



### 3 KRCS provides food to poor in Kuwait during Ramadan



### 6 Muslims mark a somber Ramadan amid lockdown



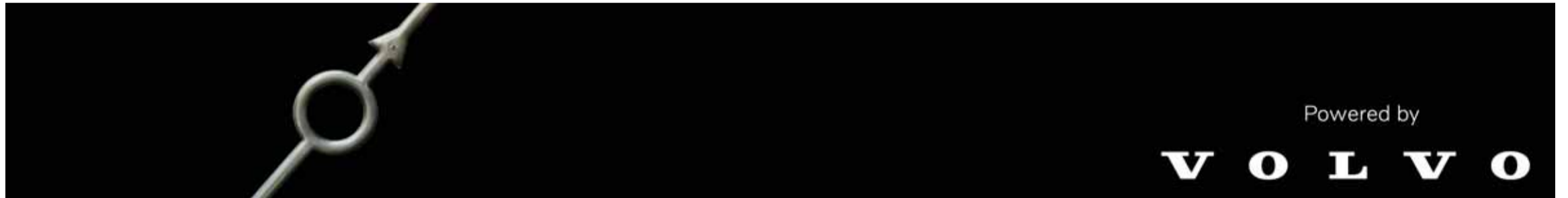
### 20 Everything clouds over, goes dark: Iniesta on depression



## Ramadan

KAREEM

Imsak	03:37
Fajr	03:47
Dhuhr	11:46
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:21
Isha	19:43



# Virus toll nears 200,000 as UN pushes vaccine effort

## Islam's holiest sites emptied by coronavirus crisis during Ramadan



MAKKAH: A picture taken on Friday shows sanitation workers disinfecting the area around the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan. — AFP

WASHINGTON: The global coronavirus death toll approached 200,000 yesterday as the United Nations launched an international push for a vaccine to defeat the pandemic. Governments around the world are struggling to limit the economic devastation unleashed by the virus, which has infected nearly 2.8 million people and left half of humanity under some form of lockdown. The scale of the pandemic has forced medical research on the virus to move at unprecedented speed, but effective treatments are still far away and the United Nations chief said the effort will require cooperation on a global scale.

"We face a global public enemy like no other," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a virtual briefing on Friday, asking for international organizations, world leaders and the private sector to join hands. "A world free of COVID-19 requires the most massive public health effort in history." The vaccine should be safe, affordable and available to all, Guterres stressed at the meeting, which was also attended by the leaders of Germany and France.

But notably absent from the meeting were the leaders of China, where the virus first emerged late last year, and the United States, which has accused the UN's World Health Organization of not warning quickly enough about the original outbreak. The UN chief's vaccine appeal came a day after US President Donald Trump prompted outcry and ridicule with his suggestion that disinfectants be

used to treat coronavirus patients. "Is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning?" Trump mused during a televised briefing. "It sounds interesting to me."

As experts - and disinfectant manufacturers - rushed to caution against any such dangerous experiment, the president tried to walk back his comments, saying he had been speaking "sarcastically". The United States is the hardest-hit country by far in the pandemic, recording more than 51,000 deaths and over 890,000 infections. The world's biggest economy has been hammered by the pandemic, with 26 million jobs lost since the crisis began, and American leaders are under pressure to find ways to ease social distancing measures.

Despite criticism from Trump, the governor of Georgia allowed some businesses, including nail salons and bowling alleys, to reopen on Friday, sparking both criticism and relief. The mayor of the state's capital Atlanta condemned the "irresponsible" move, telling ABC News: "There is nothing essential about going to a bowling alley or giving a manicure in the middle of a pandemic." But some in the city cherished the opportunity to re-engage with society. "I actually had a great time," beamed Tili Banks, 41, as she and a friend left a bowling alley. "I was just so happy to be out that I didn't even realize that I had these people's bowling shoes on when I walked outside."

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## 'COVID-positive' Filipino commits suicide in Kuwait

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A Filipino who allegedly tested COVID-19 positive at Amiri Hospital and allegedly killed himself in a bathroom at the hospital was an engineer who was in Kuwait on a visit visa. He came at the invitation of his Abu Dhabi-based company for a project in Kuwait. Because of the lockdown, he wasn't able to go back to Abu Dhabi for more than a month. He was only given a week's visa upon arrival in Kuwait, but due to the lockdown, was unable to return to the UAE.

The deceased decided not to go to the Philippines when outbound flights to Manila from Kuwait reopened, fearing he might lose his job if he decided to go straight to the Philippines. A source from Amiri Hospital claimed the man who committed suicide and was reportedly COVID-19 positive had received a notice of termination from his Abu Dhabi-based company. He was found in a toilet in Amiri Hospital with an electrical cord around his neck Thursday morning. (See Page 2)

## Sick, stranded, broke: Crisis hits Gulf expats

ABU DHABI: When all nine men in his dormitory caught coronavirus, 27-year-old Nurudhin was bused to a remote quarantine camp - becoming one of many migrant workers Gulf states are struggling to accommodate adequately. The oil-rich Gulf is reliant on the cheap labor of millions of foreigners - mostly from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka - many of whom live in squalid camps far from the region's showy skyscrapers and malls.

But the spread of coronavirus, alongside shrinking oil-driven

economies, has left many workers sick and countless others unemployed, unpaid and at the mercy of unscrupulous employers. "There is nothing in my room except a small bed. I have to share a bathroom with 20 to 30 people," said Nurudhin, a draftsman from India who was hospitalized before being taken to a remote isolation facility for blue-collar workers in the United Arab Emirates.

"There is no Wi-Fi. Not even a television. But the situation in my room was even worse," he said of his crowded quarters in Abu Dhabi, which proved a fertile ground for the disease. Despite strict curfews in force for weeks, the Gulf states with the biggest populations of foreign workers - Saudi, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar - are still reporting rising

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DUBAI: A health worker stands in front of a bus driving migrant workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 to the Warsan neighborhood, where people infected or suspected of being infected by the virus are quarantined. — AFP

## Tea, wheat, garlic: How world copes with lockdown

BAGHDAD: In the US it was toilet paper, in Mexico it's beer and in France, predictably, flour. The goods missing from stores reveal how the world is coping with coronavirus lockdowns. The winner for most bizarre shortage of 2020 is Afghanistan, where a rumor about a mustachioed newborn advising the purchase of black tea sent people flocking to the shops. "I will live for two hours and have come to tell you that black tea is the cure to this virus," reads the quote accompanying a picture of the baby, purportedly from the eastern province of Nangarhar, widely shared on Facebook. The run on the ubiquitous black tea briefly tripled prices before the rush calmed.

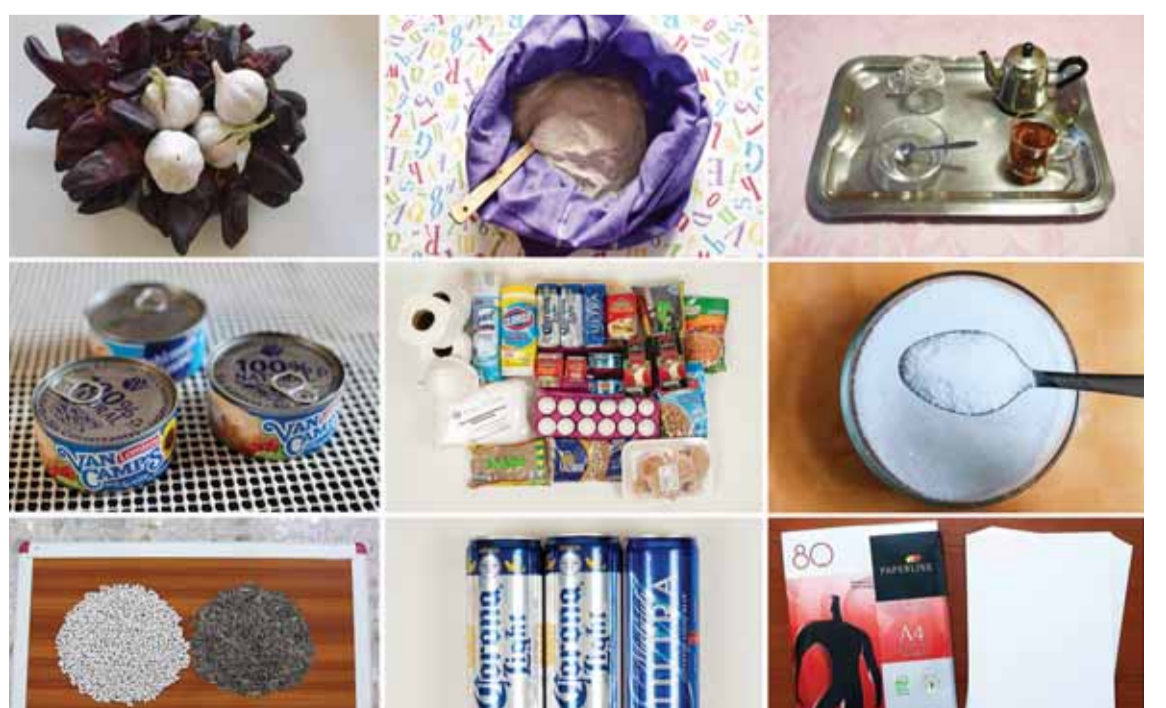
In Mexico, beer - along with tequila - is a drink of choice. When the country went into its lockdown, the two national beer giants Heineken and Grupo Modelo - which makes the country's beloved and now unfortunately-named Corona brand - announced they would stop producing. That prompted a wave of panic purchases and a defiant

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## Sunlight destroys virus; remdesivir fails human trials

WASHINGTON: The new coronavirus is quickly destroyed by sunlight, according to new research announced by a senior US official on Thursday, though the study has not yet been made public and awaits external evaluation. William Bryan, science and technology advisor to the Department of Homeland Security secretary, told reporters at the White House that government scientists had found ultraviolet rays had a potent impact on the

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TUNIS: Items that are in high demand in various countries as a result of the novel coronavirus - (top left to right) cloves of garlic in Tunisia, semolina in Algeria, black tea in Afghanistan; (middle left to right) cans of tuna in Chile, various groceries in Mexico, sugar in Sri Lanka; (bottom left to right) salted sunflower seeds in Iraq, beer in Mexico and paper in Libya. — AFP

## Local

# Filipino man commits suicide in Kuwait after testing positive for COVID-19

## Abu Dhabi-based engineer stuck in Kuwait after arriving on one-week visa

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A Filipino who allegedly tested COVID-19 positive at Amiri Hospital and allegedly killed himself in a bathroom at the hospital was an engineer who was in Kuwait on a visit visa. He came at the invitation of his Abu Dhabi-based company for a project in Kuwait. Because of the lockdown, he wasn't able to go back to Abu Dhabi for more than a month. He was only given a week's visa upon arrival in Kuwait, but due to the lockdown, was unable to return to Abu Dhabi.

