



# 16-hr curfew in Ramadan; govt shutdown till May 28

2 deaths, 85 new virus cases • Kuwaiti banks to provide SMEs with financing

## Banks can't save Gulf economies

By Karen Young  
Al-Monitor.com

As the COVID-19 pandemic's economic damage continues, governments around the world are trying to intervene in the financial sector to stop the bleeding. Many governments are using their central banks to reduce the cost of borrowing by lowering interest rates, or to create stimulus packages that expand government loans to businesses or even direct cash transfers to workers as unemployment benefits or tax relief. Small businesses have been acutely affected by the pandemic as a result of crashed consumer demand as lockdowns continue globally, forcing billions of people to stay home and forgo travel for work or pleasure.

For the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, directing economic relief through the financial sector has some region-specific challenges. The state looms large over the financial sector in the Gulf, and this crisis is underscoring the limitation of GCC governments to spur organic growth in the private sector.

For more, visit [www.KuwaitTimes.net](http://www.KuwaitTimes.net)

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- Dubai delivery culture makes lockdown easier (Page 15)
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By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet decided late Monday to expand the partial curfew to 16 hours daily between 4 pm and 8 am starting from the first day of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, expected to begin on Friday. The Cabinet also decided to keep government offices closed until May 28, which means after the end of Ramadan, in a bid to counter the spread of the coronavirus, where more than 2,000 cases have been reported in the country.

The government also decided to allow food delivery services and supermarkets to operate between 5 pm and 1 am daily throughout the fasting month. The Cabinet asked the ministries of interior and information to take all necessary legal actions against violators of home quarantines and curfew, adding their names will be announced in the media.

The ministry of health yesterday reported 85 new coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours, bringing the total of infections to 2,080. Two deaths were reported as well, bringing total fatali-

ties to 11. During its daily briefing, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 46 patients are in intensive care, 20 of them in critical condition.

Those currently receiving treatment at hospitals reached 1,657 patients. The new death cases are of a 59-year-old Bangladeshi male and a 63-year-old Somali male - both were receiving treatment in intensive care units. Earlier yesterday, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah announced the recovery of 45 patients, bringing the total to 412 recoveries.

Kuwait's Central Bank said yesterday that banks must provide qualifying small and medium enterprises (SMEs) affected by the coronavirus outbreak with financing at a maximum 2.5 percent interest rate. Kuwait's National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development will provide 80 percent of the SMEs' funding needs at no interest for up to three years, while banks will finance 20 percent and the state will support companies in paying the up to 2.5 percent interest for three years.

## US oil hits -\$40; Trump may halt Saudi imports

**NEW YORK:** Traders desperate to avoid owning oil fled the markets on Monday, sending crude futures into negative territory for the first time ever, in recognition that the coronavirus pandemic has sapped demand for fuel and there is not enough storage for the massive glut of oil present on US soil. Investors sold the May futures contract due to expire yesterday in a series of waves. At one point the contract hit negative \$40. When the trading stopped, crude oil had ended the day at a negative \$37.63 a barrel, a decline of some 305 percent, or \$55.90 a barrel.

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## Local

# Kuwaiti citizens repatriated on 19 flights Monday

## Global airline to bring home nationals in out of reach cities



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti nationals leave Kuwait International Airport upon their return as part of a repatriation plan on Monday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said 19 flights brought hundreds of citizens back home on Monday, the second day of a repatriation plan aimed at bringing back nationals amidst spread of coronavirus. The second day of a three-day plan included Arab and European capitals and cities, DGCA said in a statement. It said 19 flights brought citizens from Jeddah, Dammam and Riyadh, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Manama, Cairo, Amman and London. Kuwait Airways operated 10 flights while Jazeera Airways operated nine flights. President of DGCA Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah had said earlier in the day the second phase of repatriation plan would start tomorrow and lasts for three days. The second phase will include following destinations: Amman, Casablanca, Nouakchott, Istanbul, Vienna, Alexandria, Cairo, New York, Brussels, London, Paris, Manila, Bangkok, Dakar, Tunis, Malta, Beirut, Tbilisi, Baku, Mumbai, Delhi, Sarajevo and Amsterdam.

### Mandatory quarantine

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health said Monday 146 citizens who were repatriated on Sunday were transferred to mandatory quarantine while the remaining 2,933 were sent to home quarantine. Six persons were transferred to Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital because medical workers testing incoming passengers at the airport suspected that they have coronavirus symptoms, MoH's As-

sistant Undersecretary for Technical Affairs Dr Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said. Al-Mutairi, also the supervisor on medical testing facilities at Kuwait International Airport, said four cases were transferred to different hospitals to continue their treatment they were undergoing abroad. Mutairi



### 146 transferred to quarantine

said 3,089 Kuwaiti citizens were repatriated on 27 flights on Sunday.

### Global airline

In the meantime, Kuwait plans to contract a global airline to bring home nationals stranded in cities unreachable by its two domestic airlines, Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways, amid the global spread of the deadly coronavirus. The Cabinet is the sole body responsible for choosing the operator, Kuwait airport's Deputy Director at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation,

Saleh Al-Faddaghi said on Monday. Four flights arrived late Monday, which represents the second day of the huge endeavor. This comes after another 15 flights arrived earlier and another 27 arrived the day before, bringing the total to 46 flights, thus far. The recent flights are part of a phase one, which includes trips from neighboring Gulf Arab countries and some Arab and global destinations. This particular phase will be followed by a "rest day," said the official, ahead of the commencement phase two on Thursday, which focuses on the remaining Arab countries and the rest of the world. This period will also target a three-day repatriation of passengers with specific medical needs.

The whole plan is being administered under the directions of the Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah and is being executed by a ministerial committee led by Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran. The operating procedures for each body under the plan at Kuwait International Airport, have been outlined under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and healthcare authorities. Passengers will be supervised by Kuwaiti authorities upon entering the plane at their respective locations, during their flight, at the airport where they will be administered virus detection health checks, upon receiving baggage and upon departing the airport to their mandatory home or institutional quarantine or to a medical facility. — KUNA

## Association condemns assault on Kuwaiti doctor

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait Medical Association (KMA) strongly condemned an assault on a female Kuwaiti doctor while on duty at Al-Bahar ophthalmology center. KMA Deputy Chairman Dr Ali Al-Moussawi stressed that the association totally condemns assaulting any doctor, adding that it will take all possible legal actions to deter any further attacks on medical staff. Moussawi also noted that KMA had immediately contacted the assaulted doctor and investigative authorities.

KMA Treasurer Dr Mohammad Al-Obaidan called for accelerating the process of passing a law on medical practices and patients' rights, which had been discussed over a year ago and still not passed. Obaidan also called for showing no tolerance with those who assault doctors and urged the Ministry of Health (MoH) to protect doctors in such situations.

The doctor also filed a case against the husband of one of her patients, saying he kept complaining about his wife kept waiting to be examined and kept shouting, which affected the doctor's focus while tending to another patient. "I opened the room door and asked him to keep his voice down and went back in," the doctor said, noting that, instead, the assaulter barged into the room shouting abusive words and assaulted her, before others controlled him. She then went to a police station to report the assault.

### Infected workers

Responding to news about some co-op workers testing positive for COVID-19, KUCCS Deputy Chairman Khaled Al-Hudhaiban said that in a preventive measure, KUCCS called for testing all co-op workers. Hudhaiban added that MoH promised to randomly test 100 workers in each co-op soon. "This comes as a preventive measure to protect co-op customers," Hudhaiban added, noting that co-ops where the cases were found were immediately closed down to have all staff members tested and sanitize the entire place, which would not be reopened until proven safe. Notably, Ishbelia Co-op Society's board had announced closing the main supermarket after a worker tested positive for COVID-19. The co-op board added that it would remain closed until sterilization is over.

### Pandemic Diaries

## Locked-in syndrome



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

On Monday night, the Cabinet decided to extend the public holiday until the end of Ramadan and the partial curfew from 4 pm to 8 am - effectively giving us all a clear timeline for how this next month will play out. For many, the continuation of the curfew and closures will be difficult to take. Many people spend the month going to the mosque, gathering with family and friends for iftar, attending ghabqas and enjoying the many night-time activities of the month.

Spending it under lockdown will be a new experience for us all. Even the pleasure of having food delivered after curfew starts cannot compare with the loss of seeing family and friends and the gatherings that make Ramadan special.

At the same time, the clear timeline gives us all a gift that might go unnoticed. Choice has been temporarily taken out of our hands. Whatever our individual circumstances, we are collectively locked down, and that means we cannot do anything to change the situation. Whether we still work or we are stuck at home without income, we now have one month guaranteed of the status quo.

One month to make of it what we will. Under great constraints can come great creativity. If we are lucky enough to have our basic needs met and to not get sick, we can spend this next month exploring. We can build, create, draw, learn or simply wonder and think. We can read. We can build a new habit or break an old one. We can take the daily stress, anxiety, fear and uncertainty that has insinuated itself into our daily lives and channel that into mindfulness practice, into art, into something that we would never in our normal lives have the time or opportunity to do.

We've been given the gift of time. Yes, it's under the worst of circumstances and yes we still have worries and pressures, demands and concerns. Our children need help e-learning as well as time and attention. Our homes need taking care of, dinners need cooking. Some of us have lost our jobs or had our salaries cut and just survival and daily meals will be a major concern. But we have blessed Ramadan and Insha'Allah we will all have enough food and shelter, family and friends (even if via Zoom and Facetime).

At the basic level of survival, we have no choice, but we do have control over how we view our circumstances. We do have a choice of what we do with this time. In the book, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, journalist Jean-Dominique Bauby recounts memories from his life and explores what it is like to live with locked-in syndrome. Bauby survived for 15 months after having a stroke, completely paralyzed except for small movements of the head and face.

But he didn't give up, didn't stop living. He used his eyes to communicate and the entire book was written by his eyelids opening and closing to indicate letter by letter the ideas he wanted to share with the world before he died. "I am alive and I can think," Bauby wrote, "and no one has the right to deny me these two realities."

We are alive and we can think. Now we know we have one month before us. We can see it as a gift or a jail sentence. We cannot change the situation but we can change how we live it.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 2,080 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), in addition to 11 deaths. With the exception of 46 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, 412 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,657 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, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. 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 May 28, with work resuming on May 31, 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 Naeem 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-Sahh:** on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.

**Dr Fahad Al-Tasha:** daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.

**Dr Othman Al-Asfour:** daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.

**Dr Mohammed Al-Khalidi (head of this team):** daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.

**Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi:** daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.

**Dr Muneera Al-Qattan:** Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.

**Dr Zainab Al-Saffar:** Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.

**Dr Sameera Al-Kandari:** Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.

**Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout:** Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local

# Kuwait govt adopts multi-faceted measures to curb COVID-19 spread

## Curfew extended, food delivery allowed during Ramadan

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's government Monday adopted multi-faceted measures aimed at curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and taking action against people who violated the curfew and home quarantine. During a meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the cabinet assigned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and affiliate companies to coordinate with Ministry of Health to prepare quarantine facilities in North Ritqa and South KIPC to be used by the Ministry of Health (MoH) as soon as possible. It assigned MoH to rapidly coordinate with Ministries of Interior and Finance to boost strategic stocks of medicine and medical equipment to confront coronavirus. Deputy Premier, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said in a statement.



### Violators to be named and shamed

will be extended from April 26 until May 28, and work will resume on Sunday, May 31, said Saleh. The cabinet assigned the Ministry of Social Affairs to coordinate with Union of Cooperative Societies to remove all obstacles hindering the build-up of a strategic stock enough for six months. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) shall coordinate with Foreign Ministry, Custom Directorate, Kuwait Ports Authority and Public Authority for Agriculture and Fish Resources to arrange imports of food through sea ports and border crossings. The cabinet, which approved MoH's home quarantine regulations, assigned Kuwait Municipality to make sure food stores abide by health regulations. The ministers extended the curfew hours to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am, but allowed restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. They assigned Ministries of Interior and Information to name and shame people who violated home quarantine and curfew in



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

media, newspapers and social media.

### Masks' production

The cabinet assigned Kuwait National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development to take appropriate measures to produce fabric-made masks to meet growing needs of people and citizens being repatriated. The cabinet also decided to continue payment of support wages for citizens working in the private sector even if

they did not update their working status or were abroad. Meanwhile, the cabinet expressed gratitude for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for addressing the nation on the first day of repatriation of citizens. His Highness the Amir urged the citizens to fully comply with health instructions during the time they spent in quarantine. His Highness the Amir also thanked all those working at the frontlines for their dedica-

tion. The cabinet, said Saleh, would comply with His Highness the Amir's instructions for the sake of the well-being of citizens. The government, in the meantime, mourned former Minister Jassem Khaled Al-Marzouq and paid tribute to his service. It strongly condemned a shooting attack in Nova Scotia, Canada, which killed a number of people, and asserted Kuwait's rejection to these criminal attacks. — KUNA

## Kuwait govt reviews COVID-19 economic, social repercussions



Kuwait Central Bank Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's government discussed Monday a briefing of economic and social repercussions of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and steps taken by the supreme committee for economic stimulus, presented by its head, Kuwait Central Bank Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel. The review urged an early intervention to contain a crisis characterized by uncertainty, due to its negative impacts on global oil prices as a result of dwindling supply and demand and the halt in a large proportion of global economic activity. The results of the global pandemic were described as being of "unparalleled proportions," far exceeding initial estimates compared to each and every crisis that has emerged since World War II.

The need to secure public funds was another topic of discussion, along with the importance of protecting the national economy, particularly the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) sector, which is the most vulnerable to these effects. The need to protect the national workforce, burden sharing amongst all parties to overcome the crisis and to assist strongly-performing economic entity, which have been known to contribute to the national economy, in order to maintain their production levels upon a return to normal life. The commit-

tee said the 11-article proposed solutions are based on current statistics, leaving the door open for a different approach in the event of the lengthening of the crisis' duration.

In particular, ministers discussed article six and seven of the draft proposals, related to providing individuals, SMEs and economic entities with soft loans - a role which banks could positively contribute through providing liquidity. The discussions paid homage to the efforts of the Central Bank over the past decade to strengthen the banking sector, leading to strong buffers and a high level of financial safety indicators which the nation can now bear the fruit of at this point in time. The proposals, which received cabinet approval, handed out to virus-impacted individuals, SMEs and economic entities. In order to protect social security, the committee also recommended that state charity, Bait Al-Zakat (Zakat House), provide assistance to marginally-employed and financially-affected labor, estimated at around 500,000 individuals, for food aid over a 100-day period. The need to closely pay attention to applying appropriate policies in relation to maintaining social security, and to strengthening the role of civil society bodies in supporting these institutions was also approved. — KUNA

## Kuwait's Amir receives call from Iranian President

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received a phone call from the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. During the call, His Highness the Amir and the Iranian President discussed bilateral ties between the two countries and the latest regional and global developments as well as the precautionary measures taken by the two countries to limit the spread of the coronavirus. His Highness the Amir expressed appreciation for the call, wishing the Iranian President full wellbeing and for his country and friendly people further progress and prosperity.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable to Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom and the other Commonwealth realms, congratulating her majesty on her birthday. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His

Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Monday a cable of condolences to the Governor General of Canada Julie Payette over the deadliest mass shooting that took place in Nova Scotia, Canada, which resulted in killing many innocent people. His Highness the Amir expressed sorrow and wishes speedy recovery to the injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Canadian leadership. On Sunday, 16 people were killed in a shooting in Nova Scotia, Canada, including a police officer and the gunman, according to local reports. The police identified the gunman as a 51-year-old male and that the shooting seemed "random in nature." — KUNA

Wellbeing Amidst Pandemic

### Reframing perception

By Sadie Hussain

Concerns about the pandemic are perfectly normal. However, to those that experience intense anxiety or unhelpful thoughts that impact their day to day lives, try to focus on issues that are in your control, such as how you act, who you speak to and where you get information from.

It is fine to acknowledge that some things are outside of your control, but if constant thoughts about the pandemic and its effects are leading to overwhelming feelings, try utilizing the coping methods such as praying, meditation, mindful breathing or setting positive affirmations. Be attentive to negative emotions and identify relaxation techniques that best work for you.

During a time of heightened uncertainty and unrest, it is natural to have many questions in mind and in the absence of information, an anxious mind will often consider worst case scenarios (what if's), leading to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability.

We are at a climax of the history of our Earth. Take deep breaths, practice mindful grounding, be grateful for today and for all that you have. Cultivate thoughts of hope and better days ahead.

Consider reframing questions in order to shift thinking to a more constructive mindset. Examples of questions may be:

- What are the things within my control?
- What are the strategies that have helped with challenging situations in the past?
- How can these strategies be tailored to help me cope during this time?
- What are the positive actions that I can take now?

There are certainly some things that you can control such as your attitude, your output and your contribution. When you control your thoughts and emotions, you harness clarity of mind.

Remember the well-known serenity affirmation? "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference."

Do not use your energy to worry. Instead, use your energy to believe and to make a change.

— The above advice should not be considered as a comprehensive report or medical advice concerning issues that may affect physical and mental wellbeing.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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# Indians finish applying for amnesty; Sri Lankans next in line



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: The last day for Indian nationals to avail the amnesty was on Monday, as hundreds of people headed to centers set up by the Ministry of Interior to receive expatriates without valid residencies. Kuwait announced 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. Sri Lankans began applying yesterday and continue until April 25, fol-

lowed by 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 different locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh as follows: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslamya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.



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## Ooredoo provides services to 'Civil Defense'

KUWAIT: During a meeting held last week at the General Directorate of Civil Defense, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, affirmed its support to the employees and volunteers of the Directorate working to insure our safety during these critical times. This initiative stems from the company's Corporate Social Responsibility and a continuation of its efforts during the COVID-19 situation and its commitment to supporting the Government and its entities. The meeting was attended by Ooredoo Kuwait, represented by the Acting Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operating Officer, Fadi Kawar, Chief Business Officer, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain and Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil Al-Ayoub, and the Director General of General Directorate of Civil Defense, Colonel Jamal Husain Al-Fodari.

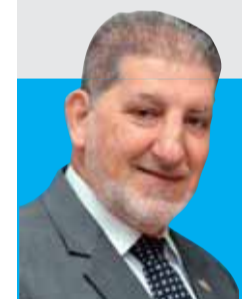
Commenting on details of the meeting and the services provided by Ooredoo, Kawar stressed Ooredoo Kuwait's commitment and full support of the government during these times. Kawar recognized the great efforts made by the General Directorate of Civil Defense during this critical time and added that Ooredoo's management has been keen since day one to harness all the company's capabilities to serve all the concerned sectors in Kuwait. Kawar said "we had the honor to meet the Director Central of General Directorate of Civil Defense and his team, and we ensure our full support and commitment."

Kawar praised the efforts of the staff and volunteer teams at the General Directorate of Civil Defense during this crisis. He further confirmed that this initiative is in alignment with the Company's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy to support the society at all times throughout the year, and across all sectors. This has been Ooredoo Kuwait's strategy since day one, and the company is committed to provide the society and the nation with all the support needed under any circumstances.



In my view

## Dos and don'ts



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

The Muslim lunar calendar is characterized with a month during which practicing Muslims fast during daylight hours for as long as 14 to 16 hours on average - it is the month of Ramadan. This practice, although a religious ritual, has many health benefits in general and can help any person - Muslim or otherwise - to have a healthy lifestyle. I would like to write about certain common habits that should not be followed when breaking the fast, and will follow with later articles about the benefits of fasting on the body.

People in this part of the world rush to drink large amounts of water as soon as it is time to break the fast, which is something very wrong. One should drink a glass of water every two hours, because filling the stomach with liquid causes more problems, including difficulty breathing, more than filling it with food. We all know that juices are rich in sugars, so it is wise to drink sensible amounts every other day and not daily.

Some young men resort to practicing sports shortly after eating, which is something that may cause an upset stomach. The right thing to do is to wait for at least two hours to allow for digestion, as the blood during this time will be concentrated around the stomach.

It is totally wrong to eat quickly; rather one must chew the food slowly, because this helps in digestion and gives the feeling of satisfaction. Desserts should not be eaten immediately after meals; rather one should wait a while to avoid drowsiness and sluggishness.

Another thing one should pay attention to is not to consume food that is rich in sodium, because this will cause severe thirst while fasting. You can avoid thirst by eating potassium-rich food, because it prevents thirst (one banana may be enough to prevent thirst during the day). A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine said not eating for 16 to 18 hours every day could be a way to treat numerous health conditions, even if you have to train yourself to push past the hunger.

