Australian Open five times, said.

“Obviously I would have loved to win the Australian Open or the French Open but I think as a chal-

lenge for me, because clay was such a tough surface for me throughout my career, that would have been for me my biggest achievement.”

The Serb hit back from losing the first set to out-play Murray in that Paris showdown, completing his career Grand Slam in the process. World number one Djokovic has never won the Olympic gold medal though, a feat Murray achieved in 2012 and 2016.

Djokovic said his semi-final defeats against Murray and Rafa Nadal in the 2012 and 2008 Olympics were two of his toughest losses — together with his defeat by Juan Martin del Potro in the first round of the 2016 Rio Games.

“Maybe that match against you in London, or the

semi-final against Rafa in Beijing (in 2008),” Djokovic, who won the bronze medal in Beijing said. “In Rio I felt really good but two days before the match I felt my wrist. It started to be more painful. It’s no excuse,

I got injections, but I felt sad that I wasn’t at my best and could work my way in the tournament. “If I could change any outcomes would be Rio and London.” Three-time Grand Slam champion Murray, trying to salvage his career after hip surgery at the start of 2019, admitted he wished he had enjoyed his successes more.

“After the issues I’ve had the last few years, I sometimes do wish I had enjoyed those moments more. When you see the end coming you think... I should have enjoyed the wins or even the losses that

were great matches.”

Asked to come up with the perfect player if they could combine strokes from different players, both picked each other for having the best service returns.

“If I won a free point off my first serve against you I was celebrating like I won a set,” Djokovic, who owns 17 Grand Slam titles, said of his fellow 32-year-old. Both said they would swap for the serves of John Isner or Nick Kyrgios, while Murray said Nadal’s forehand was the toughest and Djokovic picked Roger Federer’s.

Unsurprisingly they were in agreement on which player is mentally the toughest — Nadal. “It’s like going on court to face Gladiator,” Djokovic said. Asked by a fan what they would have done rather than tennis, Djokovic picked being a scientist.

For Murray? “Right now it would be cool to be a doctor because you realise what’s important in times like this.” — Reuters

“If I won a free point off my first serve”

### Athletes banned until 2020 can qualify at Olympics

**TOKYO:** The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics will allow athletes banned until 2020 to qualify for the Games next year as doping bans are based on time periods and not events. Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) head Brett Clothier told Reuters.

Last month, the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government agreed to postpone the Tokyo Games, due to start in July, to 2021 because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 150,000 people worldwide.

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) bans are designed to prevent athletes from competing during an Olympic cycle and Clothier said stopping athletes whose bans expire this year from competing in 2021 would lead to legal complications.

“The standard penalty under the WADA code for doping is a four-year ban,” Clothier said. “And that’s been designed that way to tie in with the Olympic cycle.” But in this case, of course, it’s an anomaly that the Olympics have moved so some athletes will benefit from that. “It’s an unfortunate situation but one that is very clear under the legal framework so the ban is based on time and not tied to particular events.” The anomaly could prove to be a double-edged sword, however, with Clothier saying athletes caught after August this year would be banned for two Olympic Games — in Tokyo and Paris — since they fall within the four-year sanction range.

But with social distancing protocols and lock-

downs in place in several countries, Clothier said the biggest impact the pandemic has had on anti-doping agencies is the lack of regular testing.

“The restrictions on movement that are happening in many countries are having a severe disruption to testing processes around the world,” he said.

“We do testing for over a 100 countries round the world and there are different restrictions in each country... and those restrictions are changing day-to-day, week-to-week.

“So our normal testing operations are disrupted. We are still conducting testing where we can but there is a severe disruption, no question.”

The United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) said a new self-administered doping test, where athletes are monitored live by a doping control officer, could help protect clean athletes, as the agency tries to ensure no one gets a “free pass” from reduced testing during the pandemic.

Clothier said that though current testing limitations give dopers an opportunity to cheat, agencies should be proactive in identifying athletes prone to cheating while also cracking down on the root causes of doping. “One thing that needs to be understood though is testing for us isn’t just a numbers game,” he added. “We use intelligence and investigation methodologies to make sure we are testing the right athletes we need to at the right time.

“While our testing activities are reduced at the moment, we are focusing on our priority and high-risk athletes and making sure we can test them as much as possible within the limitations we have.

“We’re hoping that we’ll see change around the anti-doping world... where more organisations invest in intelligence capabilities so that they can address the root causes of doping and the people behind doping rather than just using the tests as a facade or a numbers game.” — Reuters