Speaking with Kuwait Times via Facebook, Larry (not his real name) said he was in the same hotel in Kuwait City as the person who committed suicide. Larry, who was also in Kuwait on a visit visa, left the country last Monday when Kuwait opened outbound flights. He said the deceased became his friend during the time they were locked down at the hotel. They were not permitted to leave the hotel due to having expired visas.



### Victim feared losing job if repatriated

Larry decided to go back to the Philippines when outbound flights to Manila from Kuwait reopened. But the person who committed suicide remained at the hotel, fearing he might lose his job if he decided to go straight to the Philippines. "I told him to go back with me to the Philippines since he had his family there. But he said he cannot go back to the Philippines directly since he has a job in Abu Dhabi," Larry said, quoting his former hotel mate.

But what could have triggered the alleged suicide, inquired Kuwait Times. "We don't know, but he was taking medication. I left Kuwait on Monday, and on Tuesday he went to Amiri Hospital. I checked his Facebook page on Thursday, he wasn't online anymore," Larry said.

A source from Amiri Hospital claimed the man who committed suicide and was reportedly COVID-19 positive has received a notice of termination from his Abu Dhabi-based company. He was found in a toilet in Amiri Hospital with an electrical cord around his neck Thursday morning.

#### News in brief

##### Workers test positive

KUWAIT: The National Assembly announced that a photographer working there has tested positive for novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Medical team will be testing people who were in contact with, it confirmed. Meanwhile, Shamia Co-op Society announced it was closing yesterday after one of the volunteers working there tested positive.

##### Shopping at co-ops

KUWAIT: The timing to make a reservation to shop at co-operative societies through the ministry's website www.moci.shop has changed to be from 8:00 pm to 2:00 am. Meanwhile, the ministry announced the increase of surgical face masks' price from 100 fils to 150 fils per piece, due the high global demand.

##### Country of origin

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a circular for importers of commodities asking them to mention the country of origin clearly on imported commodities. The new directive is based on the Cabinet Decree 27 (2015) relating to consumer protection. It obliges the importers to cite the country of origin, instead of just the continent of that country; otherwise, they could face a legal action.

##### Fast-breakers' punishment

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced that fast-breaking in public during Ramadan is an offence punishable by a maximum of one month in prison, a fine of 100 dinars or both. Meanwhile, the ministry announced that police arrested ten curfew violators on Friday, including four in Hawally, four in Farwaniya, and two in Jahra Governorates. Six Kuwaitis and four expats were arrested.

##### 'Kuwait Mobile ID'

KUWAIT: 'Kuwait Mobile ID' app will soon allow its holders to travel without the need of carrying the physical civil id, the Public Authority for Civil Information announced, adding that coordination is ongoing in that regard with relevant authorities inside and outside Kuwait.

##### EU flights

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways announced three outbound flights to London for UK and EU nationals on April 27, 28, 29. The ticket will cost KD 200. People with valid tickets are allowed to drive to the airport during curfew hours. Also, Kuwait Airways operated a special flight to Amsterdam yesterday for EU nationals and residents. As for Qatar Airways, two daily flights from Kuwait to selected destinations via Doha will leave Kuwait till May 30, 2020.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality teams carried out an inspection Friday night during which they checked on permissions issued to restaurants for food delivery during curfew hours in Ramadan.



## Absurd questions

Pandemic Diaries

By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

Can drinking disinfectant or standing in sunlight kill the coronavirus? The short answer is no. Despite persist fake news online and unscientific claims by politicians, scientists in several countries have reported no findings that confirm these wild theories.

Not sunlight.  
Not drinking disinfectant.  
Not drinking turmeric or lemon water or lots of water.  
Not drinking bleach.

In fact, there is NOTHING proven by science that will prevent anyone 100 percent from getting coronavirus. There are vaccines under trial and insha'Allah one will prove successful but so far none have. People can reduce their chances of getting the virus by washing their hands thoroughly and according to published, medical guidelines.

People can reduce their chances of getting the virus by staying at home, reducing contact with other people and avoiding gatherings or crowded places. People can reduce their chances of getting the virus by wearing a mask and social distancing.



### Drastic measures absolutely necessary

Even with all these measures, some estimates suggest that as much as 60-80 percent of the global population will get the coronavirus. For the vast majority of people, this will be a mild case that does not even require hospitalization. Unfortunately, for far too many, the COVID-19 infection could result in hospitalization and even death.

So it's scary. It is serious. It is stressful and the stay at home measures, the closures of businesses and the total lockdown, while distressing and financially painful, are absolutely necessary. And it may seem absurd to have to say again but no, drinking disinfectant or standing in sunlight will not kill the virus or keep you from getting sick.

<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/outbreaks-and-emergencies/novel-coronavirus-2019/fact-or-fiction>

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 2,614 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 15 deaths. With the exception of 60 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, 613 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 1,986 people receiving treatment and 1,367 quarantined as of Friday. 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) 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, and send the form via email to: 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

utility 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-Aslamaya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem 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-ehhealth.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-Khaldi (head of this team):** daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.
  - **Dr Ahmad Al-Khaldi:** daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.
  - **Dr Muneera Al-Qattan:** Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.
  - **Dr Zainab Al-Saffar:** Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.
  - **Dr Sameera Al-Kandari:** Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.
  - **Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout:** Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.
- For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

Local

# Kuwait exemplary supporter of security, peace: UN official

## World marks Int'l Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace

**KUWAIT:** UN Secretary General's Representative and Resident Coordinator to Kuwait Tareq Al-Sheikh said Thursday Kuwait is an exemplary model for promoting world security and peace, building regional and global partnerships and pursuing peace and preventive diplomacy. This came in a joint press statement issued by the UN official and Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Nasser Al-Hayyen, marking the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, which was observed Friday. Kuwait strongly believes in international multilateralism and its significance to this unprecedented global response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Sheikh said. He commended the efforts and effective political stance of the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry and government as a reflection of the approach of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a Humanitarian Leader.

"In the UN, we always welcome the Kuwaiti role in supporting international multilateralism on all levels for promoting security and peace as well as multilateral partnerships," the UN official added. He regarded that the State of Kuwait has played a key part in the domain of multilateral partnerships and peace diplomacy, citing, in this regard, its fervent efforts and relentless work during its first 1978-1979

UN Security Council membership. Kuwait, in fact, has spared no effort to take decisions regarding Arab issues, and to keep international peace and security, he remarked. Kuwait's UNSC membership was based on four priorities: adopting Arab issues, primarily the Palestinian cause, along with humanitarian issues,



### More int'l cooperation against COVID-19

thwarting conflicts, pursuing preventive diplomacy and mediation, and overhauling UNSC mechanisms, Sheikh pointed out.

As for the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, the UN official said this international day is deemed a reaffirmation of the UN Charter and its principles pertinent to the resolution of conflicts among countries by peace means. In this

regard, he underlined the significance of this occasion amid the current circumstances of the coronavirus, unresolved conflicts, climate change, growing inequality and humanitarian tragedies. No buts, all this shows the importance of concerted work and peace diplomacy on both regional and international levels, he said, urging closer cooperation among countries, businesses, individuals and all segments of society, and partnerships with international organizations to address regional and global challenges.

### More cooperation

Echoing the UN official's views, Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Nasser Al-Hayyen said it is essential to use this opportunity to push for more international cooperation to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, speaking highly of UN organizations' response to the globally spreading virus. He said Kuwait attaches much significance to the vital role of the UN, pointing out cooperation between Kuwait and the UN and its resident coordinator Sheikh as well as other specialized bodies' chiefs. He boasted that the UN had picked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a Humanitarian Leader and the State of Kuwait as a Humanitarian Center, thanks to donors' conferences hosted by Kuwait to alleviate the humanitarian situ-

ation in Syria. Kuwait also played host to UN-sponsored inter-Yemen peace negotiations for three months, and provided bountiful aid to affected people worldwide, the official reminded.

During its UNSC membership, Kuwait kept its humanitarian approach and wise and moderate policy, he said, citing UNSC Resolution 2472 suggested by the State of Kuwait for missing people during armed conflicts. He also reminded of Resolution 2449 jointly proposed by Kuwait and Sweden for humanitarian aid to Syria and Resolution 2401 on a ceasefire in, and aid access to, Syria. The Kuwaiti official noted his country's efforts to back Iraq on all levels, including the hosting of an international reconstruction conference on Iraq, while commending its endeavor to settle inter-Gulf disagreements. Finally, Kuwait has promoted its concept of multilateralism by contributing \$60 million to the World Health Organization (WHO) to support its fight against the COVID-19, he concluded. — KUNA



Tareq Al-Sheikh

### Wellbeing Amidst the Pandemic

## Demonstrating Compassion

By Sadie Hussain

It is most important that we strengthen our sense of community by connecting with and supporting each other. Communication is a subject that has been constantly highlighted: we must all adapt to this peculiar rhythm of life and make a collective effort to get in touch with others in creative ways. Research that was conducted after the SARS virus in 2008, produced evidence supporting the significance of connection through epidemics. It found many experienced "increased social connectedness, which offset the negative mental health impacts of the epidemic." This is something to be deeply reflected on during this time.

Working together as a community fosters solidarity and this is something we must all adopt in our fight against the Pandemic: social distancing involves physical-social distancing and is not to be mistaken as distancing from society. Our community starts with those around us: stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues remotely. Offer your help where possible, volunteer, devise and/or suggest initiatives that support professional and social communities. The possibility is endless, the smallest of acts build a sense of hope, purpose and meaning: a reminder that we can better manage this together, in solidarity. Making others feel hopeful will also make you feel positive in what lies ahead.

Stay connected with your values, do not let fear or anxiety drive your interactions with others. COVID-19 doesn't discriminate - it can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, nationality or ethnicity. Practice awareness. The World Health Organization has published several guides on handling those that have been affected by the pandemic. Unconscious bias is topic to be taken into consideration, do not refer to people with the disease as "the victims", "the infected" or "the diseased". They are "people who have contracted COVID-19", "people who are being treated for COVID-19", or "people who are recovering from COVID-19". It is important to separate a person from having an identity defined by COVID-19, in order to reduce stigma.

Use understandable and accessible ways to share information with people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities. Where possible, include forms of communication that do not overwhelm the listener.

Compassion is as vital in this time as the air we breathe. Imagine a world without our historically exceptional patrons, imagine a world without the countless individuals who risked their own lives to save others. We must consider that if compassion has the power to rouse courageous deeds, it must also encourage a number of positive bi-products that have both individual and societal benefits. Perceive compassion as profound requisite for a meaningful existence in modern society.