Studies have suggested that intermittent fasting can help reduce blood pressure, aid weight loss and improve longevity. The report serves as a roadmap for experts to prescribe fasting as a way of prevention or treatment for obesity, diabetes and heart disease. The author of the study, Mark Mattson, a professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University, hones in on two types: Daily time-restricted feeding, which means you eat a full meal and fast for 16-18 hours and 5/2 intermittent fasting, which means you fast two days a week.

Fasting is highly beneficial and one should practice it most of the time and not link it to religious practice or a certain time. Ramadan Mubarak. God bless you all.

Local



**KUWAIT:** Salmiya Co-operative Society installed a 'sterilization chamber' at the entrance of its main supermarket to provide protection for customers against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

**LOYAC launches creative online programs campaign**

**KUWAIT:** In a bid to encourage youth to make the best of the long time they have to spend at home due to the COVID-19 crisis as well as to exchange expertise, LOYAC recently launched its 'Be Ready' campaign which includes a number of creative online programs to help the youth fruitfully utilize their time, develop their skills, qualify for the labor market and spiritually be prepared for post-crisis times.

In this regard, LOYAC's general manager Al-Razi Al-Bedaiwi said that 'Be Ready' initiative provides a number of online training course and workshops to help the youth develop skills and be ready for their academic and practical lives with new ones when life goes back to normal.

"LOYAC has recently opened for registration in the 'Professional Preparation' training course which includes a number of workshops launched via Zoom and designed and administered by the leadership and management advisor Amal Al-Bedah," Bedaiwi explained, adding that the course includes five workshop through which the youth would be trained on planning for their careers, setting goals, determining their

career course, building up professional personalities, overcoming professional challenges and achieving goals.

Further, Bedaiwi pointed that starting last month, LOYAC began interactive live communication with the youth via Instagram providing them with interactive lectures presented by trainers specialized in entrepreneurship, nutrition, psychological health in addition to a weekly seminar with LOYAC board member Fetouh Al-Dalali on which she hosts successful examples of people who had started their careers at young age with LOYAC to talk about their experiences and starting careers through LOYAC.

In addition, Bedaiwi said that in collaboration with LAPA, LOYAC presents weekly arts and music training sessions. Finally, Bedaiwi stressed that LOYAC cares a lot for Kuwait youth and future leader through enlightened thinking aiming at bringing up an intellectually capable generation and creating fully mature future leaders, which all rhymes with the national development plan instructed by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwait Vision.



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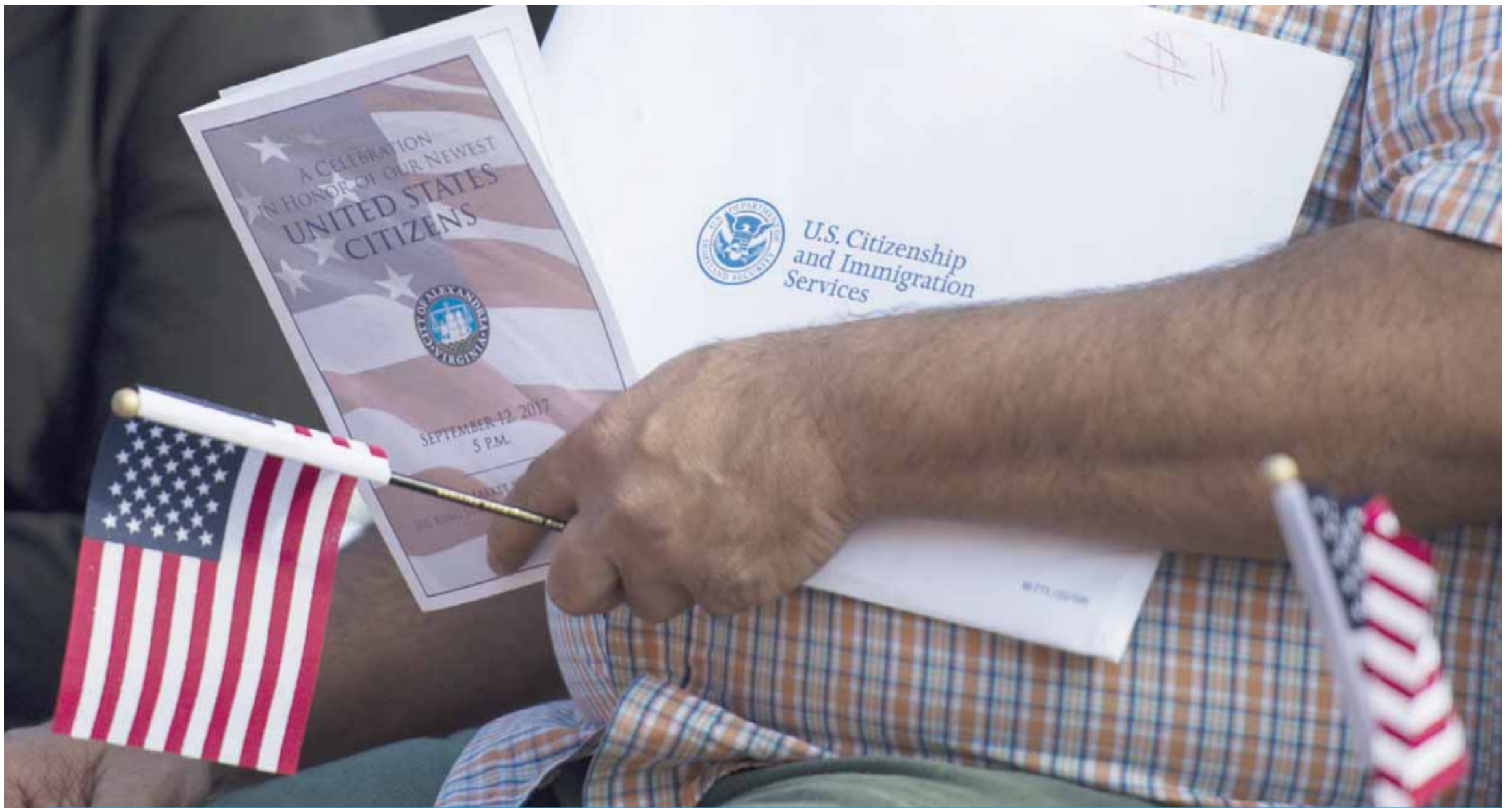


Netanyahu and Gantz reach a 'historic deal'

## US zeroes in on the shadowy Lebanese playmaker in Iraq

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ALEXANDRIA: In this file photo, a new US citizen holds an information packet at a naturalization ceremony at Alexandria City Hall in Alexandria, Virginia. US President Donald Trump said in a Tweet on April 20, 2020 that he will sign an executive order to 'temporarily suspend immigration into the United States', amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

# Trump to ban immigration

## Angry Americans demand end to lockdown

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump said he would temporarily ban immigration to the United States because of the "Invisible Enemy" of the coronavirus, as angry Americans took to the streets to demand an end to crippling lockdowns. In just four months, the virus has turned the world upside down, confining half the planet indoors and killing nearly 170,000 on its march through virtually every country. Drastic measures never before seen in peacetime have shredded the global economy, resulting in the extraordinary spectacle of oil prices turning negative as demand evaporates.

World leaders are agonizing over the right moment to loosen restrictions, terrified of a second wave but aware their citizens need to work and live amid growing signs of social tension. US President Trump, who has encouraged anti-lockdown protests roiling parts of the country, said Monday he would halt immigration — a theme long popular with his supporters. "In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!" he tweeted.

At least 22 million Americans have lost their jobs

since sweeping lockdowns were implemented to slow the spread of the virus, and exasperation was growing in some parts of the country. Hundreds took part in a "Patriots Rally" in Pennsylvania, one waving a banner proclaiming "Give me liberty or give me death." Rose Bayer, 50, said it was "crazy" to shut down the world over a disease she said has a recovery rate of about 98 percent. "People will starve, they'll commit suicide, they'll lose everything over this. The cure - like Trump said - the cure cannot be worse than the disease," she said.

While such demos have captured much attention, more than four in five Americans would approve of a national stay-at-home order, according to a recent Quinnipiac poll. But isolated protests are also springing up elsewhere with hundreds defying social distancing rules in Vladikavkaz, in Russia's Northern Caucasus, to demonstrate against the lockdown and economic

hardship. Sporadic clashes also broke out in a down-trodden northern Paris suburb with protesters launching fireworks at police they accuse of enforcing the restrictions too harshly.

### 'Like a war situation'

In hard-hit Europe, several countries are cautiously creeping out from confinement measures, buoyed by mounting signs the worst of the virus may be behind them. Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Germany was "still a long way from being out of the woods," as she allowed smaller shops from florists to fashion stores to reopen. There were also encouraging signs in other major European countries such as Italy, France and Britain, although authorities warned citizens against letting their guard down. Ghana became the first African country to lift its coronavirus restrictions, sparking a mixed reaction on streets in Accra teeming with citi-

zens after a three-week lockdown.

"It is a huge reprieve. We have a listening government," hawker Jemima Adwoa Anim told AFP. "It was like a war situation. We had no money and at the same time couldn't step out to work to earn some cash," she added. But others were furious the restrictions had been lifted so early. "This is totally ridiculous. How is it possible?" asked 20-year-old student Francis Collison. "We just recorded over 1,000 positive cases of COVID-19 and suddenly the president decided to lift the partial lockdown."

### 'Nobody wants to buy'

The fallout from the coronavirus has sparked fears of a second Great Depression with millions around the world losing their jobs as economies grind to a halt. A devastating supply glut resulted in oil producers effectively paying others to take crude oil off their hands, as a barrel of US benchmark West Texas Intermediate for May delivery closed at -\$37.63. Futures prices rebounded back above zero in Asian trade Tuesday, but the historic moves sent shockwaves through global markets, sending the Dow Jones Index sharply lower and Asian markets into the red at the opening bell. — AFP



## World leaders terrified of a second wave

## Joy or fear? Mixed feelings as Ghana ends lockdown

ACCRA: While some Ghanaians were relieved to get back to work Monday, others were left fretting after the country became the first in Africa to lift a coronavirus lockdown. The streets of Accra buzzed with life following President Nana Akufo-Addo's announcement of the end to a three-week restriction on movement around the capital and second region Kumasi.

Akufo-Addo told the nation in a televised address that increased testing, aggressive contact tracing and expanded isolation centers allowed him to halt measures that hit the country's poor hard. "This decision to restrict movement has occasioned a number of severe difficulties for all of us across the country, especially for the poor and vulnerable," the president said.

Jemima Adwoa Anim was overjoyed to be back out hawking her wares as pedestrians and cars returned to Accra's Central Business District. "It is a huge reprieve. We have a listening government," she said. "It was like a war situation: we had no money and at the same time couldn't step out to work to earn some cash. God bless our president." But around the capital there was plenty of criticism for the decision to ease restrictions after the West African country saw confirmed infections rise to 1,042.



ACCRA: A woman sells goods in traffic after the partial lockdown in parts of Ghana to halt the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus was lifted in Accra, Ghana on April 20, 2020. — AFP

"This is totally ridiculous. How is it possible?" asked 20-year-old student Francis Collison. "We just recorded over 1,000 positive cases of COVID-19 and suddenly the president decided to lift the partial lockdown." Shopkeeper Rita Baido insisted she was not happy with the decision but had "no option" but to open her store and try to make money in the suburb of Mallam. "It has not been easy indoors, but I think it was the best solution to keep us safe," she said.

### Balancing act

Ghana's decision to lift the lockdown on the two key regions will be watched closely across Africa. Authorities on the continent are grappling with a difficult balancing act: how to curb the spread of the virus while allowing millions living in poverty to earn

money and feed themselves. The Ghanaian government insists that a decision to quarantine arrivals from abroad and bolster testing to more than 68,000 samples gives it a strong hand in controlling the pandemic.

The country's borders remain closed and measures shuttering schools and limiting public gatherings are still in force. But some working in the health sector said Ghana-wide seen as a model of political stability in a volatile region was risking any progress by lifting the lockdown. "The president has been on top of issues since coronavirus entered Ghana but last night's decision to lift the restriction on movement eroded all the gains we're making," said nurse Abigail Sosu. "I'm scared. We don't have the resources should a second phase of the virus emerge in the country." — AFP

## Algeria targets online media

TUNIS: Algerian authorities have blocked a third online news website that covered the anti-government "Hirak" protest movement, stirring condemnation Monday from media watchdog Reporters Without Borders. RSF also voiced concern that a draft law on "fake news" could be used as another channel to "muzzle the press". The draft legislation aims to "criminalize... fake news" which authorities say could undermine national security.

"Algeria is the country recording the largest numbers of deaths related to the coronavirus in Africa but authorities prefer to hound the free press," said the RSF director for North Africa, Souhaieb

Khayati. Algerian authorities earlier this month shut down online media sites Maghreb Emergent and Radio M. On Sunday, news website Interlignes was also hit by the censor's axe and no longer accessible online, said its founder Bouzid Ichalalene. "The authorities are trying to push serious media to close and allow only the mediocre ones to exist," Ichalalene told AFP.

There was no immediate comment from the authorities. In July last year, Interlignes was targeted by the authorities for its coverage of the Hirak protest movement. For more than a year, Algeria was gripped by weekly protests which started in February 2019 and led to the resignation of veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Demonstrations continued even after he stepped down in April with protesters demanding a complete overhaul of the political establishment. — AFP



TUNIS: Tunisian seamstresses make designer protective masks at the workshop of the Miss Anais haute couture brand in Tunis which donates 60 masks daily to staff at hospitals caring for COVID-19 patients. — AFP

## International

# Women suffer as lockdown worsens 'domestic hell' across Latin America

## Confinement traps women victims with their attackers

**BUENOS AIRES:** Weeks of confinement imposed by the coronavirus pandemic is taking a chilling toll on women and girls across Latin America, where the number of calls to helplines have soared, made by victims of domestic violence who cannot flee. Appeals to help women experiencing violence in the home have redoubled in recent weeks, from the United Nations to Pope Francis-Latin America's first pontiff.

"The confinement is plunging thousands of women into hell, trapped with an attacker who they are more afraid of than the coronavirus," said Victoria Aguirre from the Argentine NGO MuMaLa, which campaigns against violence related to macho culture. In Argentina, 18 women have been killed by their partner or ex-partners during the first 20 days of a mandatory quarantine instituted by the government from March 20. Appeals to helplines in Argentina are up nearly 40 percent.

The country is still reeling from the shocking murder of Cristina Iglesias and her seven-year-old daughter Ada, killed by her mother's partner in the early days of the lockdown. Their two bodies were found buried in the backyard of their home in a town in Buenos Aires province. Elsewhere, police-alerted by neighbors-arrived in the nick of time to save a woman whose husband attacked her with a hammer.



### The number of calls to helplines have soared

where they should be protected, in their own homes," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who issued a call for a domestic violence "ceasefire" as lockdowns extended into April.

"You live in fear of turning your back on him. It is only later, when the bruises appear, that you realize that he could have killed you," Luciana, a 25-year-old victim of domestic violence, told AFP. She was badly beaten by her ex-husband. "Every day, a woman is abused, raped or beaten at home by her partner or her ex," said Ada Rico, from the NGO La Casa del Encuentro. "In normal times, we would help her to file a complaint. These days, the urgency is to get her out of the house as quickly as possible."

The situation is similarly grim in Mexico, Brazil, Chile and elsewhere, where measures taken by the authorities often fall far short of properly protecting victims. In Mexico, "emergency calls have increased" since the start of the lockdown on March 24, said Nadine Gasman, head of the National Women's Institute in Mexico City. Maria Salguero, who researches violence against women and created a "femicide map" around the country, estimated that around 200 women have been murdered since quarantine measures began.

### Rape and murder

The sordid murder of Ana Paola, a 13-year-old who was raped and beaten to death by a burglar in the northeastern state of Sonora in early April, provoked widespread disgust and anger in Mexico. Emergency calls to the National Refugee Network, an NGO which caters to women victims of violence, have increased by 60 percent since the beginning of the confinement period. The number of women

we are talking about new cases multiplying day by day, five or 10-fold." The burly middle-aged man with curly ginger hair from Georgia came to Russia to study medicine and specialized in critical care. The virus is a "major test for the health system, for Moscow's medicine," he says, vowing: "We will overcome it."

### Red and green zones

Tens of thousands of beds have been made available in Moscow and the recent opening of large new virus hospitals "will allow us to better overcome this difficult situation," Churadze said. Yet virus treatment at this facility is not accessible to most Muscovites. It takes cash-paying patients or those with private health insurance and a course of treatment costs tens of thousands of dollars, Churadze says.

The private hospital group that owns it, Medinvest, also runs a much bigger coronavirus hospital for public health patients. The entire hospital, including administrative floors, has been divided into "green" or clean and infectious "red" areas, including lifts. To enter the "red zone", medics put on full personal protection, including goggles, hooded white suits, one or more masks, shoe coverings, and two pairs of gloves, helped by special staff. "It's an absolutely new reality" for medics, Churadze said.

Doctors are kitted out with protective gear but getting hold of this equipment is a challenge,

biggest contributor to the WHO but Trump is freezing funding, alleging that the organization mismanaged and covered up the spread of the virus.

Tedros said the presence of embedded US government secondees working at the WHO headquarters in Geneva meant there was nothing being concealed from Washington. The WHO said there were 15 staff from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US health protection agency, detailed specifically to work with the organization on its COVID-19 response.

"Having CDC staff means there is nothing hidden from the US, from day one. Because these are Americans working with us. It just comes naturally and they tell what they are doing," said Tedros. "WHO is open. We don't hide anything. Not only for CDC, them sending messages, or others—we want all countries to get the same message immediately because that helps countries to prepare well and to prepare quickly."

### Taiwan row

The US State Department has said the WHO was too late in sounding the alarm over COVID-19 and is overly deferential to China. It questioned why it did not pursue a lead from Taiwan flagged up on December 31 about reports of

due to the coronavirus pandemic and will later head into election season.

Alexander Lukashenko, the authoritarian leader of Belarus, in 2008 threw out the US ambassador after the George W Bush administration imposed sanctions on the president, his allies and a state oil company following elections seen as unfair and a crackdown on protesters. In a sign of warming ties, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in February met Lukashenko in Minsk in the first visit there by a top US diplomat since 1994.

While saying the United States was not trying to drive a wedge between Belarus and Moscow, Pompeo said the United States wanted to help the country often described as Europe's last dictatorship to be a "sovereign." Pompeo also offered to export US oil to the



SANTIAGO: A woman demonstrates against 'femicide' and killings related to domestic violence, in front of the La Moneda presidential palace in Santiago. —AFP

taken into care by the organization is up 5 percent.

With more than 1,000 femicides in 2019, two recent brutal murders—one of a seven-year-old girl—once again highlighted a lack of action by authorities. Mexican feminist activists have demanded more effective policies from President Andres Manuel Lopez to combat the wave of violence. It's a similar case in Peru, where 2019 femicides were the highest in a decade. In Sao Paulo, the epicenter of Brazil's virus outbreak, reports of domestic violence have risen by 30 percent since the state government imposed a stay-at-home order.

A group of 700 volunteers have formed a "vigilante network" to provide victims with medical, legal and psychological assistance through a WhatsApp messaging service. In Chile, which has opted for selective confinement in the most affected areas plus a nighttime curfew, complaints of domestic violence are up 500 percent in Providencia, an upper class neighborhood in the capital Santiago. The crisis has resulted in "increased alcohol consumption, mental health effects, increased anxiety, depression and violence within families," said senior health official Paula Daza.—AFP

## Luxury Moscow clinic becomes coronavirus 'battleground'

**MOSCOW:** A small elderly woman lies curled up in bedsheets with an oxygen tube in her nose, coughing as doctors cocooned in white suits care for her. In a nearby bed, an elderly man is on a ventilator. In another a woman in her 50s lies on her belly to improve her oxygen saturation. This is the intensive care ward at a branch of Moscow's K+31 private hospital. Until a week ago, it was a luxurious private clinic where you could get a nose job.

Yet as the capital shoulders the weight of Russia's virus onslaught, with more than 26,000 cases, the facility has switched entirely to treating coronavirus patients. "There's not a single empty bed," says chief doctor Boris Churadze. In the state-run hospital next door, where 500 patients are being treated, the situation is the same, he says. He calls the virus fight a "battlefield," where medics combat an invisible enemy with homicidal intentions.

The situation is set to deteriorate in the next two or three weeks, he warns, predicting "mid-May will be the absolute top of the peak." "I think

## WHO insists it hid nothing, sounded alarm from start

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization insisted Monday that it sounded the alarm on the novel coronavirus right from the very start and had hidden nothing from Washington about the deadly pandemic. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said there were no secrets at the UN agency after being blasted by the United States for allegedly downplaying the initial COVID-19 outbreak in China. "We have been warning from day one that this is a devil that everyone should fight," Tedros told a virtual briefing in Geneva.

The virus, which emerged late last year in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has so far infected more than 2.4 million people globally and killed more than 165,000, according to an AFP tally. The United States has by far the highest death toll of any country, at more than 40,000 fatalities, and President Donald Trump has faced criticism over his handling of the pandemic. Washington is the

## US names Belarus envoy after decade-long freeze

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Monday named its first ambassador to Belarus in more than a decade as it seeks to nudge the close Russian ally toward the Western orbit. President Donald Trump tapped career diplomat Julie Fisher, a top State Department official for Europe who has served in Moscow, to be the US ambassador to Minsk. Fisher requires confirmation by the Senate. While her nomination did not generate immediate opposition, it is uncertain when the Senate would act as lawmakers are staying out of Washington



MOSCOW: An ambulance is seen on the territory of a nearly-finished hospital for coronavirus patients outside the village of Golokhvastovo, some 60 kilometers southwest from the center of Moscow. —AFP

Churadze says. "It's a global problem." "A black market for personal protective equipment has even appeared and a lot of people are making money from this." "It's ordinary work" - In the intensive care unit, doctor Sergei Sevalkin is helping treat a patient in her late 60s. "We've held out a week and now it's a bit easier," he says. "We have one patient in a serious condition who was transferred from another hospital." Working for hours in a protective suit is one of the hardest parts of treating virus patients, he says. "After a shift you feel like ripping it off." —AFP



GENEVA: World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus attends a daily press briefing on COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, at the WHO headquarters in Geneva. —AFP

atypical pneumonia in Wuhan Debate has raged over the significance of Taiwan's email, which informed the WHO of the reports from Wuhan, and of at least seven patients being isolated—something that would not be necessary for a non-infectious disease. —AFP

landlocked country, which was embroiled in a price war with Russia. Shortly after Pompeo's visit, Lukashenko traveled to Russia and said President Vladimir Putin pushed him to merge Belarus outright in return for cheap energy.

The United States and Belarus agreed in principle to exchange ambassadors after trips to Minsk last year by David Hale, the top US career diplomat, and John Bolton, then Trump's national security advisor. Bolton, a hardliner on Russia, had been keen to nurture US relationships with neighboring nations including Belarus and Ukraine. Despite his administration's push, Trump has voiced admiration for Putin and has been especially critical of Ukraine—with his pressure on Kiev leading to his impeachment.—AFP

## Families mourn as police seek motive for gun rampage

**MONTREAL:** Investigators on Monday scoured crime scenes from the worst mass shooting in Canadian history to try to understand why a dental worker with no criminal past killed at least 18 people. The gunman, identified by police as 51-year-old Gabriel Wortman, began his rampage late Saturday in the seaside village of Portapique, Nova Scotia, dying 14 hours later in a hail of police gunfire outside Halifax, 100 kilometers away. "Just how could this happen, we may never know why," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a news conference.

"But we do know this: no one man's action can build a wall between us and a better day, no matter how evil, how thoughtless, or how destructive." The death toll, initially put at 16, rose to 18 on Monday, Trudeau said, with police warning that more bodies could be found in the rubble of five burned out homes and buildings. "We expect there to be more victims," said RCMP Chief Superintendent Chris Leather. Among the victims so far identified were a veteran constable with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a nurse, an elementary school teacher, prison guards and a retired firefighter.

"This happened in small towns—in Portapique, Truro, Millford and Enfield—places where people have deep roots, places where people know their neighbors and look out for one another," Trudeau said. A "virtual vigil" has been planned for Friday at 7:00 pm. Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil told public broadcaster CBC that the investigation and the grieving process would be "complicated" by the coronavirus pandemic—and the vast geographic area of the crime spree.

### 'Unprecedented violence'

Forensic investigators fanned out to 16 "chaotic" crime scenes across the province that is home to Canada's Atlantic navy fleet. Some of the victims were not known to the shooter, while others were specifically targeted, said Leather. "It's too early to tell what the motivation was," he said. "It appears to be, at least in part, very random in nature."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel led international expressions of sympathy, telling Trudeau in a note: "This senseless and cruel act has shaken us all deeply." After the first gunshots rang out in Portapique, where Wortman owned two properties, police found casualties inside and outside a home and also responded to a series of blazes. Neighbors told The Globe and Mail newspaper that Wortman set fire to homes and shot residents as they ran out.

An acquaintance said Wortman drove to his house in a mock squad car, wearing a police uniform, and banged on the door clutching a rifle and a pistol. "He wasn't killing enemies, he was killing his friends," said the man, who hid with his wife and called the police. "He was trying to beat down our door. It was beyond terrifying." Police said Wortman, still posing as a policeman, later stopped a vehicle near Debert and shot the occupants. "A monster murdered my mother today," Darcy Dobson wrote in a Facebook post about victim Heather O'Brien, a nurse in Truro. —AFP

## International

# US zeroes in on the shadowy Lebanese playmaker in Iraq

## US offers millions for any details on the 'mysterious man'

**BAGHDAD:** Months after the United States killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad, it has offered millions for any details on the mysterious man filling his boots-Hezbollah power-broker Muhammad Kawtharani. Washington charged last week that Kawtharani had "taken over some of the political coordination of Iran-aligned paramilitary groups" formerly organized by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Qasem Soleimani.

In fact, when a US drone strike in January killed Soleimani and others in a small convoy outside the Baghdad airport, the little-known but powerful official from Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement was initially rumored to have died alongside him. It was quickly confirmed that Kawtharani, who has long spearheaded Hezbollah's Iraq policy, was not among those killed in the attack that brought arch enemies Tehran and Washington to the brink of war.

But rumors of his demise only proved his place among the shadowy pro-Iran brokers steering politics in Iraq, the oil-rich but poverty-stricken country torn by unrest since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Keen to curb Iran's influence in Iraq, the United States last week announced the reward of up to \$10 million for any details on Kawtharani's activities or associates. The State Department accused him of inheriting part of

Soleimani's role coordinating among pro-Tehran factions that have attacked foreign diplomatic missions and "engaged in wide-spread organized criminal activity".

### 'The conductor'

Washington had first sanctioned Kawtharani as a "terrorist" in 2013 for providing "training, funding, political, and logistical support to Iraqi Shi'a insurgent groups". Born in Iraq in the late 1950s, Kawtharani studied in the holy shrine city of Najaf and is married to an Iraqi woman with whom he has four children. Little is known about his early political work, but his rise to prominence began following the US-led invasion.

"Kawtharani was appointed to head Hezbollah's Iraq file in 2003 and has reported directly to its secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah," said a source close to Hezbollah's senior ranks. In that role, the slender sheikh travelled frequently between Baghdad and Beirut to negotiate with Iraqi figures, particularly during politically turbulent times like government formation and elections.

He was often in the Prime Minister's Guesthouse, an ornate resort in Baghdad hosting officials and foreign dignitaries, in his traditional white turban and black robe. "In that role, he was like a copy of

Soleimani," a senior Iraqi official who met with him several times told AFP, referring to the Iranian general's infamous shuttle diplomacy. Kawtharani fluently speaks Iraqi dialect, which differs markedly from Lebanese Arabic. "He's got a lot of experience and is the only foreigner, after Soleimani, to know the Iraqi political scene inside out," another Hezbollah source said.

Iraqi political expert Hisham Al-Hashemi said Kawtharani wore multiple "hats". "He's the conductor in the Shiite loyalist orchestra," said Hashemi, referring to the collection of Iraqi Shiite parties that see Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as their main reference. As such, he painstakingly builds consensus among Iraq's varying Shiite political and armed factions-but he has also worked on bringing Iraq's Sunnis on board with their traditional Shiite rivals.

### A growing profile

Following the US strike that killed Soleimani and top Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, Kawtharani saw his portfolio balloon further to include coordination with Kurdish parties. "He became responsible for all the political factions," said Hashemi. At the same time, he crafted ties between Iraq and Lebanon, where Hezbollah has strained under financial pressure from US sanctions,

"Kawtharani held sway over Iraqi politicians-so much so that he asked for millions of dollars from Iraq last year to solve Lebanon's financial crisis," a diplomatic source said. The request was made outside the formal state-to-state channels and it was unclear if it was ever processed.

And while a second Iraqi official confirmed Kawtharani made the request, a source close to the sheikh in Beirut denied the overture. The US's renewed spotlight on Kawtharani was worrying, another source close to him said. "Seeking information about him now may be an introduction to a possible attempt at his arrest, or his assassination," the source said. When approached by AFP regarding Kawtharani, numerous Iraqi and Lebanese sources declined to comment on his activities, hinting at fears their information would be used by the US to target him.

Given the backlash the US faced internationally following its assassination of Soleimani and Muhandis-both key officials in their respective countries-the US may target someone with a relatively lower profile. "Assassinating the new Quds Force chief Ismail Qaani isn't among Washington's options right now. That's why they turned to Kawtharani. He's a party official but not a government one," the source said. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Syrian down Israeli missiles

**DAMASCUS:** Syrian air defenses downed Israeli missiles over the ancient city of Palmyra in Homs province on Monday, state media reported. Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria targeting government troops as well as allied Iranian forces and fighters from Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. "Air defenses confronted an Israeli aggression over Palmyra and intercepted several hostile missiles," SANA said. The missiles were downed before they could hit their targets, it added. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the targets were "military posts for Iranian militias in the Palmyra desert." The monitor did not report any casualties. Contacted by AFP, an Israeli army spokesperson declined to comment. — AFP

#### Mexico marks deadliest day

**MEXICO CITY:** Mexico has recorded its deadliest day this year, official data showed Monday, with 105 murders the previous day amid the government-imposed quarantine to combat the spread of COVID-19. Sunday's toll exceeded the latest high of 104 people on April 4, 2020, federal data showed. "We are addressing the issue of the coronavirus, but unfortunately we continue to have problems with homicides," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, known as AMLO, acknowledged Monday in his morning briefing. The data, collected by state prosecutors offices and federal agencies, showed the State of Mexico (center) had the highest number of intentional homicides, with 12; Chihuahua (northwest) with 10, while Mexico City, Guanajuato (center) and Oaxaca (south) reported nine each. — AFP

#### UN slaps sanctions on Miskine

**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN Security Council on Monday imposed sanctions on Central African Republic rebel leader Abdoulaye Miskine, who last year signed a peace agreement between the government and armed groups. Miskine, founder and head of the Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC), was offered a government position under the terms of the February 2019 accord. However, in the last report by UN experts monitoring sanctions and an arms embargo imposed in 2013, the self-proclaimed general was mentioned as looking for fighters. Despite the signing of the agreement, Miskine "remains a threat to the peace, stability and security of the CAR," a diplomat said. Miskine had signed the peace agreement in Khartoum between CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadera and the heads of 14 armed groups. — AFP

#### Biden raises \$46.7 million

**WASHINGTON:** US presidential candidate Joe Biden raised more than three times as much money for his campaign than President Donald Trump managed in March, a potential sign of voter enthusiasm for the Democratic challenger. Biden's campaign said on Monday it took in \$46.7 million last month despite the coronavirus health crisis that has disrupted fundraising for US politicians and hit donor finances. It was a record haul for the former vice president and well above the \$13.6 million that Trump's campaign raised, which was a decline from the prior month. Still, Biden is entering the general election contest with a smaller war chest than what Trump, a Republican, has been amassing since 2017, according to disclosures filed by the two campaigns to the Federal Election Commission. Biden ended March with \$26.4 million in the bank, an increase from February but well below Trump's

## Israel's Netanyahu, Gantz agree to form unity government

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reached a historic deal Monday with one-time rival parliament speaker Benny Gantz to form a unity government, ending the country's worst-ever political crisis. The three-year agreement allows Netanyahu, 70, to stay in office for 18 months, during which he is due to stand trial on corruption charges he has long denied. Gantz, 60, will then take over as premier for the remaining 18 months as Netanyahu bows out after 12 years in office-the longest premiership in Israeli history.

Netanyahu, head of the right-wing Likud party, had squared off against Gantz in three inconclusive elections over the past year, but neither had secured enough support to form a viable governing coalition. As the COVID-19 epidemic intensified following the last election on March 2, calls mounted for them to unite and offer the country a rare period of political calm as it battles an unprecedented health crisis.

"I promised the State of Israel a national emergency government that will act to save the lives and livelihoods of Israeli citizens," Netanyahu tweeted shortly after the deal was announced. Gantz stressed that the deal had prevented "a fourth election." Through the first six months, the government will be defined as an "emergency" body focused

## Sri Lanka falls silent for victims on Easter attacks anniversary

**COLOMBO:** Survivors of last year's devastating Islamist suicide bombings in Sri Lanka held a private anniversary service yesterday because of a coronavirus lockdown as the nation paid tribute with a two-minute silence. The pandemic forced the Roman Catholic leadership to call off elaborate services to honor the 279 people killed at hotels and churches in the Easter Sunday attacks.

Instead, churches across the country rang their bells for five minutes. This was followed by two minutes of silence from 8:45 am - the moment the bombers struck. Even television channels went silent during the tribute. Some survivors attended a closed service at St. Sebastian's church just outside Colombo, which was hit by a bomb. At St. Anthony's church in the capital, residents prayed outside and lit candles near a memorial for the 56 people who perished inside.

On April 21 last year, seven followers of a local

## Seoul plays down report on N Korea leader's health

**SEOUL:** South Korea played down a report yesterday that the North's leader Kim Jong Un was being treated after surgery, as speculation mounted over his absence from a key anniversary. Pyongyang marked the birthday of its late founder, Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung, on April 15 - by far the most important date in its annual political calendar-but Kim was not seen in attendance. Daily NK, an online media outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, said Kim had undergone a cardiovascular procedure earlier this month and was recovering at a villa in North Phyongan province.

"Excessive smoking, obesity, and fatigue were the direct causes of Kim's urgent cardiovascular treatment," it cited an unidentified source inside the country as saying. No confirmation of the report was immediately available. But it triggered wide-

spread speculation, with CNN citing a US official saying that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger after a surgery". That report did not specify what the intelligence was.

### Power-sharing

The deal evenly splits cabinet posts between Likud and Gantz's centrist Blue and White alliance. Gantz, a former army chief, will officially become "prime minister-designate" when the government is sworn in, stepping down as parliament speaker. Under the deal signed by members of both men's alliances, the speaker's position will then be filled by a Netanyahu loyalist. A key issue in the unity talks was implementation of US President Donald Trump's controversial Middle East peace plan, which gives Israel the green light to annex Jewish Settlements and other territory in the occupied West Bank.

Such annexations would defy international law, and the Trump deal has been rejected by the Palestinians and condemned by much of the international community. The Netanyahu-Gantz deal allows the prime minister "to bring President Trump's statement with regard to the realization of Israeli sovereignty (in parts of the West Bank) to government and Parliament, following due process." Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shatah on Monday condemned the formation of an "Israeli annexation government," saying it marked the end of the two-state solution.

### Judicial appointments

Following the March election, Israeli President



**COLOMBO:** This combination of pictures shows (right) part of the interior of St Anthony's church during the first anniversary of the Easter Sunday attacks on April 21, 2020 and Sri Lankan security personnel walking past dead bodies covered with blankets amid blast debris at the same church following an explosion on April 21, 2019. — AFP

Muslim radical group went into three churches and three luxury hotels as services and morning buffets were being held and set off explosive vests. The dead included 45 foreigners.

Nearly 600 people survived with serious injuries. "We honor especially all those, who lost their loved ones and those who were injured, for their spirit of magnanimity in not reacting in anger and hatred," said Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, Sri Lanka's Catholic leader in an anniversary message.

Ranjith thanked minority Catholics for not retaliating against Muslims. However, inter-communal riots did erupt three weeks after the attacks. One man was killed and hundreds of homes and vehicles were damaged. The government used emergency powers to prevent a spread of violence. The extremist National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), that had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State militant group, was held responsible for the bombings. — AFP



**SEOUL:** People watch a television news broadcast showing file footage of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday. — AFP

notable." The North Korean leader has not made a public appearance since presiding over a meeting of the Workers' Party politburo on April 11. His powerful sister Kim Yo Jong was named as an alternate politburo member and the meeting called for stronger measures against the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP



# Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2020

## 10 Virgin Australia collapses under coronavirus strain



## 10 China fish farmers harvest troubled waters



## 11 Ahli United Bank AGM approves a cash dividend of 15 fils per share



TEHRAN: Employees work at headquarters housing Alibaba, Iran's largest online travel booking service, in the capital Tehran Iran's startup sector, which began to develop in the 2000s, took off from 2013. —AFP

## Women in Iran tech sector fight to keep jobs

### Coronavirus compounds women's hardship in sanctions-hit country

**TEHRAN:** From the hustle and bustle of a startup, Fereshteh Kasrai now works from home, like many Iranian women fighting to keep hard-won tech jobs as the coronavirus outbreak stirs uncertainty. Iran says the COVID-19 disease has claimed more than 5,200 lives and infected close to 83,000 over the past two months, in the Middle East's deadliest outbreak.

Kasrai says working remotely from the confines of her home amid the health crisis has had its upsides and downsides. "Emotionally, it's very bad, but it's more efficient," she says in a teleconference call. She comes across as tired, contrasting with the energetic tone when AFP met her at her workplace in Tehran a few weeks ago. "For me, it's a little bit difficult. I miss my colleagues and I miss the days when we interacted," she says.

The 44-year-old is head of human resources at Alibaba, Iran's largest online travel booking service. She doesn't hide her concerns for the startup whose core business has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. Kasrai and her colleagues had to adapt at short notice to ensure they didn't lose out. "We are having daily meetings and video calls. It's not the same quality as face-to-face work but it's the best we can do."

#### 'Iran Silicon Valley'

To enter Alibaba's headquarters is to enter another Iran, a short distance from impoverished districts of the capital. An "Iran Silicon Valley" sign

adorns the entrance of the building. The interior is trendy with giant cushions in rest areas and glass enclosed offices where staff focus their gaze on high-end computers. Dressed in tight-fitting jeans and scarves that reveal their hair, women work alongside men, an uncommon mix in the Islamic republic.

Of the nearly 700 employees at Alibaba, 42 per-



### Alibaba's tech vision breaks the taboo

cent are women. Some have senior roles, a challenge in this patriarchal society. "I worked with three large companies before Alibaba... and I felt that growing in those places requires a certain condition," Anis Amir Arjmandi, a legal manager, says referring to nepotism. "The opportunities I'm given here—which is not because of my gender or my position, but the company's way of doing things—enable me to have a degree of freedom," she says.

needed to find buyers to take physical possession of the oil — a job made near-impossible as storage becomes scarce. However, focus is now on the June contract, which had trading volumes more than 30 times higher. That rose towards \$21 a barrel, from \$20.43 on Monday. Brent crude, the international benchmark, was changing hands at \$23.87 for June delivery, down from Monday.

The collapse in WTI "was driven by a precipitous drop in demand caused by the market expectation that the US lockdown could continue into May", said Tai Hui at JP Morgan Asset Management. "This isn't surprising, given flights are grounded and people are driving much less for work and leisure. If the economic reopening takes longer than expected, we could see pressure further out in the futures curve." He added that firms were still churning out oil because stopping output "is not feasible for some producers since it could permanently damage their oil fields. Hence, giving their oil away for one month could still make sense in the long run."

Oil markets have been ravaged this year after the pandemic was compounded by a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia. While the two have drawn a line under the dispute and agreed with other top

Her colleague Fatemeh Ashrafi, 38, says there are more opportunities in startups. "There's more space to express oneself, since the bureaucratic hierarchies are less intrusive," she says. "We can see our managers whenever we want. We don't need to wait at their doors and ask for time" to meet.

Tech journalist Khosro Kalbasi says women benefit from working in startups as they are more progressive with younger managers. "Over the years the number of women employed by these companies has grown," he says. Iran is one of the Middle East's most connected with an internet penetration rate of 87 percent.