A number of psychological studies have found that increased compassion is related to:

- Increased happiness and overall wellbeing.
- Decreasing depression by acting as a buffer against physiological reactivity to stress.
- Promoting social connection.
- An important motivator of co-operative behavior.

The Pandemic has affected us all in ways unforeseen. Compassion is at the core of all our relationships: be altruistic, practice patience, show respect and most importantly, always be kind whether to yourself or others. Never underestimate the power of hope, and that, which you have to offer another person.

"And this too shall pass".

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

## Amir, Palestine President exchange Ramadan greetings

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call Friday from Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas to congratulate him on the holy month of Ramadan. Abbas wished His Highness the Amir good health, and that Kuwait achieves further progress and prosperity under his leadership. His Highness the Amir thanked Abbas for his greetings, and hoped the State of Palestine and the Palestinian people live in prosperity under his leadership. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call Friday from

Omani Deputy Prime Minister for the Cabinet Affairs Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Saeed to congratulate him on the holy month of Ramadan. Saeed wished His Highness the Amir be in good health, and that Kuwait enjoy further progress and prosperity under his leadership. His Highness the Amir thanked Saeed for his greetings, and hoped Oman and its people live in prosperity under leadership of Sultan Haitham bin Tareq.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also called the Omani Deputy Prime Minister for the Cabinet Affairs to congratulate him on the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Crown Prince wished the Omani people progress and prosperity, and prayed to Allah the Almighty to eliminate the coronavirus on Oman and its people, and to protect the Arab and Islamic people from harm. Saeed thanked His Highness the Crown Prince for his greetings which reflected the deep fraternal relationship, and expressed his wishes that Kuwait enjoy progress under leadership of His High-

ness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to eliminate the pandemic on Kuwait, Arab and Islamic nations.

In the meantime, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah exchanged Ramadan greetings with Gulf and Arab leaders in phone calls on Friday. His Highness the Prime Minister exchanged greetings with UAE's Vice-President, Prime Minister of Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammad Al-Maktoum, Qatar's Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Thani, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, Dr Adel Abdulmahdi of Iraq, Egyptian Premier Mustafa Madbouli, Jordanian Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab, Tunisian Prime Minister Elias Fakhfakh, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh, Moroccan Prime Minister Saadudine Othmani and Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled wished Ramadan greetings to Arab and Islamic nations. — KUNA

## KRCS provides food to poor during Ramadan

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society is delivering 7,000 iftar meals per day throughout the current fasting month of Ramadan to workers and the needy in many Kuwaiti regions. KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said in a statement to KUNA on Saturday the meals would be delivered to workers and low-income residents in Al-Mahboula, Khaitan, maternity, Al-Amiri and Al-Sabah hospitals, medical warehouses, Kuwait University, Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorate, the ports, ministry of electricity and water and Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). Barjas called on private companies and capable people to aid the needy during the fasting month. She has praised volunteers who are exerting efforts during the hot summer to help the impoverished. — KUNA



## Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed



# Kuwait forms team to eliminate human traffickers

## Interior Minister visits checkpoints during curfew



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh visits a checkpoint during curfew. —Interior Ministry photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh Thursday formed a team aimed at eliminating human traffickers who were importing large numbers of expatriates and leaving them unattended, as well as tackling relevant funding. Saleh, also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, met with the team members and called on importance of establishing a mechanism that would eliminate human traffickers, an Interior Ministry statement said. The team will be tasked with taking all legal measures against traffickers, as well as eliminate funding used for this illegal act, said the statement. The team is headed by Minister Saleh and consists of senior officials from the Public Authority of Manpower, Interior Ministry, Ministry of Justice, Fatwa and Legal Advice department



### Minister visits quarantine facility

and general investigation department. Meanwhile, Minister Saleh visited areas where policemen were manning checkpoints and making sure people were complying with curfew, imposed to curb spread of coronavirus, thanking them for their dedication. Saleh visited the checkpoints in Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, which have been under lockdown, a ministry statement said. Saleh also visited a 5,000-bed quarantine facility that was setup by the Ministry of Public Works opposite Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium, and was briefed about the process of receiving and admitting coronavirus patients. Saleh thanked the policemen and workers at the front lines for their dedication and the way they were handling cases. —KUNA



Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh visits a quarantine site.

## Kuwaiti probes citizen's death in Istanbul

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Ministry announced a citizen has passed away at Istanbul Airport on Thursday evening, and Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah opened an investigation over this case. The citizen, Anwar Mohammad Al-Ghareeb, came to Istanbul Airport to be repatriated back to Kuwait although he and his family

were not listed on Thursday's flights, and were due to fly Friday, the ministry added in a statement. The deceased asked, while boarding passes were distributed, employees of Kuwait Consulate in Istanbul who were at the airport to register him and his family in Thursday's flights, it explained. The employees asked him to wait until they finish the distribution and to see if there are people who did not show up, then he and his family would be allowed to board, it said, but the deceased became furious and fainted. Ghareeb was immediately whisked to hospital but he was pronounced dead upon arrival, said the statement. Minister Sheikh Ahmad instructed an investigation into the causes of the death. —KUNA

## Army chief proud of soldiers over support

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Mohammad Al-Khodhr expressed his pride on Friday in all military servicemen working and supporting various state agencies in the country, amid the ongoing fight against the coronavirus pandemic. In a statement by the military's moral and guidance office, Khodhr made his remarks during a tour to COVID-19 inspection site at Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air force Base, expressing as well gratitude to all who helped establish the site, and all who worked in the front lines against this pandemic. The Army chief of staff also prayed to Allah that this pandemic ends and be defeated under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, 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. —KUNA



In my view

## It is different



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Ramadan is normally a month like no other, and this year is something no one thought about - not even the experts in fiction movies could have come up with such a mixed scenario. In normal times, people used to go home from work at 2 or 3 in the afternoon to prepare for the iftar meal. Families used to gather for iftar, then go to the mosque for taraweeh prayers, which are particular to the month of Ramadan. Later we found streets, markets, malls and even parks full of people - I mean so full that you couldn't find a place to land a foot.

I do not want to get carried away talking about Ramadan traditions, which have been shelved this year because of something that requires so much caution and action to avoid being hurt: COVID-19. Streets are empty, people are nowhere to be seen, malls are shut and cafes are on the pause mode. Authorities decided to expand curfew hours from 4:00 pm to 8:00 am during the holy month, so most of the time will be spent indoors, and this may prompt many changes.

If I take myself as an example, and although I read much and do many things online, I found myself in the kitchen on the first day of Ramadan making qatayef (something close to pancakes), and it is a sweet particular to this month. Things went fine until my wife entered the kitchen and discovered what had happened and how the sink was full of all types of dishes that needed washing, which is something that is not pleasant. On a more serious note, COVID-19 brought many consequences that are dangerous around the world. After starting relatively slow, it became a pandemic and spread around the world in a flash. This made most if not all countries shut down public life, schools, universities, institutions, parks, etc to keep people apart as one of the weapons in the fight against this enemy. Even corporations and companies asked their employees to work from home, while other companies asked their employees to stay home until further notice so as not to be at risk of getting the virus.

Working from home has its advantages and disadvantages at the same time. One may become relaxed more than necessary and become less productive because of the feeling that there is much more time to do things, although people should behave as if they are in the office.

Working from home requires one to have his computer, mobile phone and other gadgets in use always ready, besides having them fully charged in case power is lost. One may find it reasonable to work while in bed, which is totally wrong and may trigger the notion of laziness and the person will not be able to complete the job correctly and on time. In fact it is advised that one should put on clothes as if they will actually go out while working at home, as this helps to have a feeling of being at work. It will be great if one designates a certain corner at home to work, as this will also give the feeling of being in the office. Being in touch with colleagues and superiors is something good, as work ethics should be followed even at home, while colleagues should encourage each other as they may feel stressful in such a situation, and avoid harsh criticism of those who make a mistake or two.

Final word: "Every job is a self-portrait of the person who does it. Autograph your work with excellence." —Anon

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## Local

## Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Kuwait Amir Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (1921 - 1950) meets with some Bedouin guests coming from the desert circa 1946. The image shows the Amir's preferred falcon to the left. This picture was taken during the beginning of the oil era in Kuwait. (Source: 'The Picture Post' magazine, volume 32, on July 13, 1946, London. — Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

## More reasons why Muslims love Ramadan

By Shariffa Carlo

To someone from outside, seeing the enthusiasm that Muslims exhibit for the coming of Ramadan in the face of the work and effort we have to put in, it can be quite confusing and frustrating. A Christian friend of mine, Dr Kathy Nixon, was actually annoyed by Ramadan because, among other things, she wouldn't be able to have her hot lunch at work. In her final year in Kuwait, she was invited to join us in the fast. She studied it, got a number to call if she got weak and with that knowledge and support, she fasted. She saw how it is a special and blessed time for those who observe it with prayer and humility. She even likened it to her observance of Lent. Now, she not only appreciates Ramadan, she is enthusiastically planning to fast with us at the beginning of Ramadan this year. So, let's explore some other reasons do Muslims have for loving Ramadan as much as we do:

### Ramadan synchronizes families and communities

Some of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "We eat but are not satisfied." He said, "Perhaps you eat separately." The Companions replied yes. The Prophet then said, "Eat together and mention the Name of Allah over your food. It will be blessed for you" (Abu Dawud).

Fasting is also a wonderful way to socialize and reconnect. I don't know about others, but my family isn't exactly synchronized in our eating schedules throughout the year. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are not always possible at the same time. My teaching schedule and my sons' college classes and socializing schedules don't make for a lot of daily shared meals.

Many families have grown children with families of their own. Many of us, expats in Kuwait, don't even have any extended family and our friends become our family by default. Ramadan, a time where we all eat at the exact same time, becomes the perfect impetus for getting together for a highly appreciated meal, a meal that is, more often than not, made even more delicious by the fact of being surrounded by others.

Ramadan meals are special in so many ways. They are normally extra tasty (The fact that we have waited all day for it makes that first bite taste like manna from heaven), as our Prophet said, "The fasting person enjoys two moments of pleasure: when

he breaks his fast he is joyful, and when he meets his Lord he is joyful for his fasting."

And, of course, I would be negligent if I didn't mention that every Muslim family has its Ramadan Specials, food that only comes out at Ramadan, like nightly samboosasa. Many Ramadan meals are an ever-ending variety parade of soups, salads, meats, sweets and treats that leave many of us in food comas, in spite of fasting all day. So, it's clear that the sharing of food, itself is a big part of our love of the month.

### Ramadan: Sharing is caring

To punctuate this, we are, as Muslims, aware that providing food to anyone who is fasting is also considered a massive charity and yet another chance for blessings.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Whoever feeds a fasting person will have his sins forgiven, will be saved from hell fire, and will have the same reward as the fasting person without diminishing the reward of the fasting person in the slightest." The Companions said, "Not all of us find that with which to feed a fasting person." The Prophet replied, "God gives this reward to whoever breaks the fast of another even with a sip of milk, a date, or a drink of water."

Even if we can't share our food together at the same table, we can increase our chances for blessings by giving food, money or ingredients to those who are less fortunate. In Kuwait, you can't help but notice all the tents that go up all over Kuwait serving the iftar to anyone who comes in. You might notice people taking large serving trays to the mosques right before the time to iftar. What you may not see is the millions of dinars that travel the world, headed to those in need. In Ramadan, the purse strings become extra loose as people try their best to emulate the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who was described as being 'more generous than the blowing winds', during Ramadan.

These simple acts help us unlock doors to compassion we may have neglected throughout the year. I have to wonder what will happen to those who are alone this Ramadan, if we still aren't allowed to gather. I envision and pray that we can, at least, have some zoom iftars with those who are alone.

### Courtesy of the TIES Center:

The TIES Center is the social and educational hub for English Speaking Muslims in Kuwait and aims at empower Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, you can contact TIES at Tel:25231015/6; Hotline:94079777; e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

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US death toll tops 50,000 as some businesses reopen

## COVID-19, the knockout punch for multilateralism?

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MAKKAH: An aerial view shows the Great Mosque and the Makkah Tower deserted on the first day of the fasting month of Ramadan in this holy city on Friday. — AFP

# Muslims mark somber Ramadan

## Empty mosques, cancelled iftars amid unprecedented virus lockdown

RIYADH: Mosques stood empty and fast-breaking feasts were cancelled as Muslims around the world began marking Ramadan under coronavirus lockdown on Friday, while a pushback in some countries sparked fears of a surge in infections. Makkah's Grand Mosque, Islam's holiest site, was among those devoid of worshippers as the holy month got under way amid unprecedented bans on family gatherings and mass prayers.

A stunning emptiness enveloped the sacred Kaaba - a large cube-shaped structure in the Grand Mosque towards which Muslims around the world pray - in the most potent sign of how the daytime fasting month will be a sombre affair across Muslim-majority nations. Ramadan is typically a period of both worship and socializing, but this year strict lockdowns limit gatherings for iftar meals at dusk when the fast is broken - a centerpiece of Ramadan.

The measures have put a damper on spirits in Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation, where national religious organizations have called on the faithful to stay at home. "This Ramadan is very different - it's just not festive," said Indonesian housewife Fitrija Famela. "I'm disappointed that I can't go to the mosque, but what can we do? The world is different now."

Similar sentiments echoed across the Middle East and North Africa, where multiple towns and cities are under round-the-clock curfew. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria have partially eased the lockdown, but Morocco has announced a night-time curfew for Ramadan as it steps up emergency measures to combat the virus. The North African nation's Council of Oulemas, the official religious body, called for confinement to be respected during Ramadan, saying Islamic sharia law put saving lives above all else - even meeting for prayers.

However, some religious leaders in Asia - home to



Emptiness envelopes sacred Kaaba

nearly a billion of the world's Muslims - have shrugged off fears about the spread of COVID-19. In Bangladesh, the fundamentalist Hefazat-e-Islam group criticized government moves to restrict access to more than 300,000 mosques nationwide. "Quotas on prayer attendance are against Islam," Mojibur Rahman Hamidi, a Hefazat official, told AFP. "A healthy Muslim must join prayers in a mosque. We hope that, if we pray hard, Allah will save us from the coronavirus," he added.

### 'We must accept it'

The top Islamic organization in Indonesia's conservative Aceh province also publicly bucked a national order to stay at home. Several thousand worshippers attended evening prayers Thursday at the biggest mosque in the region's capital Banda Aceh, though crowds were smaller than usual. The threat of large religious gatherings has been highlighted in recent weeks by waves of infections in Asia linked to separate, massive Islamic congregations in Malaysia, Pakistan and India.

The COVID-19 death tolls across the Middle East and Asia have been lower than in Europe and the United States but are rising steadily, sparking fears the virus may overwhelm often underfunded healthcare systems. To limit exposure, the World Health Organization has

urged countries to "stop large numbers of people gathering" in places associated with Ramadan activities, such as entertainment venues, markets and shops.

Mohamad Shukri Mohamad, the top Islamic cleric in the conservative Malaysian state of Kelantan, planned to skip public prayers and family meals - even if it meant not seeing his six children and 18 grandchildren. "This is the first time in my life that I've been unable to go to the mosque," he told AFP. "But we must accept it and obey the rules of social distancing to protect our lives."

### 'Sinful'

The restrictions have hit businesses hard, including retailers who would normally be preparing for the Ramadan rush. This year many Muslims are saving their money for masks, gloves and other COVID-19 protective gear. In Lebanon, the threat of the virus and a severe economic crisis have put a damper on Ramadan festivities, with the streets in the capital Beirut largely empty. "Sales will drop by more than 75 percent compared to previous years," predicted Samer Hallab, a sweetshop owner in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, famous for its Ramadan desserts.

Hallab said his business has taken a hit as the crisis has made sweets a luxury and the lockdown prevents large nighttime gatherings. Hardliners across Islamic nations have rejected some online suggestions by Muslims that they should be exempt from fasting this year owing to the pandemic, insisting that while social distancing was necessary, the virus did not stop them from observing the rules of Ramadan from home.

Still, many have considered skipping the daytime fast over fears it could weaken their immune system. "It would be sinful to miss it because fasting is mandatory," said Indonesian bank employee Amalia Nur Istigfarin. "So I'll try other things to boost my immune system like exercise and taking vitamin C," she added. — AFP

happened years ago," said Adam Coogler, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Division at Human Rights Watch. "There's nothing now standing in the way of Saudi Arabia reforming its unfair judicial system."

Meanwhile, prominent Saudi Arabian rights activist Abdullah Al-Hamid, imprisoned since 2013, died on Thursday, activists and a source close to him told Reuters. Hamid, 69, died in the King Saud Medical City in Riyadh, having suffered a stroke on April 9 in prison, London-based Saudi rights group ALQST told Reuters. The news was confirmed by a close friend of Hamid's who asked to remain anonymous owing to the sensitivity of the matter.

Hamid was one of the 11 founding members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA). The group was disbanded in 2013 and all of its members eventually sentenced by Saudi courts on charges relating to its activities. Hamid was arrested seven times, the last time in 2013, along with another founding member of ACPRA. He was sentenced in 2013 to 11 years in prison on charges including breaking allegiance to the ruler, questioning the integrity of officials, seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations, and instigating international organizations against the kingdom.

The Saudi government media office did not immediately respond to a detailed written request for comment. Hamid was often referred to by intellectuals and opposition figures as the father of the kingdom's reformists. Sweden-based Right Livelihood Foundation in 2018 awarded him the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the alternative Nobel Prize, along with fellow activists Mohammad Fahad Al-Qatani and Waleed Abu Al-Khair. — Agencies

## Inject disinfectant? Trump's medical claims baffle nation

WASHINGTON: Top White House coronavirus advisor Deborah Birx shrank in horror and around the nation comedians sharpened their pens: President Donald Trump had just asked if virus victims couldn't be injected with disinfectant. Even as a new poll shows most Americans wish the former real estate magnate would leave science to the experts, Trump on Thursday evening hit a new high in the annals of amateur presidential doctoring.

Encouraged by tentative findings that summer weather may dampen the novel coronavirus, Trump used his daily live national press briefing to ask whether light could become a medical treatment. "Supposing we hit the body with a tremendous - whether it's ultraviolet or just very powerful light," Trump said. "Supposing you brought the light inside the body, which you can do either through the skin or in some other way?"

Birx and another government medical expert looked on warily. The president wasn't finished. "Then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks (the virus) out in a minute. One minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning? Because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs."

Birx winced and turned her eyes from the president to the floor. Trump sought to walk back his comments Friday saying he'd been talking "sarcastically" to the journalists, but in fact he was clearly addressing the government officials and there was no sign of sarcasm in his tone. After 24 hours of controversy, the president attended a short media briefing Friday evening but left without taking any questions - a rarity.

### Seeking silver bullet

The novel coronavirus has already killed more than 50,000 Americans, trashed the economy and thrown Trump's previously strong march to reelection this November into jeopardy. With some predicting a need for drawn-out social distancing and only a slow return to economic health, Trump appears to be in search of a silver bullet. For weeks he has aggressively pushed for use of the malaria treatments chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine against the novel coronavirus, even if evidence for their effectiveness is flimsy at best.

Rick Bright, who until this week was head of the US agency trying to develop a real vaccine, says he was fired because he opposed the "misguided" chloroquine crusade. Now the government's preliminary findings on the effects of sunlight and the approaching summer season have Trump excited. Where the unorthodox idea for sanitizers comes from is less clear - although the briefing did touch upon the effects of disinfectant chemicals. — AFP

## India doctors fight to save sight of raped 7-year-old

NEW DELHI: Doctors in India battled Friday to save the sight of a seven-year-old girl who was raped and then had her eyes damaged so she could not identify her attacker, police said. Police have arrested a 21-year-old man over the assault in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. The child was lured into an abandoned house while playing with friends on Wednesday night, senior police official Hemant Chauhan told AFP. She was found there with her hands tied and severe injuries to her eyes.

The suspect, who lived nearby and was arrested Thursday, has admitted to the crime. Chauhan said. "The accused pressed his fingers very hard into the girl's eyes. Doctors are trying their best to save the eyes. We are hopeful," Chauhan said. Swati Maliwal, head of the Delhi Commission for Women, called the attack "vile and disgusting". "I demand strongest punishment against these monsters," Maliwal said on Twitter.

The attack came after four men were hanged last month for a notorious 2012 Delhi gang rape. That case unleashed public anger over rampant sexual violence against women in India, and the introduction of tough new laws to punish rapists. Nearly 34,000 rapes were reported in India in 2018, according to official data. Madhya Pradesh had the highest number of any state with 6,500. But the figures are considered the tip of the iceberg, with many more victims too scared to come forward. — AFP

## Saudi to end flogging; leading activist dies

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is ending flogging as a form of punishment, according to a document from the kingdom's top court seen by Reuters on Friday. The decision by the General Commission for the Supreme Court, taken sometime this month, will see the punishment replaced by prison sentences or fines, or a mixture of both. "The decision is an extension of the human rights reforms introduced under the direction of King Salman and the direct supervision of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman," the document said.

Flogging has been applied to punish a variety of crimes in Saudi Arabia. Without a codified system of law to go with the texts making up sharia, or Islamic law, individual judges have the latitude to interpret religious texts and come up with their own sentences. Rights groups have documented past cases in which Saudi judges have sentenced criminals to flogging for a range of offences, including public intoxication and harassment.