#### Opportunity to innovate

Azadeh Kian, professor of sociology in Paris and a specialist on Iran, says women account for 70 percent of engineering and science students in the Islamic republic. "It is a sector where they know they can have more room for improvement and the possibility of innovating," Kian says. Kasrai says Iranian women are becoming increasingly assertive in the workplace. "They have no fear to express themselves," she says. She said she was pleased to see "as many women as we have men" in Alibaba's tech division, breaking the "taboo" that a programmer must be a man. Startups began emerging in Iran in the 2000s, before really taking off from 2013. But the country's tech sector was hit hard by the re-statement of US sanctions in 2018, after the United

States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal.

In an unexpected twist, the sanctions were seized upon by Iranian entrepreneurs as an opportunity to launch even more startups. With the benefit of being protected from foreign competition, they took inspiration from global giants to create local equivalents.

Among them are Digikala, Iran's answer to US online retailer Amazon, as well as Tap30 and Snapp, which are similar to US ride-hailing service Uber. Mona Ahmadi says she has flourished at Tap30, where she manages around 140 call center workers, 61 of them young women.

"I'm a workaholic," says the 33-year-old, dressed in a denim jacket and leggings. "I've always wanted to have a good job and social status," she says with a smile. Forty-five percent of Tap30's staff are women. "Most of them are less than 30 years old, and they are employed in all sectors—marketing, technical, HR, call center," says Negar Arab, who is head of communications. As well as Arab's own position, the company's finance and legal divisions also have women at the helm, she adds. But Arab says the coronavirus outbreak has turned her life upside down. She says it has made her "very busy" between working remotely and taking care of her daughter and her family. One of the biggest success stories among Iran's startups is Takhifan, an online retailer founded by Nazanin Daneshvar and her sister. — AFP

## US oil bounces after crashing below \$0.00

**HONG KONG:** US crude prices bounced back into positive territory yesterday, a day after crashing below \$0.00 for the first time owing to crippled demand and a storage glut, while the commodity rout sent equities sharply lower. Investors were also tracking developments in North Korea following US reports that Kim Jong Un had undergone cardiovascular surgery earlier this month and was in "grave danger". West Texas Intermediate for May delivery rose to \$1.10 a barrel after diving to an unprecedented low of -\$37.63 in New York as the pandemic brings the global economy, transport and factory activity to a halt. However, it later eased back to sit 30 cents higher.

The sell-off in May futures came because the contract expires later Tuesday, meaning traders



HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA: People sit on a hillside overlooking oil pumpjacks at the Huntington Beach Oil Fields amidst the coronavirus pandemic on Monday in Huntington Beach, California. — AFP

producers to slash output by almost 10 million barrels a day, that is not enough to offset the lack of demand. Equity markets were deep in the red, having enjoyed a healthy couple of weeks thanks to massive stimulus measures and signs of an easing in the rate of new infections globally. Tokyo ended two percent lower, while Hong Kong shed 1.9 percent and Sydney dropped 2.5 percent with Mumbai

more than three percent lower.

Shanghai sank 0.9 percent while Seoul was down a similar amount and Taipei retreated 2.8 percent. Singapore, Jakarta and Bangkok lost more than one percent, and there were also big losses in Wellington and Manila. In early trade, London, Paris and Frankfurt tumbled. The losses came despite signs that the virus, which has infected almost 2.5 million people and killed 170,000, is easing as global lockdowns begin to take effect, allowing some countries to slowly return to normality.

Analysts warned the drop in stocks could be an indication that the recent surge may have been too much too quick and another sell-off is possible. The flight to safety was reflected in currency markets, where the dollar soared against high-yielding, riskier units. The Australian and New Zealand dollars and Russian ruble were all down more than one percent, while the Indonesian rupiah sank 0.9 percent. The South Korean won came under extra pressure following the reports about Kim. CNN cited a US official saying Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that the leader was in "grave danger after a surgery". The report did not specify what the intelligence was. — AFP

## Business

# Cash-strapped Virgin Australia collapses under COVID-19 strain

## First largest carrier that falls victim to the pandemic

**BRISBANE:** Cash-strapped Virgin Australia collapsed yesterday, making it the largest carrier yet to buckle under the strain of the coronavirus pandemic, which has ravaged the global airline industry.

In an announcement to the Australian Stock Exchange, Virgin said it planned to keep operating flights despite handing the keys to administrators. "Our decision today is about securing the future of the Virgin Australia Group and emerging on the other side of the COVID-19 crisis," CEO Paul Scurrah said in the statement. "Australia needs a second airline and we are determined to keep flying."

The airline was more than Aus\$5 billion (\$3.2 billion) in debt and had appealed for a Aus\$1.4 billion loan to stay afloat, but the government refused to bail out the majority foreign-owned company.

Administrator Vaughan Strawbridge, from accounting firm Deloitte, said more than 10 parties had expressed a "keen interest" in being part of the restructuring plans. "There has been an extraordinary amount of interest in the business and in the restructuring of Virgin Australia," he told reporters in Sydney. "And so we are confident that this will result in a restructuring being achieved in a short period of time."

Ratings agency Moody's said unsecured creditors would have to take "a significant haircut" if the

restructure was successful. "Nevertheless, such an outcome may remain preferable to putting the company into liquidation with uncertain recovery prospects," it said. The airline had already made 1,000 workers redundant and stood down 8,000 of its 10,000 pilots, flight attendants and ground crew. Strawbridge said the administrators would "seek to preserve as many of those jobs as possible". Virgin suspended all international routes and scrapped all but one of its domestic routes after Australia shut its borders to limit the spread of COVID-19 and imposed tough restrictions on movement. The airline more recently began operating limited domestic routes, as well as flights to bring Australians home from overseas, with financial support from the government.



**Airline is more than \$3.2bn in debt**

**'I'm so proud of you'**  
Virgin was struggling before coronavirus, posting

an underlying before-tax loss of Aus\$71.2 million last year. Richard Branson, the billionaire founder of Virgin Group, which owns 10-percent of the airline, tweeted a message in support of the Virgin Australia team.

"I am so proud of you and everything we have achieved together," he said. "This is not the end of Virgin Australia, but I believe a new beginning. I promise we will work day and night to turn this into reality." Branson also joined critics of Canberra for



**ADELAIDE:** Two travellers look at self-check-in machines at Virgin Australia in the departures area at Adelaide Airport in Adelaide yesterday. Cash-strapped Virgin Australia announced it had gone into voluntary administration yesterday, the largest airline to buckle under the strain of the coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

failing to bail out the airline, saying governments in most countries had "stepped up" to help their carriers during the "unprecedented crisis for aviation". The news follows the collapse of Britain's biggest domestic carrier FlyBe last month as the crisis threat-

ens many firms. On Monday, Branson warned Virgin Atlantic would fold without state help. Norwegian Air announced four subsidiaries in Sweden and Denmark had filed for bankruptcy, and Japan's ANA slashed its annual net profit forecast by 71 percent. — AFP

## Hunt for storage space turns urgent as oil glut grows

**NEW YORK/HOUSTON:** The telephone lines have been ringing at Adler Tank Rentals in Texas as oil companies found a new use for steel tanks that had been left idle when shale producers stopped drilling - they want to use the tanks to store some of an oil glut that has overwhelmed the market and flipped US crude prices negative for the first time.

Hundreds of millions of barrels of crude have gushed into storage worldwide in the past two months as the coronavirus-related lockdowns wiped out around a third of global oil demand. With oil depots that normally store crude oil onshore filling to the brim and supertankers mostly taken, energy companies are desperate for more space. The alternative is to pay buyers to take their US crude after futures plummeted to a negative \$37 a barrel on Monday. A topsy-turvy market that has oil prices for October delivery at \$31 a barrel has oil firms anxious to sock away millions of barrels now to sell at a profit later.

### Tank farms are full

In Cushing, Oklahoma, home to dozens of large tank farms with combined space for about 76 million barrels, operators are fully booked, said traders. Storage there jumped by 5.7 million barrels the week before last, according to the latest U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). While the government estimated there is available space, traders said Monday's market drop indicated any unfilled tanks are under lease, and not available to new renters.

"The industry is really scrambling to source viable storage options," said Stuart Porter, a manager at Adler Tank Rentals in Texas, which has shale companies lining up to potentially lease dozens of its 500-barrel steel frac tanks. The tanks can be lined up like dominos and filled at the well site by producers without a home for their oil. Convergence Midstream LLC with millions of barrels of storage available in underground salt caverns outside Houston has gone from few takers to requiring one- to two-year contracts.

"Quite honestly we were struggling for business. Now that the market has changed, everyone is our friend," said Dana Grams, chief executive of Convergence Midstream.

The hunt for storage points to the magnitude of the collapse in demand for US shale and the huge volume of unsold oil to refiners who are cutting purchases. Last month, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers including Russia threw in the towel on four years of self-imposed output curbs that gave US shale a price umbrella. The result was a drop in US oil prices to about \$20 a barrel as Saudi Arabia and Russia pledged to pump full bore. For a time, it looked like prices would stabilize after the pair and other nations this month agreed to deepen cuts. — AFP

## CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq

**KUWAIT:** The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for 3 months with a rate of return 1.250 percent.

## APICORP ratifies a callable capital increase to \$8.5bn

**KUWAIT:** The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP), a multilateral development financial institution, announced yesterday that its General Assembly ratified a landmark increase in callable capital to \$8.5 billion at its Annual General Meeting (AGM), as well as a significant increase in authorized and subscribed capital. The increase, the largest in the Corporation's history, is based on the recommendation by APICORP's Board of Directors.

The increase in the capital reinforces long-term commitment towards APICORP's sustainable growth plans for the benefit of its member countries. The callable capital increase further bolsters APICORP's financial sustainability and resiliency and its overall financial position.

The Corporation's authorized capital was also increased to \$20 billion and subscribed capital to \$10 billion, as well as transfer \$500 million from the



Dr. Sherif Elsayed Ayoub



Dr. Ahmed Ali Attiga

Corporation's general reserves and retained earnings into its issued and fully paid capital.

Commenting on the increase in capital, Dr. Ahmed Ali Attiga, Chief Executive Officer of APICORP, said: "As we enter the next stage of APICORP's growth story and build upon its long-standing reputation as a trusted financial partner to the Arab energy industry, the capital increase will enable APICORP to fulfil its policy mandate by continuing to deliver sustainable impact-driven develop-

## China fish farmers harvest troubled waters

**XIAPU, China:** Fishermen like Zhu Chunfu have hauled their living from the seas off the Chinese province of Fujian for generations, but what happens when over-harvesting causes fish stocks to collapse? In the case of coastal Xiapu county, you turn to raising the fish yourself, a shift that has made it one of China's most important aquaculture sites and spawned communities floating at sea.

The water in this area of maze-like bays and coves is covered by a patchwork of hundreds of floating platforms where fishermen live and tend to underwater expanses of nets and cages teeming with sea cucumbers, yellow croakers, seaweed and other marine produce.

"My ancestors were fishing in the sea ages ago, and when there were not enough fish to catch, we started to make a living by aquaculture," Zhu said, standing next to a small hut where he lives for several months of the year with seven others.

Beneath him, swaying in the gentle waves, hang dozens of underwater cages full of sea cucumbers, a squishy, elongated cousin of the starfish that is popular in Chinese cuisine and traditional medicine.

Zhu, who has lived at sea most of his life, says sea cucumber breeders like himself can earn hundreds of thousands of yuan per year. Aquaculture took off in the area in the late 1980s, fuelled in part by the decades-long collapse of yellow croaker stocks.

### Troubled waters

Formerly abundant in China's waters, the species' popularity on the Chinese dinner table saw it over-harvested to the point that wild stocks are no longer commercially viable. Today, aquaculture has made China by far the world's largest producer of yellow croaker, with Fujian in the country's south-east accounting for more than 85 percent of national output, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Xiapu county is the beating heart of that production, and as a result, communities like the floating village of Dongan have sprung up, including wooden houses complete with kitchens and toilets.

As with everywhere in China, the county was brought to a standstill by the coronavirus epidemic, which essentially shut down the national economy. But at the urging of the area's government, its fish-



**XIAPU, China:** Fishermen like Zhu Chunfu have hauled their living from the seas off the Chinese province of Fujian for generations, but what happens when over-harvesting causes fish stocks to collapse? — AFP

ery business was among the first to get back up and running to take advantage of the harvest season, according to local media reports.

Work began to resume in February—with the requisite checkpoints set up for taking the temperatures of workers and fish farmers—and the busy spring harvesting season is now in full swing.

Boats hawking supplies wind their way through the farms, and even simple restaurants and hotel lodgings are available. Locals estimate that up to 20,000 people spend all or part of their time out on Xiapu's waters, though it remains to be seen how the coronavirus epidemic will affect that.

Xiapu's way of life is also under threat from pollution. Blocks of buoyant hard foam underpin the platforms, and fragments of the non-biodegradable material litter the waters, as does waste from the floating communities: sewage is released directly into the ocean and pollutants from fish feed fowl the water.

An influx of poorer migrants from China's interior, drawn by aquaculture's economic opportunities, have amplified the harmful impacts. In 2018, the local government established new rules to rein in pollution and control the rapid expansion of the farms. "Authorities are tackling the problem at the source but it's too soon to tell the effect," said Guo Shigui, 33, who farmed fish at sea for six years until moving to land two years ago to pursue an e-commerce career.

He still speaks fondly of his time on the water. "I was like a bird in a cage, with limited space to move

ment projects and supporting investment activities. I appreciate the shareholders' strong confidence in APICORP and their willingness to support it in its journey to support the growth trajectory in the regional energy and petroleum industries sector."

Dr. Sherif Elsayed Ayoub, Chief Financial Officer of APICORP, said: "The capital increase serves as one of the cornerstones of APICORP's growth plans as per our board-approved risk appetite and five-year corporate strategy. These include increasing our lending and investment capacity to better meet the ever-growing needs of our public and private-sector partners in the energy sector. This remarkable show of support from our member countries shall also cement APICORP's profile as a financially strong, well-capitalized, highly-liquid and consistently profitable MDB."

APICORP recently disclosed its financial results for the year ended 2019, posting strong results including a 17 percent Y-O-Y increase in net recurring income to \$112 million, up from USD96 million at year end 2018. APICORP's strong profitability in 2019 was driven by Corporate Banking and Treasury and Capital Markets, whose gross income increased 32 percent and 24 percent Y-O-Y to reach \$201 million and \$80 million, respectively. — AFP

## COVID-19 upends outsourcing as firms embrace AI

**MUMBAI:** Coronavirus is permanently shaking up the global outsourcing industry as lockdowns from Bangalore to Manila prompt firms to "reshore" jobs and, with AI, to move further away from needing humans at all. Restrictions on normal activity in these countries and others have created a logistical nightmare for the managers of call centers and other back-office operations for foreign corporations.

Having their staff work from home is difficult because of rules governing the handling of sensitive material such as financial transactions for bank customers from Scotland to San Francisco. Also, many workers in places like India and the Philippines live in crowded housing with poor-quality broadband, while some firms do not have enough equipment like laptops to provide to employees.

"The outsourcing industry doesn't lend itself to working from home," consultant Vivek Sood, author of "Outsourcing 3.0", told AFP. "We are talking about companies which used to ask employees to leave even their pens and pencils outside the office because of security concerns."

### 'Temporary stay arrangements'

Desperate to stay operational, some firms have resorted to having staff live at their place of work. Vodafone India, for example, says it has "organized temporary stay arrangements at our data center locations, (and) made food and groceries available at critical locations". Similar practices by others have sparked the ire of trade unions.

Mylene Cabalona, president of the Business Process Outsourcing Industry Employees' Network (BIEN), told AFP the union had received reports of some workers "effectively quarantined and locked down in their offices". The Financial Times in early April published photos that it said appeared to show workers sleeping on the floor of a call center in the Philippines, living in what they described as "subhuman" conditions.

Anthony Esguerra, who works at a Manila firm handling data for a Chinese online gaming company, admitted that 80 percent of its operations were disrupted. "The workflow of processing players' requests really slowed down, since our internet access was limited compared to when we were working at the office," he told AFP. — AFP

## Business

# Ahli United Bank AGM approves a cash dividend of 15 fils per share

## Bank also approves a bonus of 5 shares per 100 shares

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank (AUB) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on April 20, 2020, with 90.003 percent quorum and approved a cash dividend of 15 fils per share (15 fils per share) in addition to 5 percent bonus shares (5 shares per 100 shares).

In alignment with the guidelines and measures issued by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health, AUB took all necessary health and safety measures, including implementing social distancing between all attendees.

Ahli United Bank's Deputy Chairman, Raed Mohammad Al-Nusf, commenced the meeting by welcoming the attendees and expressing appreciation to the measures issued by the Kuwaiti Government and the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) aimed at protecting the domestic economy and the banking sector from any negative impacts from COVID-19. Al-Nusf affirmed his belief in the strength of the Kuwaiti banking sector and its ability to face challenges and overcome obstacles.

Al-Nusf added: AUB continues to pursue success while capitalizing on its clear strategy, strong presence and leading brand, let alone its long-established history and unique position as the first bank in Kuwait since its inception on the 28th of February 1942. Over several decades and despite the varying political, economic and social conditions, AUB further developed and expanded its business activities, operated under different brand names, until in 1971, it became a 100 percent Kuwaiti bank under the name "Bank of Kuwait and Middle East". 2002 witnessed a historical milestone, as the bank became part of AUB Group, capitalizing on its goodwill and pre-eminence in the banking industry. AUB reached the most remarkable turning point and significant breakthrough in its journey when it converted its business activities to comply with Islamic Sharia on April 1, 2010.

AUB has been consistently able to witness success while overcoming several challenges and arising conditions for 78 years. Today, AUB continues to capitalize on growth opportunities wherever they exist. The efforts exerted by the Executive Management in line with the plans and guidelines set by the Board of Directors have been fairly essential to AUB's continued success.

2019 was an eventful year for AUB, featuring several achievements at different levels. AUB realized record high profits, earned several awards from internationally-recognized organizations, promoted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), maintained investments in its human wealth, as well as set up a prudent framework that could meet the regulatory requirements and follow international practices and recommendations. I could affirm that AUB's pursuit of digital transformation was the most significant achievement for AUB during 2019. Sustainable investment in state-of-the-art technologies has been a key characteristic of our performance and a key component of our strategy. At AUB, recognized early on the significance of embracing digital transformation and latest technologies which would simplify and shorten the banking process and position AUB at the forefront, making banking with AUB an unrivalled experience!

In view of the above, I would like to emphasize that AUB intends to further support the role of the newly-established Digital Transformation Department that will



**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank's Deputy Chairman Raed Mohammad Al-Nusf chairs the AGM

drive AUB towards innovation and apply the latest banking technologies.

### Maximizing shareholders' profits

In view of these commendable results, the Board of Directors is pleased to propose to the General-Assembly the distribution of a cash dividend of 15 fils per share, as well as 5 percent bonus shares of the issued and paid up capital (15 fils per share and 5 shares per each 100 shares).

### Focus on corporate governance and risk management

AUB always seeks to sustain the highest standards in integrity and transparency that solidify the culture of corporate governance. In this context, AUB adopts a balanced governance framework that is aligned with regulatory requirements of applying governance principles and rules at Kuwaiti banks, and follows the international practices and recommendations to achieve AUB's goals and maximize AUB's value for its shareholders, clients and stakeholders. AUB continues to maintain a high standard of governance benchmarked against highly efficient standards and practices with the aim to foster a governance culture that maintains AUB's values and financial integrity, as well as safeguards shareholders' equity, secures depositors' and stakeholders' rights, and supports in making AUB's vision a reality.

I would like to note that the Board of Directors con-

tinuously working collaboratively with the Executive Management to adopt the highest standards of corporate governance and enable AUB to consistently enhance its practices in alignment with the highest international standards. In 2019, AUB successfully adopted a risk strategy as part of the Bank's overall integrated strategy, with a set of regulatory policies and regulations in place to ensure that AUB will continue to pursue its business activities according to the approved risk appetite and sustain independence of the internal and external audit functions.

### International recognition

Driven by its enormous potential and ongoing commitment to the highest professional standards which earn the trust of prestigious international rating agencies as a leading Sharia-compliant banking and financial organization, AUB proudly sustained the positive assessments and ratings by international rating agencies. In addition, AUB earned several prestigious awards from renowned global bodies known for closely monitoring and assessing the performance of banks and financial institutions. This a remarkable testimony to AUB's effective business strategy and outstanding performance.