"This reform is a momentous step forward in Saudi Arabia's human rights agenda, and merely one of many recent reforms in the Kingdom," the president of the state-backed Human Rights Commission (HRC) Awwad Alawwad told Reuters. Other forms of corporal punishment, such as amputation for theft or beheading for murder and terrorism offences, have not yet been outlawed. "This is a welcome change but it should have

## International

# Coronavirus imperils Ramadan meals, assistance in Gaza Strip

## Many Gazans are still getting into the Ramadan spirit

**GAZA CITY:** The holy month of Ramadan is a time for giving, with mosques and charities feeding thousands, but coronavirus has left many in the Gaza Strip wondering how they will manage this year. "The markets and mosques are closed. The good people who give us money or aid each Ramadan are facing a tough situation," said 47-year-old Palestinian Salah Jibril, who is unemployed. He and his wife live with their six children in a cramped two-bedroom flat on the outskirts of Gaza City.

He said his family normally counted on using the assistance they received during Ramadan to help them throughout the rest of the year. "This is the hardest Ramadan we have faced. We don't know how we will cope," he added. So far, there have been 17 officially declared cases of coronavirus in the Gaza Strip, an enclave of roughly two million people. That's partly due to rapid measures taken by the local government, run by Islamist group Hamas, which has announced all mosques will remain closed throughout the holy month.

Large public prayer gatherings will be banned, with people told to stay at home. Gaza's population is almost exclusively Muslim. During Ramadan, the faithful refrain from consuming food and even water during the day, breaking their fast at sunset with family and in large groups. Mosques and other charitable organizations feed thousands of poor people during the month, while individuals often

give large sums of money to help the impoverished - a donation known as zakat.

But this year in the strip, large public meals are banned and no concrete announcements have been made about alternate arrangements. Donations are expected to be down due to the global economic crisis brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. Hamas announced this week it was giving \$100 to 5,000 poor families in the strip ahead of Ramadan. Jibril's was not among them. He receives around 1,800 shekels (\$500) every four months from the local ministry of social affairs. "It isn't enough to pay the electricity, water and gas bills, as well as the food and drinks, and medicine for when the kids are sick," he said.

The family has no detergents or sterilizers. A small bar of soap on a broken sink is all they have to keep their home clean.

Umm Mohammed, Jibril's wife, said she couldn't remember when they last had enough money to buy meat. "Corona(virus) is worse than a war," she said. Around 80 percent of the strip's residents rely on aid, according to the United Nations.

Fifty-year-old father of seven Abdullah Al-Omreen used to earn a meagre living selling fruit and vegetables in central Gaza, but is now unemployed. During Ramadan, "we receive alms from the rich and they also provide us meals daily. But this year the whole situation is different," he said. "It will be difficult for everyone. I am afraid no one

plans for a simplified respirator made with 3-D printed parts. It will soon be made freely available, allowing undeveloped countries without access to sophisticated equipment to make their own. "We are using everything that we can find open source and the help of a Tunisian engineer specialized in respirators," said Khalil Allouch, an engineering student on the local respirator project based in Tunis. "This crisis has shown us we can be more self-sufficient."

### Rebuild on this basis

Tunisia graduates thousands of doctors and engineers with internationally recognized qualifications annually. But with low salaries and few local opportunities, many emigrate. While Tunisian laboratories are struggling to keep up with COVID-19 testing, Tunisia was one of the first countries in the region to decode the local strain of the virus, a necessary step towards developing a vaccine.

The Pasteur Institute in Tunis is one of few African institutions leading research into a vaccine. "Other countries are in more advanced stages but that doesn't guarantee that we will have rapid access to vaccines," said Hechmi Louzir, director of the institute. "If we managed (to develop a vaccine), it would be extraordinary."

intimidation and press censorship emerging from his isolated fiefdom. "Once he understood the seriousness of the virus, he decided to fight it with characteristic excessive force, as usual employing harsh measures and intimidation," said Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, director of the Conflict Analysis and Prevention Centre and a longtime observer of Chechnya. "This is something he knows how to do," she said. "This is something he enjoys doing."

Kadyrov emerged as Chechnya's undisputed number one in the wake of the killing of his father Akhmad in a 2004 bomb attack in the Chechen capital Grozny. The Kremlin credits the now 43-year-old with bringing stability to the region after an Islamist insurgency that followed two post-Soviet wars. But rights groups say this has come at the expense of horrific abuses including extrajudicial murders and kidnappings.

### 'Bandits and killers'

When the pandemic hit Russia, videos circulated on social media of Chechen police patrolling streets and imposing a curfew with batons. Warnings rang out from mosques in the Muslim-majority republic of

tion centre in Damascus.

Fellow defendant Eyad Al-Gharib, 43, is accused of being an accomplice to crimes against humanity, having helped to arrest protesters and deliver them to Al-Khatib in the autumn of 2011. On the second day of the closely watched hearing, a police investigator told the court that both men had fled to Germany after deserting Syrian intelligence services to join the opposition. Both men had also admitted to their past links to Assad's regime when questioned by German authorities.

For 18 years, Raslan worked in the Syrian intelligence services, a German police officer called to the witness stand told the court. He had in fact approached the police himself to tell them about his past in February 2015, five months after he arrived in

to destroy Iranian boats that harass American ships in the Gulf. Iran and the United States have appeared to be on the brink of an all-out confrontation twice in the past year. Decades-old acrimony between the two sides worsened in 2018 when Trump unilaterally withdrew from a deal that gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

Tensions escalated further in January when a US air strike killed Qasem Soleimani, the top Iranian general who headed the Guards' foreign arm, the Quds Force. "We declare to the Americans that we are absolutely



**GAZA CITY:** A Palestinian muezzin reads the Holy Quran in an almost empty mosque on the first Friday prayers of the holy fasting month of Ramadan as mass prayers are suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

will give us anything."

The coronavirus crisis has increased calls for Israel to lift its crippling, almost 13-year-long blockade of the enclave that it insists is necessary to isolate Hamas. The Islamist group has fought three wars with Israel since 2008. The mood might be dampened, but many Gazans are still getting

into the Ramadan spirit, putting up decorations on the front of their homes. "Despite the difficult economic situation due to the coronavirus, we decorate our homes with Ramadan lanterns," said Moeen Abbas, owner of an ice cream shop. "We want our children to feel the atmosphere of the holy month." —AFP

## Tunisia hopes novel methods will aid fight

**TUNIS:** The feared impact of coronavirus on Tunisia's fragile public health system has provoked a flurry of innovation from robotics to digitalization efforts to bolster the North African country's pandemic response. The government has even turned to students for help, asking the engineering school in Sousse, south of the capital Tunis, to task its students with designing a locally made ventilator as their end-of-year project.

Ventilators are crucial for treating critically ill COVID-19 patients, but as in many countries, Tunisia's poorly equipped hospitals lack sufficient numbers of the devices. Costs and delivery times for ventilators have increased dramatically. "Students, teachers and doctors have come up with a functioning prototype," said Aref Meddeb, the school's director. "This is the first time these machines have been made in Tunisia. It shows that there is real potential here."

Other Tunisian researchers have developed

## Kadyrov's strategy against virus - fear and threats

**MOSCOW:** Elena Milashina had received death threats before. But they were never so direct or brazen. The erratic and iron-fisted leader of Chechnya in southern Russia, unhappy with her journalism about the coronavirus, put out an unambiguous call for violence against the reporter on social media this month. Ramzan Kadyrov "was direct in saying what he was going to do with me - and how. This was the first time he said it this way, so concretely," Milashina, 42, told AFP. "If the threat was real... I wouldn't be able to secure my life by taking any measures. It's not possible."

Kadyrov's response to the coronavirus pandemic is hardening his reputation as a strongman intolerant of dissent or criticism, with fresh allegations of police

## Syrian 'torturers' switched sides, German court hears

**KOBLENZ, Germany:** The main defendant in the first trial on state-sponsored torture in Syria sought police protection in Germany because he felt threatened by Bashar Al-Assad's intelligence service after he switched sides, a German court was told on Friday. Anwar Raslan, 57, is in the docks charged with overseeing the murder of 58 people and the torture of 4,000 others while in charge of the Al-Khatib deten-

## Iran Guards vow 'decisive response' after Trump threat

**TEHRAN:** Iran's Revolutionary Guards chief on Thursday warned the US of a "decisive response" after President Donald Trump said he ordered the US Navy



**ARIANA, Tunisia:** Medical staff accompany a woman (center) who was healed from COVID-19 after having spent more than a month in a coma, upon her discharge from the hospital on Friday. —AFP

On the diagnostic side, Tunis engineering school Insat is working on an artificial intelligence program to evaluate the probability of infection based on an X-ray of the lungs. "The crisis has exposed us," Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh admitted on television, but it has also "revealed solid competence" in the fields of information technology and artificial intelligence. "After coronavirus we will rebuild on this basis," he said. —AFP

punishments for breaking quarantine and not wearing protective equipment outside. The republic has registered 347 coronavirus cases and six deaths but observers fear the figure is higher. Russia as a whole now has more than 60,000 cases and over 550 deaths.

Some of Kadyrov's responses to the crisis reflected his usual, unpredictable style. When Chechens complained of hairdressers being closed, he appeared on video with his hair shorn, saying with a big smile: "All our beauty salons are closed so, like our ancestors did, I decided to shave my head!" But there was menace along with the bluster. Kadyrov has said that people who break quarantine should be "killed," and likened Chechens who do not self-isolate and infect others to "terrorists" who should be buried in pits. —AFP



**Ramzan Kadyrov**

Germany. He felt "threatened by Syrian secret service agents," said the investigator, adding that Raslan said he had joined the Syrian opposition in exile after deserting the regime. That triggered German investigators' interest on his past.

### 'A stark warning'

Interrogated twice by criminal police, he provided "vast and varied information" about what he did, the court heard. He explained how within his division 251 where he was promoted to "the highest rank" in January 2011, soldiers began carrying out arbitrary arrests, the investigator said. "He said that interrogations were carried out with violence," said the officer, detailing various torture methods practiced in the prison. —AFP

determined and serious... and that all action will be met with a decisive response that will be efficient and quick," Major General Hossein Salami said. "We have also ordered our naval units to target (US boats and forces) if they try to endanger the safety of our ships or boats of war."

The latest confrontation between the arch-foes came after the United States accused Iran of harassing its ships in the Gulf last week. Trump took to Twitter on Wednesday as the Guards said they had launched the Islamic republic's first military satellite. The US presi-

## Virus surges in Djibouti as people ignore measures

**DJIBOUTI:** Djibouti has seen a rapid spike in coronavirus cases, with the Horn of Africa nation now recording the highest prevalence on the continent as the population largely ignores measures imposed by authorities. The tiny but strategically important country that hosts major US and French military bases has recorded 999 positive cases - small on a global scale, but the highest in East Africa. Two people have died.

This is largely due to testing. Djibouti, with a population of around one million, has conducted more than 11,000 tests - a similar number to neighboring Ethiopia, which has more than 100 million people. But more alarming than the figure itself is the runaway rate of multiplication: in just two weeks, Djibouti has recorded a seven-fold increase in cases. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday said that with 98.6 cases per 100,000 people, Djibouti has the highest prevalence on the continent.

Authorities have conceded the virus has not been successfully contained since a nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 23, when Djibouti had just two recorded cases of COVID-19. "The epidemic is getting worse," the health ministry said last week. The inability to control the outbreak has irritated Djibouti's powerful President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has ruled since succeeding his uncle in 1999, and is not bound by term limits.

"The confinement has not been respected by everyone, and unfortunately many of our compatriots still take this disease lightly," Guelleh said in a televised address to the nation this week. "You continue to circulate, not observing minimum distances, not isolating yourselves, and spreading the disease."

### Lockdown ignored

As the pandemic swept the globe, Djibouti - which the democracy advocacy group Freedom House ranked "not free" on its 2020 index measuring political rights and civil liberties - ordered its citizens to remain home. Only those working in essential industries were allowed outside, and public transport was banned to curtail movement. The small nation wedged between Somalia and Eritrea, and landlocked Ethiopia's gateway to the coastline, also closed its borders as well as schools, places of worship and all but the most necessary shops.

But crowds continue to throng the capital city and few wear masks or are stopped by police or soldiers on patrol, an AFP journalist said. No health measures were witnessed at busy markets selling fruit, vegetables and qat, a chewed narcotic leaf popular in the region. "If behavior doesn't change I will take even tougher measures," said Guelleh, who has crushed past rallies against his rule and curbed Djibouti's free press, civil society and political opposition. "This could go as far as a curfew, which would be the only way to stop the spread of this virus." —AFP

dent said he had "instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea."

On Thursday, France condemned Iran's satellite launch, calling it a "worrying development". Iran must cease "all activity linked to the development of ballistic missiles designed to be capable of carrying nuclear weapons, including space launchers," said a spokesperson for the French foreign ministry. Iran meanwhile summoned the Swiss ambassador to Tehran, who represents US interests in the Islamic republic, state media said. —AFP

## International

# Coronavirus, the knockout punch for multilateralism?

## COVID-19 heralds a new chapter in US, China rivalry

**PARIS:** The coronavirus pandemic blindsided international organizations, prompted individual states to unilaterally strike out alone and heralded a new chapter in the 21st century's chief geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China. In the post-COVID-19 era, will multilateralism be dead? Regional and international organizations from the European Union to the United Nations have not managed to muster a coordinated response to the pandemic, while even economic organizations like OPEC have failed to halt the slide on markets. The United States, meanwhile, is halting payments to the UN's World Health Organization (WHO), the only body equipped to deal with a health emergency that knows no borders.

This week, France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, a veteran politician known to prefer backstage diplomacy to grand public statements, emerged to give a chillingly stark warning on the global order. "My fear is that the world afterwards will be very much like the one before, only worse," he said in an interview with French daily *Le Monde*. He warned that the pandemic marked a new stage in the "already longstanding challenge to multilateralism," pointing to how major players were "backing out of their political commitments."

### 'Return to sovereignty'

The era of multilateralism dates to the aftermath of World War I, when the United States spearheaded the 1920 foundation of the League of Nations, the precursor of the United Nations. The European common market, which would later become the European Union, was then set up in the 1950s in the wake of World War II. Le Drian warned that under Trump, the US was now unsure about playing its global leadership role, making

collective action difficult-providing an opportunity for China to step into the breach. And he urged Europe to take on a more prominent role. "Europe must become geopolitical and shoulder its responsibilities at the international level," he told *Le Monde*.

Europe must "find its destiny as a leader", he added, and no longer "depend on the outside." The crisis, described by many governments and groups as the worst since World War II, has led many states to put self-interest first and relegate the common good to second place. "We are in a period where we are seeing a return to sovereignty, and the crisis will surely prompt states to behave in an even more sovereign way," Zaki Laidi, a professor at the Sciences Po university in Paris said.

### Flaring tensions

Even the UN Security Council, which has been the fulcrum of the multilateral system for the last decades, has been hamstrung by growing discord. "The optimistic version was that we were going to take advantage of the situation by rebuilding multilateralism in a more modern way," said Regine Perron, a historian at Cergy-Pontoise University outside Paris, and author of a history of multilateralism since 1918. "The ideal would be that regional entities (like the European Union) take up the baton" from larger organizations, she said.

In his interview, Le Drian also sounded alarm over NATO, whose key member Turkey has purchased a Russian air defense system and had "Syrian proxies transferred" to take part in the conflict in Libya-despite international calls for a cease-fire. In an illustration of the fractured relationship between two nominal allies, the Turkish foreign ministry accused Le Drian of "trying to



ACAPULCO: A corpse of a homeless man, suspected of having the COVID-19 coronavirus, is removed by forensic workers in Acapulco, Mexico. — AFP

cover up the desperate situation that France is facing due to the coronavirus crisis."

### Leadership void

The crisis has also exacerbated the rivalry between China and the US, both permanent UN Security Council members, with Trump accusing Beijing of being to blame for the spread of the virus. But several analysts now say they fear a critical power vacuum, with the two leading global powers wary-and most likely incapable-of assuming a world leadership role. "China is not in a situation of being able to show global leadership but it

is also not certain that the United States is capable of doing this," Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former chief of the International Monetary Fund, wrote for France's *Politique Internationale* journal.

Former British prime minister Gordon Brown, who led the coordinated G20 response to the 2008 financial crisis, has warned that more, not less, multilateralism was needed to fight the coronavirus pandemic. "It needs global action and not simply national action. We've had too much of America first, India first, China first," he told the BBC last month. "We are finding that we are connected, whether you like it or not." — AFP

## Shooter began with assault on girlfriend

**OTTAWA:** The worst mass shooting in Canada's history started with the suspect assaulting his girlfriend, and this may have been the "catalyst" for the 22 grisly slayings that followed, police said Friday. Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Superintendent Darren Campbell, at a news conference describing the 13-hour manhunt for the shooter, who also injured three people, said his motives are still under investigation. Canadians nationwide meanwhile paid tribute to the victims with a vigil that was held online because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The suspect's beating of his girlfriend, who managed to escape and hide in nearby woods and later informed police that her attacker wore a patrolman's uniform and drove a mock squad car, "could very well have been the catalyst to start the chain of events." "It was a significant assault," Campbell said, suggesting also that her escape may have further enraged the shooter, identified as 51-year-old dentist Gabriel Wortman.

Police previously described the girlfriend simply as "a key witness" who helped identify the armed suspect after she emerged from hiding Sunday morning, about nine hours into the shooting and arson spree. Thirteen victims had been identified by then in the quiet and sparsely populated Nova Scotia seaside community of Portapique where police set up a four-square-kilometre (1.5-square-mile) perimeter to try to contain the suspect. Overnight, Wortman may have fled the dimly lit area by driving through a field or, disguised as an RCMP officer, slipping past barricades, Campbell said. Going over the timeline, the police superintendent acknowledged a long gap after the first of three clusters of killings, which included a drive-by shooting of a woman walking on the side of the road, two motorists he'd pulled over and shot dead, and several people whose homes were set ablaze.

A total of 25 police units, including a dog team and a helicopter, had been deployed in the search of Portapique's dirt roads and brush, and a subsequent manhunt. "I can't imagine any more horrific set of circumstances when you're trying to search for someone that looks like you," Campbell said. This "obviously complicated things" and gave the suspect an "advantage" over police, the public and "every person that he encountered through the course of his rampage."

### Crossed paths with police

Surveillance videos showed Wortman had "come fairly close to some of our officers and did not engage them." Two officers also fired shots outside a fire station where evacuees were sent, reportedly believing that the shooter posing as a policeman was inside. Authorities noted that they had learned of three "plated" Ford Taurus cars owned by the suspect - the same make and model as RCMP squad cars - but were not initially aware of a fourth made to look like a squad car and driven in the attacks.

Investigators said they had uncovered where Wortman purchased the lightbar for the vehicle and where he may have sourced its decals, but did not provide further detail. His guns, police said, were acquired in Canada and the United States. He also took the sidearm and magazines off a veteran policewoman, Constable Heidi Stevenson, after ramming head-on into her car and shooting her dead. — AFP

## Anguish in Brazil ICU units overwhelmed by coronavirus

**SAO PAULO:** Frederic Lima arrived at the already overwhelmed Emilio Ribas hospital in Sao Paulo with coronavirus symptoms. Less than 12 hours later a doctor told the 32-year-old's aunt: "We did everything possible." It's become an all too familiar sight for Dr Fernanda Gulinelli, who treated Lima. She signs as many death certificates as release forms in the intensive care unit (ICU) at Emilio Ribas, the state's first public hospital to be pushed to breaking point by the coronavirus.

In Brazil there have been more than 3,300 deaths from COVID-19, with hardest-hit Sao Paulo state home to one-third of the country's cases. "Usually we have more discharges than deaths outside of the pandemic, but with the seriousness of these patients we have days with more deaths than discharges," said Gulinelli. Brazil still hasn't reached the apex of its outbreak, which the health ministry predicts will not occur until May.

Apart from a 22-year-old suffering from tuberculosis, all the patients at the Emilio Ribas ICU, aged



PARANA: View of images of health workers combating the COVID-19 coronavirus projected by the CCB1 Islamic Cultural Center on the roof of the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque in Foz do Iguacu, Brazil. — AFP

from 37 to 66, are either confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19, said Jaques Sztajnbock, a medical supervisor at the unit. The 54-year-old says that this disease is different from any other he's come across in his 28 years at Emilio Ribas. Now "we always have 100 percent occupancy because when one person leaves there are 100 requests" to come in, said Sztajnbock.

Beds only become available when an existing patient either recovers, or dies. For Sztajnbock,



NEW YORK: Flowers left by the community are placed near to the morgue refrigerated trailers at the Wyckoff Heights Medical Center in the Brooklyn borough, New York City - the epicenter of the coronavirus for US has had more than 141,235 confirmed cases. — AFP

in Atlanta Friday. "Believe in Science, Not Kemp," said a sign displayed by a person who honked repeatedly while driving past the governor's mansion. "Stay Home, Stay Safe," read another. Eden Lio, a restaurant hostess and bookbinder who lost both her jobs in the crisis, was nonetheless participating in the rolling protest.