### Sustainable Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

AUB's success is not only limited to its solid performance and ability to generate profits, rather it includes the Bank's ability to support others and fulfill its obligations towards the communities in which it operates. CSR and sustainable development initiatives have long been considered a top priority by AUB. For over 78 years,

CSR has been a key component of AUB's culture and values.

Based on such an approach, AUB continues to strengthen its distinctive CSR role as inspired by the Vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's "New Kuwait 2035", which addresses all aspects of the Kuwaiti society, enhances the quality of life, as well as places great emphasis on youth and environment. AUB's early endeavors to adopt "Green Banking Practices" with the aim to improve the quality of assets and contribute to achieving sustainable development is another source of pride.

In 2019, AUB participated in several initiatives and projects designed to support the most disadvantaged segments of the society in line with AUB's partnerships with several organizations fostering CSR activities.

### Our human wealth is a key competitive edge

In light of the continuous development in the banking sector, human resources with diverse hands-on expertise, as well as possessing professional and management skills stand out as a key competitive advantage and the most decisive factor to achieve and sustain success in the banking industry. Now that ongoing technological breakthroughs have increased the competitive edge between banks, the development of human resources, maximizing abilities for innovation and creativity, in addition to adopting and leveraging constructive ideas have become essential to AUB's business continuity.

Continuing to invest in its much valued human resources during 2019, AUB developed a well-established plan to attract experienced professionals and national skilled youth. AUB launched a comprehensive talent management program AUB's leadership succession plan, and placed a high priority on polishing its staff's ability to cope with and take advantage of the digital transformation to the best interest of clients.

I have every reason to take pride in AUB's pre-eminent position as a unique employer of choice, which is fairly demonstrated by AUB's retention of several highly-experienced professionals for more than 30 years.

### Appreciation & gratitude

In conclusion, on behalf of AUB Board of Directors, Executive Management and all staff, I am honored to extend appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as we look forward to seeing Kuwait prosper and flourish at all times. In addition, I would like to express gratitude to the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), especially CBK Governor Dr Mohammad Y. Al-Hashel and all regulatory bodies in the State of Kuwait for their positive support to AUB.

Finally, I am pleased to express heartfelt thanks to our valued shareholders for their valued trust in AUB. I would like to also take the opportunity to share utmost appreciation to our Fatwa & Shariah Supervisory Board (FSSB) for their efforts, to our valued clients for their continued trust and loyalty, as well as to our Executive Management and employees for their collaborative contributions to maintain the ongoing growth and leading position of AUB.

On her part, the Acting Chief Executive Officer of AUB Jehad Al-Humaidhi said: Without any doubt, I am confident that we will continue realizing more success due to the dedication and reliability of our employees that are key in achieving our future strategy utilizing state-of-the-art technological solutions and innovations in our business to fulfill the aspirations of our customers.

### Digital transformation & preparing for future requirements

AUB achieved its goals in the year of 2019 through its successful journey of digital transformation as a key step to prepare for future requirements. AUB set up the Digital Transformation Unit with the objective of enhancing the customers' experience and open up new horizons of digitalized services. These include Internet and Mobile Banking, as well as Automated ATMs, POS, E-Payment Gateway, Call Centers, Interactive Voice Response (IVR). In addition, we rolled out initiatives to improve current manual processes by using automation and direct processing tools, and introducing automated banking processes solutions (Robotics) in certain operational functions to achieve greater operational efficiency and minimize human errors.

AUB has continued its digital transformation journey

in a world where technological development is a key differentiator for success. On such basis, we launched our new and updated Mobile Banking application with its attractive interface and smooth functions. As a result, AUB earned The Best Mobile Banking Application Kuwait 2019 Award" by Banker Middle East (BME).

As added confirmation of our successful efforts in digital transformation, AUB Smart Branch at the Avenues Mall received "The Most Innovative Digital Banking Initiative Smart Branch Kuwait 2019 Award" from Global Banking & Finance Review.

### Enjoyable banking experience for customers

With the satisfaction of our customers a top priority for AUB, we do not spare any effort to grant them an enjoyable banking experience that is aligned with their aspirations while maintaining their trust and approval. Based on that, we expanded our range of Real-Estate products within the Retail Banking to include "Tawarruq", while simplifying the process of approval and execution, while continuing to adhere to our prudent risk parameters. The consumer and installment finance receivables continued to grow, primarily due to the automated Sharia-compliant financial brokerage and the broadened scope of the "Qard Hasan" (profit free financing) initiative.

AUB enriched its Premium Banking Package and set up the Wakala-based Investment Account for its valued depositors. The enhanced pricing flexibility led to achieving a record growth of fixed deposits. The automotive finance sales hit a high record, mainly due to enhancing promotional channels, tuning the products criteria, as well as promotions in partnership with major automotive dealers and showrooms in Kuwait.

AUB consistently improved its flagship Al-Hassad Islamic Account which was positively received by customers, especially the unique draws during Eid Al-Adha and Eid Al-Fitr. This resulted in a rise in customers' balances and Al-Hassad Islamic Account earned the prestigious "Best Savings Product Kuwait 2019 Award" from Banker Middle East. Corporate Banking continued its uniquely-tailored products and services to fulfill the needs and requirements of corporate and institutional customers. This resulted in expanding the base of B2B customers benefiting from Internet Banking as a platform that provides holistic and secure electronic solutions to simplify banking transactions through integration between the system of AUB and the customers' corporate planning systems. Such an accomplishment was recognized through AUB earning "The Best Online Cash Management Bank Kuwait 2019 Award" in corporate banking for the third year in a row by Global Finance.

Additionally, AUB's Personal Banking & Wealth Management was successful in developing facilities processing systems to ensure enhanced efficiency and decrease turnaround time. In recognition of these efforts, AUB's Personal Banking earned "The Best Personal Banking Kuwait 2019 Award" for the third year by the Banker Magazine in collaboration with Private Wealth Management Magazine.

### Appreciation & gratitude

In conclusion, Al-Humaidhi said: on behalf of AUB, I seize this opportunity to extend appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their substantial support for all key sectors in Kuwait, namely the banking industry. Moreover, I would like to express gratitude to the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) for its continuous support to AUB and the Banking sector. In addition, I am pleased to express heartfelt acknowledgement to the Chairman and Members of the Board for their support and guidance, as well as to our valued shareholders and customers for supporting AUB's remarkable success. I would also reiterate gratitude and appreciation to AUB's Executive Management and all staff for their sincere dedication and relentless efforts in leading and executing AUB's vision to fulfill the expectations and aspirations of our valued shareholders and customers. We look forward to 2020 as a new year, full of momentous achievements, robust performance.

After the AGM, AUB held its 33rd Extraordinary General Assembly (EGM) to amend articles (1), (12), (14), (15), (16), (17), (18), (24), (39), (41) and (47) of the Articles of Association. All articles were approved by the shareholders.



drive AUB towards innovation and apply the latest banking technologies.

### Solid financial performance

AUB's effective strategy that is based customer-centricity, human resources' development and prudent risk management approach have obviously paid off in enhancing the 2019 consolidated financial statements. The positive achievements by AUB are a fair representation of the notable operational performance and strong financial indicators as AUB reported a net profit of KD 55 million in 2019 compared with KD 51.3 million in 2018, a growth by 7.3 percent.

AUB reported growth in total assets by 11.2 percent reaching KD 4.4 billion compared with KD 3.9 billion in the previous year. The financing receivables grew by 7.8 percent to reach KD 3 billion. The customers' deposits, cautiously and prudently managed to achieve sustainable proceeds, increased by 11.2 percent to hit KD 2.7 billion during 2019. Shareholders' equity grew by 5.8 percent total record KD 0.5 billion by the end of 2019.

The return on average equity (ROAE) and return on average assets (ROAA) recorded 12.7 percent and 1.4 percent respectively by the end of 2019; marking some of the highest returns in the market. The resultant earnings per share (EPS) increased to 27.8 fils in 2019 compared to 25.8 fils in 2018. AUB effectively adopted a conservative risk management approach: enhancing the quality of assets, reducing irregular financing to 1.26 percent, with the coverage ratio including collateral to 330 percent. In addition to such achievements, AUB maintained a high capital adequacy ratio (CAR) before dividends at 16 percent as of the 31st of December

# Humans to blame for spread of COVID-19 and other 'zoonoses'

PARIS: Whether it came from a bat or a pangolin is not certain, but one thing is: the coronavirus outbreak that has killed tens of thousands and turned the world upside down comes from the animal world. It is human activity that enabled the virus to jump to people, and specialists are warning that if nothing changes many other pandemics of this nature will follow. The name given to diseases transmitted from animals to humans is "zoonoses", based on the Greek words for "animal" and "sickness". They are not new - tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis, malaria, to name just a few, are all zoonoses.

According to the UN Environment Program (UNEP), 60 percent of human infectious diseases originate from animals. This figure climbs to 75 percent for "emerging" diseases such as Ebola, HIV, avian flu, Zika, or SARS, another type of coronavirus. The list goes on. "The emergence of zoonotic diseases is often associated with environmental changes or ecological disturbances, such as agricultural intensification and human settlement, or encroachments into forests and other habitats," said a 2016 UNEP report.

"Changes in the environment are usually the result of human activities, ranging from land use change to climate change," Gwenaél Vourc'h of INRAE, a French public research institute, also blames human activity for the crossover between species. "Given the growth of the human population and its ever more intense use of planetary resources, the destruction of more and more ecosystems multiplies contacts," she says.

A key area of concern is deforestation to make way for agriculture and intensive livestock farming. Domesticated animals are often a "bridge" between pathogens from the wild and humans. The widespread use of antibiotics in the livestock industry has also led to bacterial pathogens building up immunity to front-line drugs. Urbanisation and habitat fragmentation are also highly disruptive of the balance between species, while global warming can push disease-carrying animals into new territory.

### 'Unprecedented in human history'

The novel coronavirus is believed to have emerged in a wet market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. Scientists think it originated in bats and could have been passed on via another mammal like a pangolin, an endangered species whose meat and scales are highly prized in parts of Asia.

But researchers have yet to come up with a definitive answer on how it migrated to people. The only sure thing is that human activity facilitated the jump. "The process that leads a microbe, such as a virus, from a population of vertebrates such as bats to humans is complex, but driven by people," says Anne Larigauderie, executive secretary of IPBES, the panel of UN experts on biodiversity. "People, through their actions, create opportunities for the microbes to come closer to human populations."

"The rate of global change in nature during the past 50 years is unprecedented in human history, and the most important direct driver of change in nature is land use change." Beyond the current outbreak of coronavirus, IPBES estimates that zoonoses kill some 700,000 people a year. A study by American researchers published last week and completed before the new coronavirus outbreak identifies rodents, primates and bats as hosts of three-quarters of viruses transmitted to humans.

But domestic animals also carry about 50 percent of the zoonoses identified. In terms of endangered wildlife, the study shows that those who share the most viruses with humans are precisely "populations declining due to exploitation and loss of habitat". Christine Johnson, of the University of California veterinary school, who led the study, blames the human urge to "alter the landscape". "This also increases the frequency and intensity of contact between humans and wildlife - creating the perfect conditions for virus spillover," she says.



PARIS: Photo shows empty alleys of the closed Jardin du Luxembourg park in Paris on the 35th day of a strict lockdown in France aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection caused by the novel coronavirus. —AFP

### 'Global tragedy'

According to Larigauderie, this coronavirus outbreak may just be the tip of the iceberg. "Increased trends in land use change, combined with increased trends in trade, and global travels, are expected to increase the frequency of pandemics in future," she says. "Transformative change is needed in order to find a solution to this global tragedy."

Vourc'h is also calling for a systemic response. "Beyond the essential response to each epidemic, we must think about our model... rethink our relationship with natural ecosystems and the services they provide," she says. The 2016 UNEP report, which noted that "ecosystem integrity underlines

human health and development", said effective strategies already exist to control most neglected zoonoses. The main constraint, however, appeared to be "lack of investment".

At 86, Jane Goodall has spent most of her life studying and defending animals, especially chimpanzees in Africa, especially from Tanzania. And she pulls no punches on where she lays the blame. "It was predicted that this was going to happen and it's going to happen again until we learn the lessons," warns the British primatologist. "It is our disregard for nature and our disrespect of the animals we should share the planet with that has caused this pandemic." — AFP

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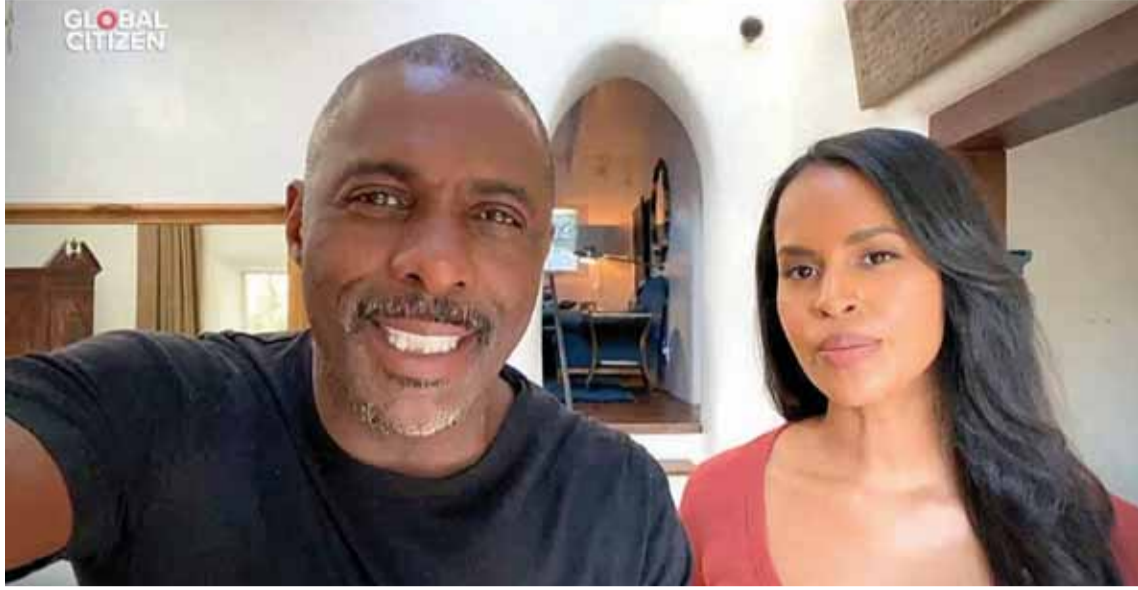
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## Lifestyle | Gossip



## Actor Idris Elba seeks money for rural farmers impacted by virus

**B**ritish actor and filmmaker Idris Elba, who has himself tested positive for COVID-19, helped kick off an appeal for a UN relief fund to help rural communities stricken by the coronavirus pandemic. With \$40 million in UN seed money, a special fund to help small-scale farmers is seeking another \$200 million in donations so the coronavirus lockdown doesn't spark a hunger crisis. The fund "needs more assistance to carry on the work that is desperately needed to keep food systems operating in rural areas if we are to come out of this crisis together and avoid needless hunger and suffer-

ing," said Elba in a statement. Elba is a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations' International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The actor disclosed last month that he had tested positive for coronavirus and had quarantined himself. IFAD's head said developing countries are already particularly vulnerable to this pandemic as a health crisis. "Unless we act now and act quickly, this will also become a major food and hunger crisis," said Gilbert Houngho

## Eva Mendes is 'trying to be a fun mum'

**E**va Mendes is "trying to be a fun mum" whilst self-isolating. The 'Hitch' star is currently tasked with keeping her two daughters - Esmeralda, five, and Amada, three, whom she has with Ryan Gosling - entertained while they're home from school amid the coronavirus pandemic, and has said she's been trying not to "lose [her] marbles" in the process. Sharing a picture of herself drawn by one of her children, she wrote on Instagram: "This is me. By my kid. It's pretty accurate. No I haven't become a master baker or a good cook during quarantine. I haven't seen a gym in two months. I haven't written a novella. I've just been trying to be a fun mom and not lose my marbles. "Sending so much love out there. Reading comments and happy to connect so let me know how you're feeling. Amore, amore, amore. (sic)" Eva recently took to social media to insist she has a "clear boundary" when it comes to her brood, as she won't post pictures of them online. She wrote: "hi! I have always had a clear boundary when it comes to my man and my kids ... I'll talk about them of course, with limits, but I won't post pictures of our daily life. And since my children are still so little and don't understand what posting their image really means, I don't have their consent. And I won't post their image until they're old enough to give me consent. As far as Ryan and I, it just works for us this way. To stay private. Sending loads of love to you at this time. (sic)" The 46-year-old actress previously told fans she won't



post new pictures of her husband Ryan, 39, either, because she insists her relationship with him is "private". She said last month: "As far as Ryan, I'll only post flash backs of things that are already 'out there' (like pics from movies we did or stuff like that). "My man and kids are private. That's important to me so thanks for getting that. Have a beautiful day. Sending so much love! (sic)"

## Gwyneth Paltrow is auctioning off her 2000 Oscars dress for coronavirus relief

**T**he 47-year-old actress is set to bid farewell to the "sentimental" gown she donned at the Academy Awards 20 years ago, as the dress will go under the hammer to raise money for All-In - an initiative that aims to raise \$100 million for non-profit organizations that support vulnerable communities amid the pandemic. Posting on Instagram, Gwyneth confirmed: "Joining the #allinchallenge "In an effort to focus on organizations providing food assistance, I have joined the #allinchallenge which is raising money for @mealsonwheelsamerica, @nokidhungry, @wckitchen, @feedingamerica and @americasfoodfund. "I am donating a dress I wore to the Oscars (and that holds great sentimental value!) which I will personally hand to you over a cup of tea. "Go to allinchallenge.com to bid as 100% of funds will go to help Americans currently experiencing food insecurity. (sic)" Gwyneth then challenged Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz, and Lake Bell to take part in the cause. She added: "I love you @garyvee for being part of this. I now challenge @drewbarrymore @camerondiaz and @lakebell. (sic)" Meanwhile, the 'Shakespeare in Love' actress recently urged people not to "abuse the freedoms we still have" amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. She wrote on Instagram: "@bradfalchuk and I were grateful to learn our local farmers market was open this morning; we walked there (keeping lots of distance) and donned masks and gloves once we got nearer to the market, only taking them off when we were almost home and there were no other pedestrians in close proximity. "Yesterday I heard tales of crowded hiking trails and parks. Although we are all on a learning curve and aren't always perfect as we figure out this temporary new normal, we must take the orders seriously and not abuse the freedoms we still have; grocery store and essential errand runs, bike rides or walks (being disciplined about correct protocol). It's not the time for denial. We must take this seriously and shelter in place. (sic)"



## CHRISSY TEIGEN is a 'brat about food'

**T**he 34-year-old model became embroiled in a Twitter war with her own followers on Sunday when she posted an image of her homemade bowl of chicken and dumplings, only to find some of her fans were less than impressed with her culinary creation. And after retaliating, the 'Cravings' cookbook author admitted she got "defensive" about her food because she feels very strongly about her homemade meals. Chrissy's rant began when she posted a picture of her food, and wrote: Chicken n dumplin night at the legend household. Thank u @TheKalenAllen for reminding me I wanted this. (sic) The 'Lip Sync Battle' star was soon flooded with comments, many of them telling her the dish looked too dark to be a classic chicken and dumplings recipe, which often has a lighter, cream-based broth. One fan wrote: "Will never cook shame you, but I've never seen a brown sauce chicken and dumplings. Is this an untapped secret?" Whilst another simply added: "Why is it brown?" After one follower remarked that Chrissy's dish looked more like gumbo and not chicken and dumplings, the model became irritated and replied: "Sigh. Gumbo is a completely different recipe with soup. Color is not the difference between gumbo and chicken n dumplings. (sic)" The same fan then asked why she was getting "defensive" about the food, to which she responded: "Because I have 500 people s\*\*\*ting on my food on Twitter every day. That's why! (sic)" Chrissy then took a moment to calm down, and when told her fans having "nothing but love" for her, she revealed the reason she gets so passionate about food. She wrote: "I know sorry I just get defensive cause I have like 500 people telling me it looks wrong and I'm a brat about food. Lol I'm sorry. "I love you guys I'm sorry. I just am in a p\*\*p mood."—Bang Showbiz

## Prepon won't reveal son's name until she's discussed it with her family

**L**aura Prepon needs to have a "conversation" with her family before she reveals her son's name. The 'Orange Is The New Black' star and her husband Ben Foster welcomed a baby boy into the world in February, and Laura has now said the reason she hasn't released the tot's name to the public yet is because she hasn't spoken to her family about the impact it will have on their privacy. She said: "We make all those decisions as a family because we're in the public eye. So whenever we do something like that, we have a conversation about it first and make sure that we're comfortable with it." Laura - who is also mother to two-year-old daughter Ella - says keeping her privacy is something she "constantly" has to "negotiate", but thinks it's "cute" people want to know her son's name. Speaking to Us Weekly magazine: "Until we have a conversation, we know not to talk about it. It's cute that people want to know his name. "It's a constant negotiation because we're so fortunate to do what we love. But part of being in the public eye is how do you negotiate keeping your privacy, how do you negotiate keeping your personal life private?" The 'That 70s Show' star announced the birth of her son on social media in February. Alongside a picture of herself holding the tot, she wrote: "Welcoming home our new bundle of love. Overwhelmed with gratitude. (sic)" Meanwhile, Laura previously opened up about motherhood and the challenges of balancing a career and being a mom. She said: "Ben and I are really great about if I'm at work, he's [at home], and if he's at work, I'm [at home]. But I do feel guilty, and I just know that she'd be proud if she knew. I've talked to a bunch of women [asking], 'How do you do this?' And they're just like, 'There's really no solution. You just do it.'"