"We're going to get more sick if we open today," the 20-year-old said through her cloth mask. "We're not ready at all." Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms echoed that sentiment and urged residents of the capital city to stay home. With the state's infection numbers and deaths rising, she said it was "irresponsible" to allow businesses to open now. "There is nothing essential about going to a bowling alley or giving a manicure in the middle of a pandemic," she told ABC News in a denunciation of Kemp's order.

Some in Atlanta, however, cherished the opportunity to re-engage with society. "I actually had a great time, a beaming Tili Banks, 41, said as she and a friend emerged from one of the few bowling allies that opened Friday. "I was just so happy to be out that I didn't even realize I had these people's bowling shoes on when I walked outside," she said. The United States is the country hardest-hit by the virus, with more than 890,000 confirmed cases and 51,017 deaths as of late Friday, according to a toll by Johns Hopkins University.

Georgia's bid to jumpstart thousands of teetering businesses is the most aggressive return-to-normalcy effort in the nation. — AFP

what's different about COVID-19 is "the huge number of cases" and that it's "a very serious disease that affects various organs and requires weeks of intensive care." The problem is that "you need to maintain the capacity to treat the five percent (of cases) that according to statistics need intensive care. No country has that many intensive care beds and Brazil is no exception," he said.

### 'We did everything'

After he was admitted, Lima was put on a ventilator but doctors couldn't increase his oxygen levels. Even after one hour of CPR they were unable to revive him. "You question whether you really did everything. I know we did everything but it affects you a lot. Since he stopped (breathing) I've felt like I was run over," said Gulinelli.

Lima was a doctor himself, originally from the north, working in the ICU of another public hospital. He lived alone and started feeling symptoms last week but didn't tell his aunt Rosa da Rocha, one of his few family members in Sao Paulo. "I don't know why he didn't say anything, maybe because he was young. He didn't have any health problems, he exercised, he was young, he had his whole life in front of him," said Da Rocha minutes after receiving the bad news. Lima had been taken to the ICU as soon as he arrived at hospital. Luckily, there was a spare bed. — AFP

## Georgia's Saakashvili eyes Ukraine political comeback

**KIEV:** Former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili said Friday he wants to help steer Ukraine through an economic crisis as new deputy prime minister but his plans sparked controversy both in Kiev and his native Georgia. President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has vowed to secure Western investment and rid the country of corruption, has proposed appointing Saakashvili as deputy prime minister in charge of reforms after restoring his Ukrainian citizenship last year.

The candidacy of the 52-year-old - who also served as governor of a key Ukrainian region - must now be approved by parliament. "Ukraine is entering an economic storm. We have to make unconventional decisions in order to save the Ukrainian economy," Saakashvili told reporters in Kiev. "The president has entrusted me with conducting negotiations with the International Monetary Fund. Ukraine needs much more aid than it is receiving now," he added. Saakashvili said lawmakers were expected to vote on his appointment next Thursday.

### New chapter

Saakashvili's appointment would come at a particularly difficult time for Ukraine, with observers warning that the shocks from the coronavirus pandemic may lead the country's economy to shrink by up to 10 percent this year. Zelensky's government has sought to unlock an \$8 billion loan from the IMF and negotiate an end to a six-year separatist conflict.

Observers were divided over the politician's return, with some saying he would be instrumental in helping Zelensky reform Ukraine, while others warning that a new Saakashvili stint would spell trouble. "I think he will eclipse everyone," a senior government member said. Yegor Sobolev, a former lawmaker who closely worked with Saakashvili, said his "enormous political experience" could help rid the country of corruption and red tape.

"Most of state functions and institutions are in a catastrophic state so people like Saakashvili are needed," he said. — AFP



## Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

**10** In virus-hit Cuba, the struggle goes on to get food on the table**11** Ooredoo launches ProPing online gaming tournament today with Blink**11** US meat giant shutter beef plant for testing

DOHA: In this file photo, travellers wearing face masks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, check their flights on information displays at Hamad International Airport in the Qatari capital Doha. Air traffic in the Middle East and North Africa is set to plummet by more than half this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, a global aviation body said. — AFP

# Mideast air traffic to dive by half: IATA

## Mideast, African governments failing to protect airlines

DUBAI: Air traffic in the Middle East and North Africa is set to plummet by more than half this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, a global aviation body said. "Airlines in the Middle East continue to be battered by the impact of COVID-19," said Muhammad Albakri of the International Air Transport Association. "Passenger traffic has all but ground to a halt and revenue streams have evaporated."

Albakri, the IATA's vice-president for Africa and the Middle East said traffic would fall by at least 51 percent compared to last year.

MENA airlines' revenues slashed by \$24.5 billion, he added. Almost all the MENA region's 19 state-owned airlines and a dozen private carriers have been grounded amid strict measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus, including halting air traffic. A few airlines have continued or resumed limited operations, including Qatar Airways, Emirates Airline and Etihad.

The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN agency, said Wednesday that the pandemic could mean 1.2 billion fewer air passengers worldwide by September. The IATA, an industry association, said the Middle East's aviation shutdown threatens some 1.2 million jobs — 300,000 more than a previous estimate three weeks ago and half the total jobs in the industry.

The estimates are based on a scenario that severe travel restrictions will last three months, before being gradually lifted for domestic flights, followed by regional and intercontinental services.

To minimize the damage to MENA economies, IATA urged governments to offer airlines direct financial support, loans and tax relief. The body said



### Lufthansa seeks state aid to secure 'solvency'

it is meeting virtually this week with governments and airlines to ensure that the sector is ready to resume operations when the pandemic is contained. "Starting up will be complicated. We need to make sure that the system is ready, have a clear vision of what is needed for a safe travel experience," Albakri said. Middle Eastern and African governments are

failing to take the action required to protect their airlines from the economic crisis caused by the new coronavirus pandemic, he said.

Several states have stepped in to help their airlines that have seen travel demand decimated by the global outbreak, such as the United States, Singapore and Australia, though few in the Middle East have made their intentions clear. IATA, which represents 290 global airlines, has been consulting with African and Middle Eastern governments, regulators and stakeholders on how to revive air travel as some countries start to slowly ease lockdowns.

"We have not seen the desired movements and decisions of governments and decision makers to ... put on the table the economic stimulation packages and the rescue packages, financial packages necessary to keep the airlines in the region alive," Albakri said on a call with reporters.

IATA wants to see Middle Eastern governments "prioritize aviation and announce specific rescue measures for the airlines and aviation industry in line with other nations," he said.

The industry body also warned African airlines were on the verge of collapse unless governments urgently stepped in. "Air Mauritius has entered voluntary administration, South African Airways and SA Express are in business rescue, other distressed

carriers have placed staff on unpaid leave or signalled their intention to cut jobs. More airlines will follow if urgent financial relief is not provided," Albakri said.

German airline giant Lufthansa said the group was in "intensive negotiations with the governments of its home countries... to sustainably secure the group's solvency", as it reported a 1.2-billion-euro operating loss in the first quarter. "The business outlook, existing multi-billion liabilities... and refunds of cancelled tickets as well as upcoming repayments of financial liabilities" will make state bailouts indispensable, the group said in a statement. But bosses are "confident" that talks with national capitals—including in the home countries of subsidiaries Brussels and Austrian Airlines and Swiss—"will lead to a successful conclusion".

Preliminary results showed Lufthansa's revenues fell 18 percent year-on-year in January-March, to 6.4 billion euros (\$6.9 billion). In March alone, sales fell almost 50 percent, or 1.4 billion euros. On top of the 1.2-billion-euro plunge in adjusted operating profit before interest and taxes (EBIT), Lufthansa "expects crisis-related asset impairments and the negative development of the value of fuel hedges to have a further significant negative impact" on first-quarter profits, it added. — Agencies

## Oil surges towards positive finish after torrid week

SINGAPORE: US oil surged Friday and headed for a positive finish to a torrid week that saw prices drop below zero, as output cuts and US-Iran tensions lifted coronavirus-ravaged markets.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for June delivery was up 8.1 percent at \$17.85 in afternoon Asian trade, after settling 20 percent higher on Thursday. International benchmark Brent for June was changing hands at \$22.55 a barrel, up 5.7 percent.

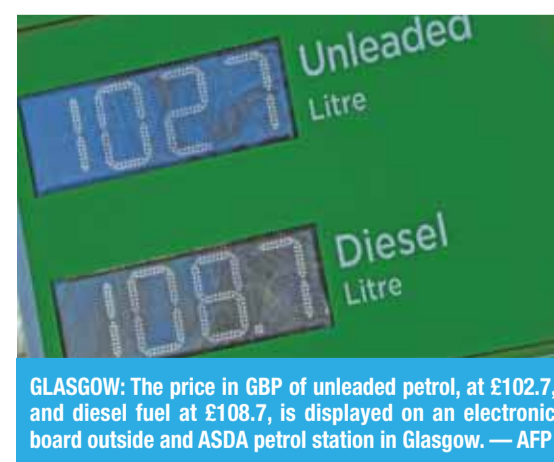
Oil prices have been hit hard as the virus pandemic strangles demand owing to lockdowns and travel restrictions, with US crude falling into negative territory for the first time Monday as storage space ran low. Earlier this month, exporting group OPEC and its partners agreed to cut output by almost 10 million barrels a day from May to shore up markets, bringing an end to a Saudi-Russia

price war. ANZ said there were signs that oil producers had started cutting production, helping push prices up.

"Kuwait said that it had already started cutting production ahead of the planned 1 May start of the recent OPEC+ supply agreement. Algeria also told OPEC it would be cutting immediately," the bank said in a note. There were also signs US output is beginning to fall—the Energy Information Administration said American crude production fell slightly to 12.2 million barrels per day last week.

In addition, tensions in the crude-rich Middle East gave a boost to markets. After President Donald Trump ordered the US Navy to destroy any Iranian boats that harass American ships in the Gulf, the Islamic Republic's Revolutionary Guards warned Thursday of a "decisive response". The Gulf is a major gateway for oil to reach international markets, and spikes in US-Iran tensions typically drive prices higher.

Even though prices are stabilizing, they remain at multi-year lows and analysts say that demand needs to pick up again for them to truly recover. AxiCorp global market strategist Stephen Innes said it was "probably rational to temper expectations as it's going to take more than a celestial



GLASGOW: The price in GBP of unleaded petrol, at £102.7, and diesel fuel at £108.7, is displayed on an electronic board outside ASDA petrol station in Glasgow. — AFP

alignment to get WTI to stick above \$15 per barrel this month, let alone super tack to \$20".