## T.I. wants to 'protect' his daughters from 'heartbreak'

**T**he 39-year-old rapper is father to daughters Deyjah, 18, and Heiress, four, and has said that whilst he's happy for his children to "date and have experiences", he doesn't want them to be negatively impacted by the end of a romance. He said: "To be honest with you, I only feel the need to protect the girls from heartbreak. So for me, it's about making sure that my daughters grow up as happy and unencumbered by outsiders tweaking their emotions as possible. That doesn't mean that I don't want my daughters to date or have experiences. It just means I know that they will hold onto those experiences and I don't know how that will translate when they come out of it." But T.I. - who also has sons Messiah, 20, Domani, 19, Clifford, 15, and Major, 11 - doesn't feel the same way about his sons dating, as he believes they need to "deal with heartbreak" in order to discover who they "are for real". He added during an episode of his E! show 'T.I. & Tiny: Friends & Family Hustle': "For a young man, you're not really going to know who you are for real until you deal with heartbreak. "It's supposed to get to a point where they can handle it on their own and they don't want you all in their business. If it doesn't get to that point, something's gone terribly wrong." The 'No Mediocre' hitmaker's comments come after he previously came under fire for saying he accompanies his daughter Deyjah to the gynecologist in order to "check her hymen". T.I. - whose real name is Clifford Joseph Harris Jr. - later clarified his comments when he said: "My intentions I think have been terribly misconstrued and misconceived. Let me go set this record straight, I never said I was in an exam room, that is an assumption, that is a falsity. I never said that it was being done present day as an 18-year-old ... and I never said that her mother wasn't present. Her mom was present every time."



## Stone mourns 'adopted grandmother' Mitzman

**S**haron Stone has mourned the loss of her "adopted grandmother" Eileen Mitzman. The 62-year-old actress shed tears as she paid tribute to the AIDS activist, who has been in hospital battling coronavirus as well as "other illnesses". Sharon posted the video on Sunday before Eileen passed away, and said the activist would "die tonight", and Fern Mallis, the creator of New York Fashion Week, has since confirmed Eileen has now sadly died. In Sharon's video, she said: Hi, I want to talk to you about someone very special to me, who became my adopted grandmother. Her name is Eileen Mitzman. I met her, a long time ago when I was beginning to work as an AIDS activist so many years ago. I met her and her husband Neil in New York at an event at Dr. Krims house. "She was just about to go and speak to then-President Bill Clinton, and she asked me what she should speak about, and she started to tell me the story of her life. She was a young woman who grew up in Brooklyn and her dad was a bookie. "He wanted to be a cop but he was too short, and so the cops let him be the bookie because they trusted him then. And she grew up and she told her fellow classmates that her dad was a bookmaker, and they thought that he made books. "She and her husband Neil met when he was a crossing guard in elementary school. He went away to war and she wrote to him everyday and when he came home he married her." The 'Basic Instinct' star went on to reveal she began to see Eileen as an "adopted grandmother" after her own passed away, as Eileen herself had suffered terrible loss. She added: "And they had a beautiful long life together until he passed away a couple

years ago. I met her because she and Neil were two of the heads of Concerned Parents for AIDS Research, because her daughter was one of the first daughters to die AIDS. "Her boyfriend was a bartender at Studio 54. Their other daughter died in a car accident coming home from prom. So I ask them if they would be my adopted grandparents, since mine had passed away. And they became my adopted grandparents and my fellow HIV/AIDS worker." Sharon then spoke about Eileen's health, and said she would die "a warrior". She explained: "We worked very hard together to do a lot of good in this world. Tonight she's going to die in New York hospital. She has coronavirus, but she will die because she is septic and has other illnesses and none of us can go there to be with her. "But she will die a warrior, and I think we should grieve like warriors now because holding grief will only make us sick and affect our lungs and our respiratory systems in a way that we should not allow that to do."



Lifestyle | Features



Ugandan Mullika Indy, an employee of CAFU, the first fuel delivery service in the region, service, refills a car using a mini tanker outside a client's house in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.



Motorbikes belonging to a delivery company are picture lined up in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.—AFP photos

DUBAI'S OVER-THE-TOP DELIVERY CULTURE MAKES LOCKDOWN EASIER

Tamara, one of Dubai's many foreign residents, hasn't been to a petrol station in years — a click on a smart phone app is all it takes to bring a mini tanker to her doorstep. In better times, the wealthy emirate's over-the-top delivery culture made life easy for citizens and expats who could summon groceries and services — even a single chocolate bar — within minutes. Dubai is now under strict 24-hour lockdown but is ideally positioned for the "stay at home" coronavirus challenge.

A large number of delivery service operators bring anything under the sun, from a hot cup of morning coffee to your office, pharmacy items at midnight, or even giant ice cubes to cool swimming pools in the scorching summer heat. Tamara, a 28-year-old-Lebanese expatriate who works in social media, orders petrol once a week through an app for Cafu, the first fuel delivery service in the region. Once she's sent her vehicle's location, the app which stores her number plate and credit details sends a driver with a mini-tanker within the hour, filling up the car while the customer is at home, work, or out at the shops or the gym. "All (the customer) has to do is leave the fuel cup open... we don't need the customer to be there," Cafu driver Mullika Indy told AFP.

Even though Dubai's many petrol stations have attendants on hand to fill up the tank, with strict social distancing in force as the coronavirus spreads, Tamara says the #stayathome option is ever more appealing. "I don't like waiting in queues or leaving



An employee of a delivery company prepares to leave for a job.

home. I simply order and they come," she told AFP. Promoted by authorities as a global "smart city", Dubai extensively uses state-of-the-art technology and mobile apps to allow most government transactions including fines and fees to be processed remotely. Most people never visit their bank branch again after having set up their accounts.

Delivery army

The people who make it all possible are the army of delivery drivers who traverse the city's sprawling highway network at all hours of the day and night, under scorching summer heat and in rare winter storms. In the weeks since the lockdown was

enforced, the streets are almost deserted except for delivery motorbikes and vans racing to their destinations, becoming an essential "second line" response to the coronavirus outbreak after the "front line" medical workers.

"If we don't go out to deliver then everyone would have to leave their homes... then the spread of the coronavirus will become a big problem," Deliveroo driver Issa Jandir told AFP. "With our mission to serve the community, God willing, it will help end the coronavirus outbreak," said the 38-year-old from Pakistan. Delivery apps flash messages highlighting preventive measures adopted by drivers, including continuous sterilization of hands and frequent medical tests. The drivers wear gloves and masks and keep their distance, or drop the goods at the doorstep, to minimize contact with customers. Payment is normally made in advance through credit cards.

The services were busy in ordinary times, but now with the city's 3.4 million residents staying at home, they are under tremendous pressure, forcing some providers to announce delays until they have hired more staff. Indian Chen Singh, 22, who also works for Deliveroo, said the service was slower than usual because of the pandemic and the extra precautions that need to be taken. "Now, we have to first use sanitizer, then put on the gloves... we ring the doorbell and keep the order one meter (three feet) away from the door until it is collected."

Malls deserted

Dubai styles itself as a regional center for trade and services, and it is a major tourist attraction, visited by more than 16 million tourists last year. But the emirate, home to the world's tallest tower Burj Khalifa, has shut down its glitzy shopping malls and upscale restaurants as it fights the spread of coronavirus. The disease has already infected more than 6,700 people in the United Arab Emirates, and 41 people have died.

Dubai, one of seven emirates in the UAE, imposed a 24-hour lockdown on April 4 as the number of cases soared. But with the closure of malls, restaurants, cafes and public beaches, some delivery services are providing options to beat the boredom at home for Dubai residents not used to cooking or staying indoors for long.

Health and fitness centers, shut over the deadly disease, are offering to deliver fitness equipment for clients to help them exercise at home. And deliveries of alcohol, which is allowed in Dubai, but only in certain places and to those holding alcohol "licenses", is now also available for home delivery. Wael Mohammed, a 35-year old engineer, says that Dubai could be the only city where residents need not be concerned about getting what they need delivered to their doorstep. "Recently I ordered weights for exercising at home... Dubai will not be stopped by coronavirus," he told AFP.—AFP



A woman looks at an image of silhouettes of the "Virus Vanguard" superhero campaign to fight the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak that was launched then shelved by Singapore authorities on a government Facebook page in Singapore yesterday.—AFP

Singapore shelves virus superheroes after backlash

A band of Singapore superheroes created to help in the coronavirus fight has been shelved after internet users criticized the campaign for being too light-hearted and for mocking Liverpool football club. The "Virus Vanguard" featured comic-book characters including "Dr Disinfectant", "Fake News Buster", and "Must Always Walk Alone (MAWA) Man" — a jibe referring to the English Premier League side's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone". The initiative devised by the government and local artists was aimed at encouraging people to follow rules to combat a worsening virus outbreak, but social media quickly lit up with mockery and anger.

Late Monday, the government announced on its Facebook page the campaign was under review, while a picture of the characters disappeared and was replaced by their silhouettes. "We have received quite a lot of feedback on the characters and we will be reviewing them. We are sorry if we offended anyone," the post said. One user described

the outfit as "too light-hearted and frivolous — perhaps tone deaf even", while another described the characters as "offensive". The band first appeared Monday, the same day Singapore reported a record jump in virus cases that took its total to over 8,000.

Fake News Buster, who according to local news website CNA "wields the Mallet of Truth" in his battle against fake news, came in for special mockery. But there was particular anger at MAWA Man, who was described in local media as a fanatical Manchester United fan who enforced social distancing using special powers to repel objects and people. Supporters of rival club Liverpool in Singapore — where Premier League football is hugely popular — set up an online petition calling for MAWA Man to be removed from the campaign, which garnered hundreds of signatures.—AFP

Wildlife photographer Peter Beard dead at 82

Peter Beard, the influential photographer renowned for his wildlife shots, was found dead after going missing several weeks ago. He was 82 years old. "We are all heartbroken by the confirmation of our beloved Peter's death," his family said in a statement. Beard, who was suffering from dementia, went missing on March 31. A hunter found his remains over the weekend in a remote wooded area of a state park in Long Island, east of New York City, local police said. Police were called to the site in Camp Hero State Park in Montauk, on the tip of Long Island, and the deceased's clothing was found to match those Beard had worn.

Known for his death-defying images of African fauna, Beard's text and photo book "The End of the Game," first published in 1965, captured the destruction of a continent long seen by colonialists as a treasure chest. A man as wild as his photographs, Beard had a brush with death when he was trampled by an elephant in the 1990s and was known to rope rhinoceroses. "Peter was an extraordinary man who led an exceptional life. He lived life to the fullest; he squeezed every drop out of every day," his family said. "He was an intrepid explorer, unfailingly generous, charismatic, and discerning. Peter defined what it means to be open: open to new ideas, new encounters, new people, new ways of living and being," the statement continued. "He died where he lived: in nature." Born into privilege on January 22, 1938 in Manhattan, Beard attended some of the US east coast's most elite private schools but was by his own account the family's black sheep.

Respected for his photography — Beard received solo shows at Manhattan's International Center of Photography, as well as Paris' Centre National de la Photographie — he also gained notoriety for his high-octane



In this file photo Peter Beard attends 2013 Gordon Parks Foundation Awards at The Plaza Hotel on June 4, 2013 in New York City.—AFP

social life. Beard was a regular at the iconic Studio 54 disco club and a mainstay in the fashion world, famously discovering the model Iman in Kenya and photographing some of the world's top supermodels — and carrying on high-profile dalliances with several of them.

He had well-documented trysts with both Candice Bergen and Lee Radziwill, Jackie Kennedy's sister, and was married three times. "It's marvelous that death is an end — what's the matter with that?" he said during the 1977 opening of his ICP show. "We have plenty of time to live; we have plenty of time to have fun and really get into things. I have absolutely no fear of dying — it's one of the most natural processes there is."—AFP

Finland's opera-singing policeman spreads message of love under lockdown

A police officer in northern Finland has hit on a novel way to help the public weather the coronavirus lockdown, using his singing talent to lift spirits and going viral in the process. A video of senior constable Petrus Schroderus singing a Finnish version of the Soviet classic song "I love you, life" as he walks the deserted streets of Oulu, a town just 200 kilometers (125 miles) south of the Arctic Circle, has quickly amassed more than a million views on YouTube. "I wanted to sing something that I really feel helps my own heart," the classically trained tenor told AFP, adding that he wanted to offer "some kind of comfort" to people who are incapacitated and alone during the coronavirus crisis.

The song promises that "The night will end, the morning will come, when the bright new day arrives." Within 24 hours of posting the video last Friday, Schroderus was "flabbergasted" to receive a thousand messages of appreciation, from around Europe, Russia, Australia and the US, "even if they don't understand the lyrics." "There's just something about that song," he reflected. "One young girl wrote that she was hospitalized, that she watched my video and cried," Schroderus told AFP, adding that he has tried to reply to every contact. Since late March, schools in Finland have been closed to older children and gatherings of more than 10 people banned as authorities try to stem the spread of the new coronavirus, which has led to 94 deaths in the country so far.

Schroderus says that apart from the occasional group of youngsters who need to be dispersed, the residents of Oulu have followed the rules well, and the bigger problem is the lockdown's impact on people's mental state. The long-serving officer took a break from policing 22 years ago to study under one of the country's most renowned opera teachers, Esko Jurvelin, before singing for the Finnish National Opera for seven years. Schroderus returned to the force in 2012, but has kept up his singing on the side, performing up to 40 concerts a year. His police colleagues are nothing but supportive, Schroderus said, and although he keeps his police work separate, he sang a theme from Jean Sibelius's symphonic poem, "Finlandia", in uniform in a 2017 video to mark the centenary of Finnish independence. A recording deal is now in the works, "but I can't say any more about that," he said.—AFP



Senior constable Petrus Schroderus singing a Finnish version of the Soviet classic song 'I love you, life' as he walks the deserted streets of Oulu in Finland. — www.freemalaysiatoday.com

Facebook launches app for livestream gaming



Picture shows the logo of "facebook gaming" during the media day of the Gamescom video games trade fair in Cologne, western Germany.—AFP

Facebook on Monday launched a standalone gaming app, allowing users to create and watch livestreams of games in a challenge to the Amazon-owned Twitch platform. The new app was available Monday for Android devices, with a separate version for Apple's iOS in the works. Facebook said the new app will enable users to watch "e-sports" or game competitions as well as participate in games with other users online. The leading social network said it accelerated the launch "to encourage meaningful community interactions" for people locked down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Facebook said it sees strong interest in the new app, with some 700 million of its global users already playing games or participating in gaming groups on its platform. It has been testing the app in some parts of the world since 2018. "The Facebook Gaming app is a focused, gaming-only experience where you can watch your favorite streamers, play instant games and take part in gaming groups," the leading social network said in a statement on Twitter. "It's all of Facebook Gaming in one neat, app-sized package."—AFP



KARACHI: In this picture taken on April 19, 2020, Muslims maintain social distancing during noon prayers at a mosque during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the coronavirus. — AFP

## Ramadan on collision course with virus for Asia's Muslims

**ISLAMABAD:** Across Asia, home to about half of the world's Muslims, the coming Islamic holy month of Ramadan is on a collision course with the coronavirus pandemic as clerics call on the faithful to cram into mosques. Authorities have tried to limit the fallout during the sacred period of fasting, which starts Thursday, but in many cases religious leaders have brushed aside concerns about activities that could spread COVID-19.

In Bangladesh, clerics lashed out at attempts to reduce the number of people going to mosques, and demanded the country's secular government allow millions of Muslims to join daily and weekly prayers. "The quota on the number of worshippers imposed by the government is not acceptable to us. Islam does not support imposition of any quota on worshippers," said Mojibur Rahmani Hamidi, a senior member of the hardline Hefazat-e-Islam group.

Islamic leaders in Bangladesh, where tens of thousands of people defied a nationwide lockdown Saturday to attend the funeral of a top preacher, reminded people it is "mandatory" for a healthy Muslim to attend prayers in a mosque. In Pakistan, devotees said worship is more important than coronavirus concerns. Authorities have buckled under religious pressure, allowing daily prayers and evening congregations at mosques after clerics

promised to instruct religious leaders to clean their facilities regularly.

In the run-up to Ramadan, mosques have been filling up across Pakistan with hundreds attending Friday prayers, sitting shoulder to shoulder and paying little heed to social distancing. "I will take all the preventive measures, washing my hands and using my mask but it doesn't mean I will stop attending prayers, especially during Ramadan," taxi driver Zubair Khan told AFP in the northwestern city of Peshawar. The virus threat at large religious congregations has been highlighted in recent weeks by three waves of infections in Asia, linked to separate, massive Islamic congregations in Malaysia, Pakistan and India.

### Rising death tolls

Asia is home to some of the world's largest Muslim populations stretching from the Indonesian archipelago to the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan, and close to a billion Muslims live in the region. Regional death tolls from COVID-19 have been much smaller compared with Europe and the United States but are rising steadily, sparking fears the virus may overwhelm often underfunded healthcare sectors.

The coronavirus pandemic has triggered lock-

Monday, the May oil futures steadily edged lower, widening the gap between that contract and the June contract, which, while weak, still ended the day at more than \$20 a barrel. But with expiration on the way yesterday, the selling accelerated in the last two hours, with oil finally hitting negative territory roughly 20 minutes before the close of trading.

Once that level was breached, sellers piled in, sending the contract at one point below negative \$40 a barrel before a slight rebound ended what will go down as the worst day since the West Texas Intermediate contract was introduced in 1983. "I'm 55 years old, and I worked on the trading floor in college. I've been through the first Gulf War, second Gulf War, World Trade Center, dot-com crisis, and nothing came close to this," said Bob Yawger, director of energy futures at Mizuho in New York. "It could get worse. This situation that we're in is that bad."

Analysts say this type of market dislocations could recur in coming months because fuel supply will outweigh fuel demand for the foreseeable future. Worldwide oil consumption is roughly 100 million barrels a day, but consumption fell by 30 percent globally, or about 30 million bpd, beginning in early March. However, it took the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other countries until early April to agree to cut supply by 9.7 million bpd. Other nations, like the United States and Canada, did not mandate cuts from private industry, but those companies are swiftly reducing output.

It will nonetheless take months before those cuts fall enough to come in-line with reduced demand - even if world economies rebound somewhat as people recover from the pandemic, which has killed more than 165,000 people worldwide. With storage soon to be completely full in the United States, crude will not have a place to go.

Crude stockpiles at Cushing rose 9 percent in

downs throughout Asia, with schools shut and businesses closed, but mosques have largely stayed open. During Ramadan, mosques hold regular prayers and large "iftar" meals to break the fast at dusk, while families host feasts at home with relatives and friends.

In Southeast Asia, there has been fierce debate in food-mad Malaysia about whether to allow popular Ramadan bazaars, where Muslims buy local delicacies before breaking their fasts. Malaysia has imposed a nationwide coronavirus lockdown, and the government last week said that to ensure social distancing, they would only allow so-called "e-bazaars", where people order goods online from local vendors which are then delivered to their homes.

### 'Trapped'

Some signs suggest the order may not be respected - authorities in the northern state of Perlis have said they will allow food traders to operate from home and on the roadside, potentially increasing the chance of crowds gathering. Hadi Azmi, a 31-year-old video editor, said he understood the need for restrictions but he also felt "trapped". "I feel weird as the fasting month approaches because we have to remain indoors and

we cannot meet our parents and siblings to break fast and pray together," he told AFP.

And in Indonesia, a possible explosion in coronavirus cases when millions travel to hometowns and ancestral villages after Ramadan has forced the country's president to issue a ban on the annual exodus. Like Christmas or the Chinese Lunar New Year, the movement kicks off an extended holiday when many Indonesians celebrate Eid al-Fitr with their families to mark the end of Ramadan.

The government has called on residents of major cities, including the capital Jakarta, to stay put, and yesterday, President Joko Widodo said he would ban any mass migration. Researchers at the University of Indonesia have warned the travel rush could lead to one million infections in the densely populated Java island alone and an eye-watering 200,000 deaths. "If you care about your loved ones, stay where you are until all this ends," Ridwan Kamil, governor of 50-million strong West Java province, said recently.

Jakarta resident Romy Gustiansyah said he wouldn't visit family on Sumatra island this year over coronavirus fears. "I'm sad that I won't see my family for Eid, but I'm trying to stay optimistic," Gustiansyah told AFP. "This is just a delay. That's what I'm telling myself." — AFP

## US oil hits -\$40; Trump may halt...

Continued from Page 1

US crude prices bounced yesterday but were unable to keep in positive territory. West Texas Intermediate for May delivery rose to \$1.10 a barrel in early trade. However, it later eased back -\$4.52. For as sudden as Monday's declines were, it was weeks in the making. The coronavirus pandemic cut fuel demand worldwide by roughly 30 percent beginning in early March, but for several weeks, the supply of oil worldwide has continued to build. Even the recent deal by OPEC and other major oil-producing countries to reduce supply will not be fast enough, nor large enough, to drain the millions of barrels of unneeded crude present in the markets.

That unwanted oil is instead going into storage, but in the United States, storage is filling much more quickly than anticipated. Cushing, Oklahoma, the tiny town of less than 10,000 people that serves as the main US storage hub, was 70 percent full as of last week, and traders say it will be full within two weeks. That realization sparked Monday's sell-off in US futures markets because of the technicalities of the West Texas Intermediate futures contract, which expires on Tuesday. When oil contracts expire, the holder has to take possession of 1,000 barrels of oil for every contract they own, delivered to Cushing.

However, with Cushing filling up, that leaves traders with the unappetizing option of taking oil they do not want, or getting out of those positions. The mad rush for the door means there were few buyers, and the contract dropped from a normal price of \$18 on Friday into unprecedented negative territory. For the first few hours of trading on

the week to April 17 to around 61 million barrels, market analysts said, citing a Monday report from Genscape. The hub has capacity for roughly 76 million barrels. Unless production is cut more swiftly, next month could see a repeat of Monday's frenzied activity with the June contract, which settled at \$29.43, or \$58 more than the impaired May contract.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said on Monday that his administration was considering the possibility of stopping incoming Saudi crude oil shipments as a measure to support the battered domestic drilling industry. "Well, I'll look at it," Trump told reporters at a daily news conference after he was asked about requests by some Republican lawmakers to block the shipments under his executive authority. Trump said he had heard the proposal immediately before the news briefing. "We certainly have plenty of oil, so I'll take a look at it," he said.

The collapse in prices has threatened to tilt the once-booming U.S. oil industry into bankruptcy. Trump described the drop as short-term and stemming from a "financial squeeze", but said the oil industry was hurting from a lack of demand, as states have imposed stay-in-place restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. "The problem is no one is driving a car anywhere in the world, essentially. ... Factories are closed, businesses are closed," Trump said. "We had really a lot of energy to start off with, oil in particular, and then all of a sudden they lost 40 percent, 50 percent of their market."

He said the global producer group known as OPEC+ had agreed to cut production by some 15 million barrels per day, and said weak prices could force more declines for economic reasons. "They have to do more by the market, it's the same thing over here. If the market is the way it is, people are going to slow it down or they're going to stop. That's going to be automatic, and that's happening," Trump

said. Trump reiterated that his administration plans to top up the nation's emergency crude oil stockpile as prices plunge.

The Department of Energy is in the process of leasing some of the roughly 77 million barrels of available space in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to US oil companies to help them deal with dearth of commercial storage as the coronavirus outbreak crushes domestic energy demand. The administration initially wanted to purchase the crude oil directly, but Congress has yet to approve the funding. Asked if he still wanted lawmakers to approve the funding, Trump said the space in the SPR would be filled either way.

The Saudi stock market led Gulf bourses down yesterday, a day after US oil prices slumped to historic lows over sluggish demand, a supply glut and a lack of storage. The Saudi Tadawul stock market, the largest in the Arab world, dropped 2.1 percent at the start of trading before recovering some of the losses. Less than an hour after opening it was trading down 0.9 percent. Energy giant Saudi Aramco was 1.3 percent lower, well below its listing price.

The Dubai Financial Market dropped by 2.3 percent, while its sister bourse in Abu Dhabi was down 2.1 percent. Qatar bourse dropped 0.7 percent. In Kuwait, the Premier index slumped 1.3 percent while the All-Shares index was down 1.0 percent. The small Muscat bourse dipped 0.9 percent while Bahrain stocks were flat.

All the Gulf states depend on oil income for most of their public revenues. The International Monetary Fund last week projected the six Gulf states along with oil exporters in the Middle East and North Africa will lose more around \$230 billion in oil revenues after oil prices dropped by more than 60 percent this year. The global lender also forecast that economies of the Gulf states will shrink by 2.7 percent, their worst performance in several decades. — Agencies



Stars

**Daily SuDoku**

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

medium

**Yesterday's Solution**

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

hard

STAR TRACK

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

If you're single, Aries, tonight you could find yourself longing for a lover from the past and wondering what's happening with this person right now. If you're currently involved, you might be experiencing a temporary separation from your beloved, and could feel inclined to spend the evening at home. If you choose to do this, entertain yourself with a favorite book or movie. Remember - a watched phone never rings!

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

Someone at your workplace could suddenly find you very attractive and make no secret of it today, Libra. How you respond, of course, is up to you, but if you don't reciprocate this person's feelings, don't respond positively simply because you're flattered. This could cause trouble for you down the line, particularly if this person is in a position of authority. Hold out for the right person!

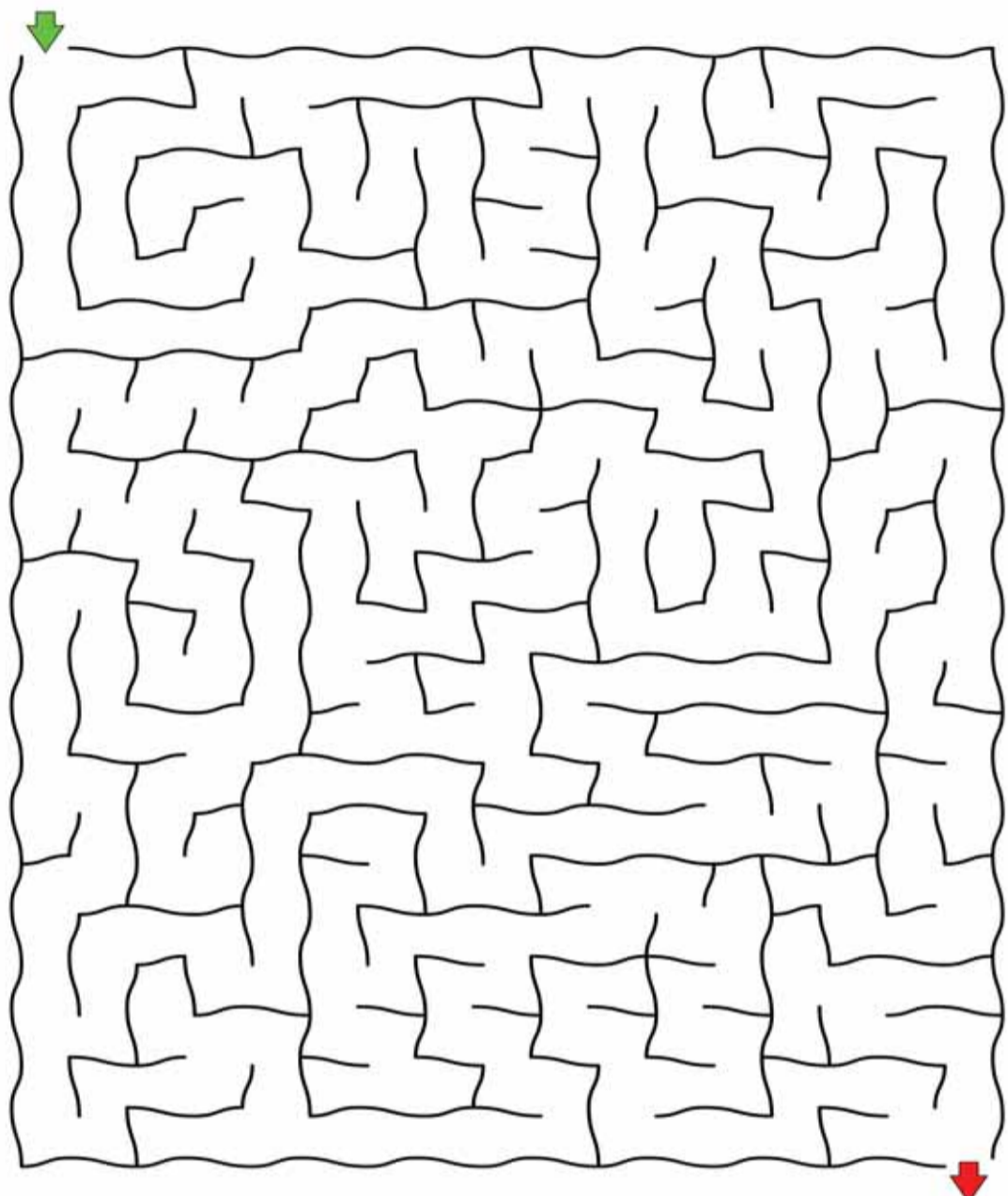
**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

Are you waiting for a love partner to phone you at work, Taurus? As much as you want to hear from your friend, you could well get so caught up in your work that you wouldn't hear a marching band go by. As you work, be sure to keep one ear tuned to the real world by looking up or getting up and walking around occasionally. Otherwise, you might sabotage what you want the most today.

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

Your desire to respect and honor the special someone in your life clashes today with an equally strong desire to become a passionate persuader, Scorpio. The secret to resolving this conflict lies in knowing that the two aren't mutually exclusive. Also, if you're going to make the most of both drives, you need to tune in to your partner's thoughts and feelings. Zero in on what you both want and then go for it! Enjoy your day.

Find the way



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

Your sensuality is tempered today with a touch of the mystical sort of romantic feeling found in fairy tales, Gemini. This might be unusual for you, but your current partner is going to love it! If you're single, you're likely to attract a lot of attention and possibly meet someone new and exciting. Take care that you make the effort to see the real person and not just a romantic image. Good luck!

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

Have you been harboring a secret desire for someone you believe thinks of you only as a friend, Sagittarius? Don't be surprised if you learn differently today. This is a day when hidden passions may suddenly be revealed - and your friend could unexpectedly divulge a covert attraction to you! The only downside is that sometimes it can be a letdown when fantasies become reality.

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

A desire to spruce up your home might start with a thorough cleaning from attic to basement, Cancer. You could go through that chore like gangbusters and then do some repairs or go for the fun stuff, such as redecorating with plants or even some new furniture. You can have a lot of fun with this, especially if your partner or friends help out. Work hard and enjoy your day!

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

Today you could encounter a work colleague and suddenly feel an unexpected romantic attraction, Capricorn. This could catch you off guard because you never before thought about this person in that way. Before jumping in with both feet, give yourself some time to come down. You're feeling especially sensual today, so this might well pass by tomorrow. Stay grounded for now.

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

A love partner could contact you out of the blue, Leo, perhaps proposing that the two of you get together tonight - alone. You're in just the mood for this, since you're feeling especially sexy and not particularly afraid to show it. An evening at home or in a dark corner of your favorite restaurant might be just the ticket. Don't be surprised if your friend orders champagne and shows up with flowers! Have fun!

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

A sum of money that you might have been expecting from far away may be delayed, Aquarius. This could be frustrating for you, but don't panic. The money is indeed coming. So unless your situation is urgent, just sit back and wait. If you want to check with those who are sending it, by all means do so. However, you'll probably find that the matter is out of their hands. Be patient and hang in there.

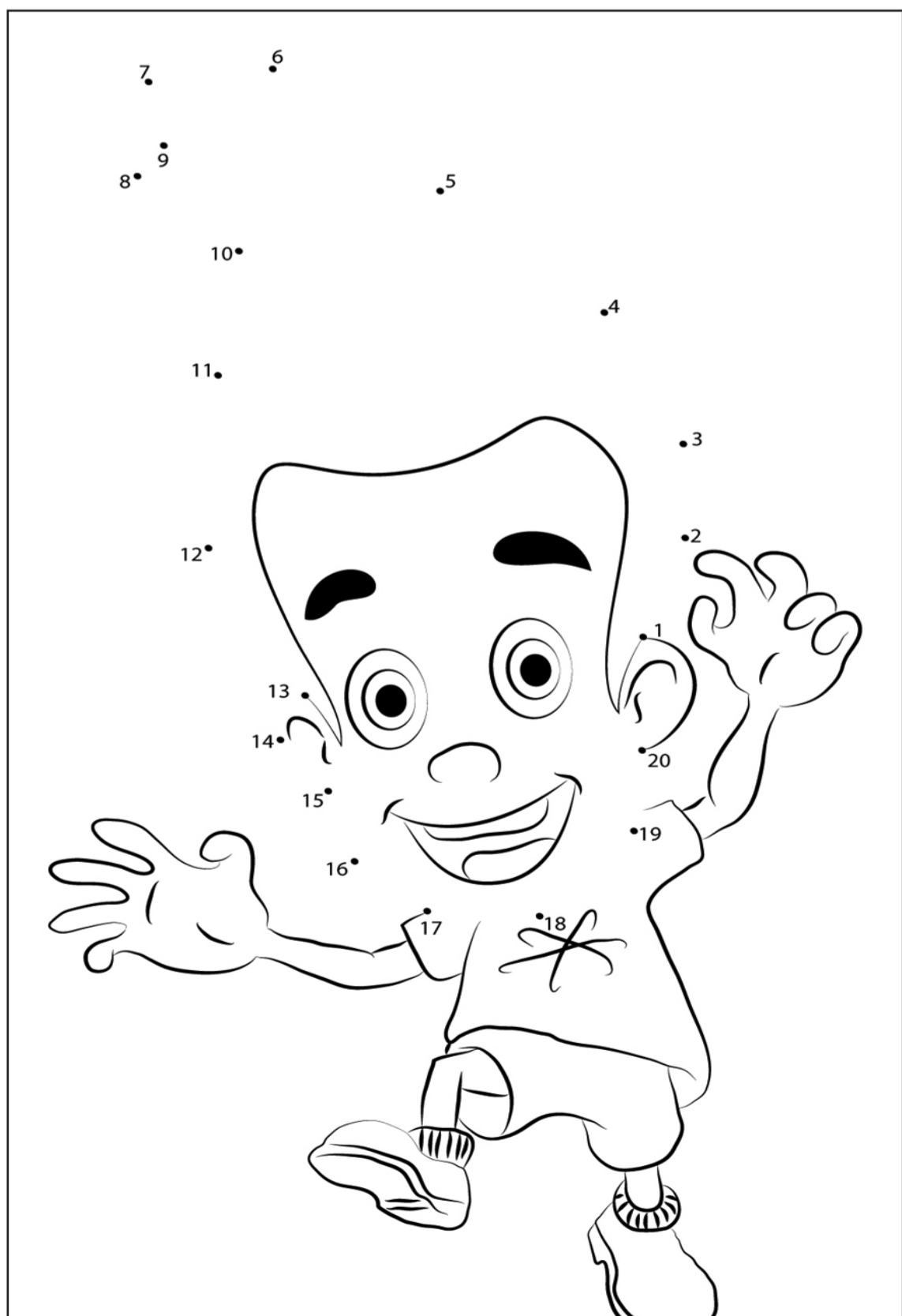
**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

Have you been waiting to hear about some funds, Virgo, perhaps to create a piece of art, write a book, or make a documentary film? If so, you could have a lot to celebrate today when you receive news that the money is forthcoming! Don't be surprised if there's a delay, however. The project is still going to happen, but just a little later than you'd hoped. All you can do now is be patient.

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

Romances top priority for you today, Pisces. You're looking especially beautiful, you're feeling especially sensual, and you could well attract admiring looks from strangers. You might want to indulge in some new clothes or perhaps new cologne. This is definitely the perfect day to schedule an intimate evening with a love partner. If you can, go for it. It might be a day or two before your schedules mesh, however. Be patient!

Join the dots



Crossword

**INSECTS**

**ACROSS**

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

**DOWN**

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

## Sports

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Fahad Al Musallam trains on his quad in Kuwait. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Legendary Baltimore Colts MLB Curtis dead

**BALTIMORE:** Baltimore Colts legend Mike Curtis, one of the heroes of Super Bowl V, died Monday. He was 77. Curtis passed away in St. Petersburg, Fla., according to the Baltimore Ravens.

Curtis, a middle linebacker, played in two Super Bowls for the Colts and intercepted Dallas Cowboys quarterback Craig Morton late in a tie game in Super Bowl V on Jan. 17, 1971. The pick set up Jim O'Brien's game-winning, 32-yard field goal with five seconds remaining in Baltimore's 16-13 victory.

The Irsay family moved the Colts from Baltimore to Indianapolis following the 1983 season, but that never dimmed current owner Jim Irsay's admiration of Curtis.

"Rest In Peace, Mike Curtis," Irsay tweeted on Monday. "One of the game's most legendary non-Hall-of-Famers. Ferocious on the field, a gentleman off the field."

Curtis was a four-time Pro Bowl selection during 11 seasons (1965-75) with the Colts. The player nicknamed "Mad Dog" also played for the Seattle Seahawks (1976) and the Washington Redskins (1977-78).

Curtis, who played in 166 career NFL games, recorded 21 of his 25 regular-season interceptions and eight of his nine fumble recoveries during his tenure with the Colts. He returned two interceptions for touchdowns and also scored on a fumble return.

Curtis had three interceptions and one fumble recovery (for a touchdown) in nine career playoff appearances, all with Baltimore. The highly intense Curtis was also known for a hit he delivered that had nothing to do with the play on the field. During a break in the fourth quarter of a home game against the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 11, 1971, a drunken fan raced on to the field and tried to take off with the ball.

Curtis saw what was transpiring and headed toward the fan to deliver a vicious hit that sent the intruder to the turf. Curtis was asked about the incident after the game and simply said, "He wasn't supposed to be on the field." —Reuters

# New location set as Red Bull Car Park Drift returns to Kuwait later this year

**KUWAIT:** Fans, race supporters, enthusiasts and drivers worldwide eagerly anticipate the return of Red Bull Car Park Drift. Event organizers have confirmed the drift tournament is returning to Kuwait, where it will be held at a brand-new location, on the Kuwait Global Steel Services factory grounds.

Red Bull Car Park Drift is organized by Basel Salem Al Sabah Motor Racing Club and is held in partnership with by Dunlop, Al-Babtain Group and Acqua Eva. The tournament tests the professional motorsport athletes in ways that are unique to the sport of drift. This difference is the highly technical placement and use of obstacles in the circuit.

This only adds to spectator excitement, as the obstacles require precision, perfect timing and execution. And the scoring system is exacting.

The judges tally a final run score out of 400 total possible points. Of these, 320 points may be accumulated skillfully from the many obstacles, with the remaining 80 being based on visual components, such as the look of the car and the smoke of the tires.

Obstacle scoring includes the Box, Gate, Flipper, Pendulum, and the Spiral with figure 8 and 11.

### 1. Box

Quite literally as it sounds, it consists of a set of water barriers arranged in the shape of a box. At a size of 10 meters by 8 meters, it contests the competitors to drift within. You hit a barrier, you lose points; you drift the wrong way, you lost points; you spin the car, you lose points. Making up to 50 points out of 400 for two boxes, if The Box is carried out incorrectly, you risk a low score.

### 2. Spiral

One of the most difficult challenges that drifters face. The Spiral covers a surface area of approximately 24 meters and it usually signifies the end of the run for competitors. With a narrow space between the triangular pylons, this may seem insurmountable but previous Kings of Drift have proved that this is merely a myth. The spiral also forms part of drifting skills section 2.

### 3. Figures 8 and 11

While the 'barriers' used to create the shape vary from country to country, the concept is unified — drift the car throughout the course that make the



figures 8 and 11. These two obstacles are imperative as part of the drifting skills sections, making up a total of 120 points.

### 4. Gate

At the entry of the Spiral, lies the first Gate that a drifter essentially needs to open and before he finishes with a donut, he turns to hit the second Gate. These make up 10% of the total possible points. If a competitor can impress the judges with their drifting skills here, then they might just be at the top of the leaderboard and move onto the next round.

### 5. Flipper

An object that, basically, drifters need to cause to flip. It is quite difficult, and it needs to be completed perfectly, not once but, twice. And if a drifter is unable to flip the Flippers, then they forfeit the points that make up 15% of the total score.

### 6. Pendulum

Technically, a weight hung from a fixed point, a pendulum is an object that the drifter's car has to hit at a turn, drifting. It serves as one of the most exciting and entertaining aspect for spectators. If a drifter hits the pendulum while just 'driving' head on, he or she collects zero points for this out of a possible 50.

The driver must expertly navigate between tight spaces, exit and enter into the next challenge obstacle, and impress the judges as well as the crowd, by appearing to make the entire run seem effortless on their part. Each driver is allowed 2 runs per day, giving them the opportunity to improve their overall final score.

The drifting event is expected to continue later this year. A full announcement with additional details is to follow once the dates have been set.

To find out more about drifting and other motorsports, visit @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook, or visit [redbull.com/events](http://redbull.com/events)



## Sports

# Coronavirus shutdown has exposed 'inequities' of tennis: King

## Nadal frustrated by lockdown, Federer happy with surgery recovery

**MUMBAI:** Tennis great Billie Jean King says the financial fallout from the coronavirus shutdown has exposed the unfairness of the sport and that it is important for the top players to lead the cause for change.

The tennis season was suspended in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown will continue at least until mid-July, depriving lower-level players, who depend solely on tournament winnings, of the chance to earn a living.

The sport's governing bodies have joined forces to devise plans to provide relief and 12-times Grand Slam singles champion King said the sport had the chance to emerge stronger from the health crisis.

"This is a good time to reset and to have one voice in the sport, which we really never had. We need that desperately," King told the Tennis Channel. "I hope they will all work together more after the COVID-19 situation calms down."

"Maybe some day, and I didn't think it is possible, we might have a Commissioner. I don't know. We are not the biggest sport in the world, we don't have as much money as say soccer. So we need to stick together and everyone needs to help each other. The thing that's also good is it shows the inequities that go on. So this is a good time to reset and think about how we want our sport to look in the future. What can we do to make it better, stronger and more secure?"

"This is a really good chance to have a new normal for tennis." While tennis is a lucrative sport for those at the top, those in the lower echelons often struggle to make ends meet. The men's ATP, the WTA, which runs the women's circuit, the world governing body International Tennis Federation and the organisers of the four Grand Slams have come together to work on creating an emergency relief fund.

World number one Novak Djokovic has said he had

been in touch with fellow men's Player Council members Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal and the players were looking to contribute collectively to assist those in the lower rankings.

King said the WTA was also working on ways to provide financial relief for its players. "Some money has gone out to the players but we need to think about more," said the 76-year-old American.

"The people who have to drive that are the top players. Because they have the big box, they have the money, it's really important for them to step up."

Meanwhile, Rafael Nadal on Monday expressed his frustration that tennis players remain unable to practise due to the coronavirus pandemic, while Roger Federer revealed he was happy with his recovery from knee surgery.

The Spanish government has extended the country's state of alarm until May 9, with the entire population confined to their homes except a small number working in specific sectors, leaving Nadal perplexed as to why he can't train. "It's true I don't understand very well because we cannot play tennis when many people are going to work and even more so in our sport, where we keep at a large and safe distance and we play on opposite sides of the court," world number two Nadal said during an Instagram Live.

"But I understand that we are in a very critical situation, that the government is dealing with something unprecedented and I also understand that the last thing they think of is who can train and who cannot train. I understand the situation and obviously there are many



Billie Jean King with Serena Williams



### Tennis is a lucrative sport

things that are not logical but you have to accept the rules." Nadal treated tennis fans to an Instagram Live in which he spoke to both Roger Federer and Andy Murray about their experiences during lockdown.

The men's and women's tours have been halted due to the virus, while Wimbledon was cancelled last month for the first time since World War II and Nadal's favourite Grand Slam the French Open was pushed back to September 20.

"I am not playing tennis, I do not have a court at home and I miss it a little," Nadal said. "I am sticking to my physical routines. From the gym of my academy they were able to bring me some machines when lockdown began so I try to work a little in the morning, a

little in the afternoon.

"It is very important to have both the head and the body focused and it is what I am trying to do at all times." Federer meanwhile gave an update on his right knee after the 20-time major winner decided to undergo surgery in February.

"I've been hitting a bit against a wall, (doing) rehab with the knee," Federer said. "It's OK, I had a really good first six weeks, then it was a bit slower, now it's getting better again but I have plenty of time."

"There is no stress, no rush. If there is anything positive (about being in lockdown) that's the only thing really. I just want the knee to be good, it doesn't matter when I return." — Agencies

## Rugby's Kirwan tackles COVID-19 mental health

**WELLINGTON:** After years battling his own demons, All Black legend John Kirwan is attempting to help fellow Kiwis struggling through COVID-19 lockdown by releasing a mobile phone app he calls "a mental wellbeing coach in your pocket".

The World Cup winning winger broke one of sport's great taboos after a stellar international career when he revealed his struggles with depression, helping explode the myth that on-field glory equates to happiness off the pitch. "I had medical depression. I was on anti-depressants — I wanted to jump out of a window one night," Kirwan told AFP in a telephone interview.

"I've got learned experience in this space." Such is Kirwan's passion for speaking out about mental health that when he was knighted in 2012 it was his pioneering advocacy, not his exploits in a black jersey, that earned him the award.

After writing two memoirs on the topic, Kirwan has in recent years devoted himself to a more hi-tech means of communication, a mobile phone app called Mentemia. The app uses personality tests and cognitive games to build up a picture of the user and provide tips for reducing stress.

These include breathing techniques, mood tracking, action plans for boosting mental wellbeing or simple reminders to take some time out during a busy day.

While it may sound warm and fuzzy, Kirwan points out that it was developed with a team of clinical psychologists using evidence-based techniques.

"The journey I went on was very much about listening to professionals and understanding what they were telling me," he said. "This information is already out there, it's about getting that science and



John Kirwan

knowledge and delivering it to people in a way that's engaging."

### 'I KNEW WHAT WAS COMING'

Mentemia — meaning "my mind" in Italian — was originally envisaged as a tool to help large corporations reduce stress in the workforce. But as the coronavirus crisis deepened, Kirwan and his business partners became convinced it could play a positive role in helping New Zealanders cope during the pandemic.

"I've got family in Italy and I knew what was coming up, so we sat down as a business and said 'What should we do?'" said Kirwan, whose wife Fiorella hails from Italy and whose son Niko plays for Serie C football club Reggina.

"The right thing to do was to gift it to the whole of New Zealand." Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government proved receptive to the idea and last week the app was made available free to all New Zealanders as

part of the COVID-19 health response.

"It provides users with practical tips and techniques to help them take control of their mental wellbeing," Health Minister David Clark said. Kirwan, now 55, said his personal situation had long since transformed "from surviving to thriving" thanks to the techniques available on the app.

"I've got a very simple mental health plan — this morning I got up and had a shower, but the secret to the shower was being able to stop and enjoy the water," he said. "Then I had a little half-hour workout and after that I sat down and had a coffee. Already today I've done three things to contribute to my mental wellbeing."

Kirwan, a World Rugby Hall of Famer with 63 Test caps, said he was one of many keenly missing the absence of sport as a distraction during difficult times. "I think it's having an incredible impact. I love my rugby, I love my football — sport to me is part of my mental health, so I'm missing it hugely," he said. —AFP

## CA board chief Roberts defends staff pay cuts

**MELBOURNE:** Cricket Australia (CA) Chief Executive Kevin Roberts has said deep staff pay cuts were necessary to shore up the game's finances amid the coronavirus shutdown, despite the governing body holding tens of millions of dollars in stock investments.

CA announced plans to furlough almost 80% of staff last week, putting them on 20% pay until June 30 when it is hoped more will be known about how long government curbs to control the coronavirus will last.

The cuts, which will save A\$3 million (\$1.89 million), have drawn criticism from media pundits, given CA had some A\$90 million in reserves at the end of March including A\$36 million in stock investments.

Roberts, however, said CA had to be prepared for further blows to the game's finances if a sustained shutdown put paid to all cricket in 2020, including the Twenty20 World Cup on home soil in October and hosting India in a lucrative test series.

"It wasn't an over-reaction because we're dealing with a situation that's hitting us unfortunately at the low point of our cash cycle over four years," Roberts told reporters in a video

conference call yesterday.

"In early September ... if there's more shots (to CA's finances) as we've had over the last month or more, that in fact would effectively chart a path to zero if we weren't to take drastic action."

"Then you layer on top of that the possibility that the international season doesn't go ahead, that's an issue of hundreds of millions of dollars."

Players, who are paid a share of total revenues generated by the game, also face significant pay cuts if the shutdown continues deep into the year. Roberts was CA's lead negotiator in acrimonious talks for a new collective bargaining agreement with the players union in 2017, and was ultimately defeated in his attempts to have them agree to abandon a long-standing revenue-sharing model.

He declined to confirm whether CA would ask players to take pay cuts even before the full extent of the financial impact from the shutdown is known.

"We're working through the detail of player payments with the ACA (Australian Cricketers' Association)," he said. "What we've all seen and heard ... they're acknowledging everyone has a role to play here in helping to fight this situation, including the players in Australia's national teams." Roberts added that all options were on the table for domestic and international cricket, including playing the entire India test series at a single venue or at closed stadiums, if required to manage the health risks. — Reuters

## China FA proposes minimum 30% pay cut because of virus

**SHANGHAI:** The Chinese Football Association has proposed clubs slash wages of players and coaches by at least 30 percent to cut costs because of the coronavirus, state media said yesterday.

The People's Daily said that the CFA is now awaiting feedback from teams in the top-tier Chinese Super League (CSL) and the two divisions below. The CSL season was supposed to begin on February 22 but was indefinitely postponed after coronavirus emerged in central China in December, before spreading worldwide.

"After the opinions are collected and revised, the Chinese Football Association will report to FIFA and other relevant departments," the state-run newspaper said. "It is understood that the target of the Chinese Football Association (wages cuts)... does not include youth players and ordinary employees with relatively low salaries," People's Daily added.

The CSL has enticed foreign coaches and players in recent years with vast pay packets. Shanghai SIPG's Brazilian attacking midfielder Oscar is one of the best-paid players in the world on an estimated \$27 million a year.

Temporary wage reductions in football are a hot topic with clubs facing financial challenges because of the pandemic, which has seen most leagues indefinitely suspended. Arsenal became the first English Premier League club to agree a pay cut on Monday with manager Mikel Arteta and players accepting a 12.5 percent reduction in salary. — AFP

## La Liga, Spanish FA agree training restart protocol

**MADRID:** La Liga and the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) have agreed a return to training protocol for professional players in the country after the coronavirus outbreak, the Spanish National Sports Council (CSD) announced on Monday.

Spain's top division has been suspended since March 12 due to the COVID-19 outbreak which has so far killed more than 20,800 people, the third-highest number of deaths in the world after the United States and Italy.

"This decision remains controlled by the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and by the decisions adopted by the Ministry of Health," the CSD said in a statement.

La Liga clubs will train again "when health conditions allow it, and by following strict health protocols," it added.

According to local media reports La Liga has already outlined a proposition which includes testing players as well as a progression from individual training to sessions with whole squads.

League chief Javier Tebas last week said play could restart as early as next month, although a fortnight extension of the nationwide lockdown until May 9 announced on Saturday appears to have scuppered those plans.

During the weekend's meeting between La Liga, the RFEF and the CSD, which reportedly took more than eight hours, the trio decided television income from football would be used to save other sports.

"The La Liga presidents and the federation have committed to create a contingency fund of 10 million euros (\$10.86 million) to help vulnerable sports, and have invited other entities like the players union to take part," the CSD's statement said.

Serie A insisted Monday that they were committed to finishing the season despite reports seven clubs are against a return to action as the coronavirus pandemic continues to afflict Italy.

"The Lega Serie A Council that met today unanimously confirmed its intention to complete the 2019-2020 season, if the government allows it to take place," Italy's top flight said in a statement

It added that any resumption will take place "in accordance with regulations laid out by FIFA and UEFA" and the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), and "in compliance with medical protocols to protect the players".

Brescia, Torino, Sampdoria, Udinese, SPAL, Genoa and Sardinian outfit Cagliari do not want to play because of the "incalculable risk" of restarting, according to reports in Italy. Six of those clubs are situated in the north of Italy which has been hardest hit by a virus which has killed over 24,000 people.

No football has been played in Italy since March 9 with the current lockdown measures in the country extended to May 3. Sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora will meet with FIGC officials midweek, but he warned he was not sure that Serie A teams can even resume training.

"I am not giving any assurances for the start of the championship or training on May 4, if the conditions for the country do not exist beforehand," Spadafora told Tg2 Post. —AFP

**18** New location set as Red Bull Car Park  
Drift returns to Kuwait later this year



**19** Coronavirus shutdown has exposed  
'inequities' of tennis: King



**19** Rugby's Kirwan tackles  
COVID-19 mental health



## Football secondary during crisis: Iniesta



TOKYO: File photo shows Andres Iniesta of Vissel Kobe poses with the winners trophy after the 99th Emperor's Cup final between Vissel Kobe and Kashima Antlers at the National Stadium in Tokyo, Japan. — AFP

TOKYO: With Spain one of the country's hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, Barcelona great Andres Iniesta says he is finding it tough to watch events unfold in Europe from his new home in Japan.

Iniesta, who joined Vissel Kobe in 2018 after a trophy laden career at Barcelona, told Reuters in an interview yesterday that while the importance of football was secondary during the health crisis it was frustrating not to be able to play.

Japan's domestic soccer season has been put on hold during the crisis, with Iniesta remaining in Kobe with his wife and three children. The 35-year-old, one of the most technically gifted midfielders to play the game, said it was difficult to be away from his wider family and friends back in Spain.

"It is a very difficult situation because you are not there with them, with your loved ones," he said through a translator. "You can't see what is happening on a daily life level so that is difficult but we keep talking on a daily basis, checking in with them and just

hoping that the situation gets better."

The new coronavirus has infected more than 200,000 people in Spain and killed over 20,000. Japan has confirmed more than 11,000 infections of the virus with over 250 deaths. Having to stay home and being unable to train properly has been a challenge but he is savouring being able to spend more time with his family.

"Right now, I think football becomes a secondary thing," added Iniesta, who scored the winning goal for Spain in the 2010 World Cup final. "What is important right now is people's lives, people's jobs, trying to move society forward to get out of this situation."

"Having said that, of course as a professional footballer it is difficult to not be able to play football, to

not be able to share time with my fans, my team mates. "I try to focus on the positive things - staying at home I get to spend much more time with my family and with my kids, which normally it is not that easy to do."

After a 16-year spell at Barcelona that saw him win nine La Liga and four Champions Leagues titles, Iniesta decided to take up a new challenge in the J.League. His storied career and that move to Japan are the subject of a documentary about his life: 'Andres Iniesta - The unexpected hero', which is to be released on Thursday.

Despite winning virtually everything there is to win in Europe, Iniesta has not come to Japan to slide quietly into retirement. He led Vissel Kobe to their first piece of silverware when they won the Emperors' Cup in January and is hungry for more success here.

After his playing days are over he says he wants to move into coaching but will take things one step at a time. "I feel I want to pursue being a coach but we will see what happens, things change on a daily basis so in a few years we don't know what will happen," he said.

"For now, I am focusing on what I have in front of me." When football is given the green light to resume Iniesta wants to pick up where he left off, imparting his wisdom to Kobe's younger players and aiming for a first J.League championship.

The J.League have said it would be May at the earliest when matches can return. "I want to share my experience with the young players. I think it is my responsibility too and it forms part of the big project I came here for," said Iniesta.

"I like to talk with them, share things with them and I also like the feeling that they can ask me questions and they are learning stuff." — Reuters

Japan will continue to cover the costs it would have done under the terms of the existing agreement for 2020, and the IOC will continue to be responsible for its share of the costs," read the IOC's answers.

"For the IOC, it is already clear that this amounts to several hundred millions of dollars of additional costs." Yesterday, Tokyo 2020 spokesman Masa Takaya said it was "not appropriate for the PM's name to be quoted in this manner" and said a request had been made for the IOC to remove the offending comment from their website.

"What we are requesting to the IOC team is that the name of the Japanese Prime Minister should not be quoted, plus the IOC's website should not express beyond what was agreed between the IOC and Tokyo 2020," said Takaya.

The IOC have yet to respond to Tokyo 2020. Reuters have also reached out to the IOC for comment. Tokyo 2020 also said that the breakdown of who will pay the additional costs had not been discussed between Abe and IOC President Thomas Bach when the pair made the decision to postpone the Games.

Earlier, Kyodo news agency reported that Abe had agreed that Japan would shoulder the cost, which Kyodo said amounted to around \$3 billion.

Japan's top government spokesman, Yoshihide Suga, said yesterday Abe had not agreed to any additional costs. — Reuters

## Chadwick stays hopeful with W Series on hold

LONDON: Jamie Chadwick raced McLaren's Lando Norris in the virtual world at the weekend but COVID-19 could put the brakes on hopes of her joining the Formula One driver on track at a real grand prix this season.

Back in February the 21-year-old had spoken of defending her W Series title and then pushing for a Friday first practice slot with the Williams F1 team, where she is a development driver.

The plan was to move up the motorsport ladder in 2021, with whoever wins the all-female series barred from returning after this year.

Now the Briton, who lost 2-1 to Norris in the head-to-head event organised by Veloce Esports, can only guess at when she might be back on track with the pandemic putting racing worldwide on hold.

A return to W Series next year is also looking more of a possibility. "I think realistically no-one knows what's going to happen this year," Chadwick told Reuters in a telephone interview from home.

"So next year is in the back of my mind and planning

ahead for that just in case is always going to be something that we would do.

"We're not due to start until the end of May so hopefully with that in mind and the progress that's being made by everyone, we still might get a season this year."

The original W Series calendar featured six European rounds from May 29 to Sept 5 with two further races supporting Formula One in Mexico and the United States in October, but that has been ripped up. The German Touring Car (DTM) championship that W Series hooks up with in Europe has revised its calendar to a tentative start at Germany's Norisring in July and a finale at Italy's Monza circuit on Nov 15.

Germany has since extended a ban on major events until the end of August, however, while Italy has the world's second highest COVID-19 death rate after the United States and remains in lockdown.

Formula One's season has yet to get going, with nine races called off so far.

"The difficulty, and where W Series is doing absolutely the right thing, is no-one really knows when this is going to end so the focus is on basically going by guidelines advised by the government and then making decisions as and when," said Chadwick.

"With W Series we are a bit reliant on DTM and F1 so that's a lot of the guidance. "I don't know how many different countries the girls are from, and obviously every country is in a different situation with regards the virus at the moment, so it's not going to be easy when things do start to get back to normality." — Reuters



### Technically gifted midfielder

umentary about his life: 'Andres Iniesta - The unexpected hero', which is to be released on Thursday.

Despite winning virtually everything there is to win in Europe, Iniesta has not come to Japan to slide quietly into retirement. He led Vissel Kobe to their first piece of silverware when they won the Emperors' Cup in January and is hungry for more success here.

After his playing days are over he says he wants to move into coaching but will take things one step at a time. "I feel I want to pursue being a coach but we will see what happens, things change on a daily basis so in a few years we don't know what will happen," he said.

"For now, I am focusing on what I have in front of me." When football is given the green light to resume Iniesta wants to pick up where he left off, imparting his wisdom to Kobe's younger players and aiming for a first J.League championship.

The J.League have said it would be May at the earliest when matches can return. "I want to share my experience with the young players. I think it is my responsibility too and it forms part of the big project I came here for," said Iniesta.

"I like to talk with them, share things with them and I also like the feeling that they can ask me questions and they are learning stuff." — Reuters

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