Meanwhile, the price of Kuwaiti oil edged down by 54 cents to \$14.11 per barrel Friday, after hovering around \$14.65 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, the price of the Brent crude went up by 11 cents to \$21.44 per barrel, and the West Texas Intermediate went up 44 cents to \$16.94 pb. — Agencies

## US mulls taking equity stakes in energy firms

WASHINGTON: The US government is considering taking equity stakes in US energy companies as it seeks to help the nation's oil and gas sector amid the coronavirus outbreak, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Friday. President Donald Trump, speaking at a White House event with Mnuchin, said he wants to help industry and suggested the federal government could buy fuel for the country in advance as well as purchase airline tickets in advance.

"We're looking at a whole bunch of alternatives," Mnuchin said. "You can assume that's one of the alternatives, but there's many of them," Mnuchin said, referring to possible equity stakes.

The oil sector has been hit hard by a dramatic drop in demand as the coronavirus has effectively shut down economies around the globe. "The energy business is very important to me, and we're going to build it up." — Reuters

## Business

# In virus-hit Cuba, the struggle to get food on the dinner table

## Virus crisis has made finding food a veritable scavenger hunt

HAVANA: Yadira types out a message to her WhatsApp group, with the name of a Havana store where a supply of chicken has just arrived. Cuba already suffered from food shortages, but the coronavirus crisis has made finding food for the dinner table a veritable scavenger hunt, with supply chains in disarray.

"We get up early in the morning and, like little ants, we scurry back home before 6:00 pm" to respect anti-virus safety guidelines, says retiree Angela Martinez. The 55-year-old wears a face mask when she does her shopping. Such coverings are required now in public places. So far, Cuba has recorded more than 1,200 coronavirus cases and 43 deaths. Schools and borders are closed, and all public transport is suspended. Most people are asked to work from home.

The health situation appears to be under control, at least for now. "We have not seen an explosion in the number of cases like in other countries," says Jose Moya, the local representative of the World Health Organization. "That speaks to the country's organizational strengths, because of its health care professionals," he adds. According to the WHO, Cuba has 82 doctors per 100,000 citizens—far more than in the United States, where the number is 32. In France, it's 26 per 100,000.

But the food situation is another story. Cuba imports 80 percent of what it eats—in 2019, that amounted in \$2 billion in food products. Most of that comes from Europe, Havana's top trade partner, but the continent has been hit hard by the pandemic, and those trade routes are disrupted.

Economy Minister Alejandro Gil admitted: "We must look for domestic solutions, as we don't know which foods our suppliers are going to stop making." A report from a Western embassy seen by AFP warned that "food export restrictions by some supplier nations" would "threaten supply chains" on the island. "Stockpiling will exacerbate the already numerous shortages in Cuba," it added.

### Where can I get rice?

In WhatsApp groups like the one Yadira belongs to, Cubans share details about sought-after products: rice, meat, even toothpaste. Those informal channels of communication do not keep lines from forming outside shops. Police and security forces try to ensure that shoppers practice social distancing. "The line is creeping ahead. I got here at 9:00 am and left at 4:00 pm. I bought every-

thing, as I can't come back again," one woman who identified herself as Matilde said on WhatsApp.

To prevent crowds from forming, only small shops are open; bigger supermarkets are closed. The government set up an online shopping portal in recent weeks, but it was difficult to access because of how slow internet service runs here. Every Cuban receives a monthly stock of supplies, which now includes disinfectant. But the food portion is not enough for most families.

### 'Not easy'

The pandemic has soured the overall economic outlook for Cuba, which was already far from stellar. Tourism, one of the primary sources of hard currency,



HAVANA: Policemen help organize people waiting in line to buy food in Havana amid the new coronavirus pandemic. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cubans must also overcome food shortages, in an island that imports almost everything and suffers the consequences of the US embargo and the delay in the reform of its socialist economy. — AFP

has come to an abrupt halt. Power consumption is up because so many people are staying at home. Of course, that means more frequent power cuts, and the government has asked people to limit their usage. For political analyst Jorge Gomez Barata, the coronavirus crisis on top of the ongoing US trade embargo means Cuba will be trying to boost its economy "in the worst conditions." Despite the formidable obstacles, Cubans say they believe they will get through this crisis. "It's like nothing we've ever

experienced. We are learning every day. It's not easy," admitted Roberto Sanchez, a 57-year-old agricultural engineer shopping in Havana.

Martinez added: "We are trying to find a solution with what we have." Residents are coming together—neighbors are making masks for each other, and helping each other to find food. "Yesterday, I was able to buy chicken thanks to you!" said another member of Yadira's WhatsApp group, after she sent her message. — AFP



## Supply chain remains in disarray

cy, has come to an abrupt halt. Power consumption is up because so many people are staying at home. Of course, that means more frequent power cuts, and the government has asked people to limit their usage. For political analyst Jorge Gomez Barata, the coronavirus crisis on top of the ongoing US trade embargo means Cuba will be trying to boost its economy "in the worst conditions." Despite the formidable obstacles, Cubans say they believe they will get through this crisis. "It's like nothing we've ever

## Showdown looms between Silicon Valley, US states

SAN FRANCISCO: US states promoting apps that could prove essential to ending the coronavirus lockdown may be headed for a showdown with the two Silicon Valley companies that control key software on 99 percent of smartphones over the collection of sensitive GPS location data.

Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google plan to release technology jointly in the coming weeks for digital contact tracing through Bluetooth sensors on phones. Public health authorities have determined that the technology is crucial to apps that will alert people when they have been close to people who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus. For contact tracing apps to work, however, millions of people must be willing to use them without fear their locations and other personal data is being tracked and stored.

Google and Apple have sought to build public trust by emphasizing that the changes they are making to Bluetooth to allow the tracing apps to work will not tap phones' GPS sensors, which privacy activists see as too intrusive. But the states pioneering the apps - North and South Dakota, and Utah - say allowing public health authorities to use GPS in tandem with Bluetooth is key to making the system viable. The Bluetooth technology will enable users to be notified if they crossed paths with a coronavirus carrier, but will not specify where the encounter happened, information crucial to authorities who want to identify hotspots for virus transmission and move fast to stop outbreaks.

Apple and Google said on Friday that they still have not decided how to proceed. "I would encourage them to go for the 'and' and not the 'or' solution," North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum said of Apple and Google in an interview late Thursday.

"During this new normal, there is a place for having solutions that protect privacy and enable more efficient contact tracing," said Burgum, himself a former software executive who sold a company to Microsoft Corp for more than \$1 billion in 2001.

### Apps at work

Anonymized GPS location data is already playing a key role in an early version of Care19, an app that about 40,000 people have signed up for in North and South Dakota. Authorities currently ask Care19 users to give them permission for timestamped GPS location data, which allows officials to manually call places where users could have spread the virus and ask for names and numbers of others who may have been there at the same time. This laborious process will no longer be necessary with the Bluetooth technology coming from Apple and Google, which will automatically catalog encounters between users and enable carriers to anonymously convey to others potentially infected that they should get tested. Without the changes the two companies are working on, iPhone users would have to keep their phone unlocked and app open at all times. Utah's Healthy Together contact tracing app, which launched on Wednesday, for now is using a workaround that only catalogs some encounters. — Reuters

## How long until major markets recover from COVID-19?

By Giles Coghlan

How long will it take for major markets (SP500, Dow, FTSE100 etc.) to recover from COVID-19 induced falls? The first thing to say is that no-one knows when markets will exactly recover from the present crisis. However, if we look back to the last global financial crisis in 2008/09 it took around 2 years for global indices to recover to pre-crisis levels. It is reasonable to assume a similar timeline this time. However, one key difference between the COVID-19 crisis and the global financial crisis is that COVID-19 is primarily a medical crisis. Therefore, if we find a medical solution we can expect a very fast recovery in the global indices. This is known as the 'V-recovery hope' and would fast track a global recovery in major indices across the world.

### Should investors close their shares out or ride out the crisis?

Those investors who have a longer-term outlook should not be overly concerned about the latest dip in the global indices. Taking a look at the previous two financial crises - the global financial crisis and the dot-com bubble - shows that US stocks have not, as yet, reached these low levels.

Of course, there is likely to be more falls in the global indices, but this at least does apply some context to our present situation. Investors with a longer-term outlook will be using these latest falls in prices to add to their positions while also being aware that further falls may be ahead.

### What challenges are there for Kuwait's stock market?

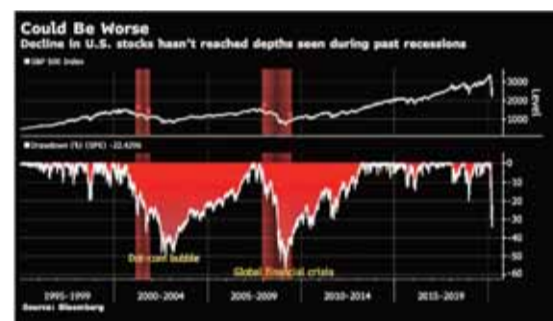
The Boursa Kuwait (MSM30) has fallen, like all major global indices, from above 6300 at the start of the year to 4797 as of April 20th. Like most GCC countries Kuwait's economy is influenced by oil prices. In the current crisis the main challenge, aside

## Facebook takes aim at Zoom with video chat upgrade

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Friday unveiled a new video chat service with virtual "rooms" where people can pop in to visit friends, aiming at users turning to the popular Zoom platform during the pandemic. Through the Facebook Messenger application, users will be able to start video call sessions that as many as 50 friends can join and linger in as long as they wish, even if they don't have Facebook accounts.

Unlike work video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, "Messenger Rooms" is tailored for socializing with friends and family whether it be birthdays, happy hours, book clubs or parent groups.

"This is designed to be more serendipitous and spontaneous," chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said while briefing AFP on Rooms. "I just keep a window open on my computer or phone and people who I normally wouldn't go out of my way to call just sort of drop by." "I feel like we are missing that in our



from the COVID-19 case growth, is the instability in the oil market dragging down growth prospects. With US oil spot price currently just above \$11 a barrel it has fallen to lows previously only seen in the gulf war crisis of 1998/1999.

### Which currencies will be the big winners and losers in the current crisis?

The Swiss franc and the Japanese yen are two safe-haven currencies. In times of market uncertainty, these two currencies actually gain in strength. Why? Simply because they are seen as relatively stable and safe currencies that investors can use to 'park' their money. So, if the COVID-19 crisis continues we can expect the Swiss franc (CHF) and the Japanese Yen (JPY) to gain in strength. In contrast, the higher-yielding 'beta' currencies such as the Australian dollar (AUD), New Zealand dollar (NZD) and the Canadian Dollar (CAD) tend to lose value during times of global uncertainty. Therefore, if COVID-19 gets worse we can expect weakness across these major commodity currencies.

### How will the latest oil developments impact Kuwait's oil export market?

The oil market has three main issues causing oil prices to fall. Firstly, the market is oversupplied with OPEC and the US is now able to pump more oil than can be used. Secondly, demand is down on COVID-19 shutdowns. Airplanes are grounded, cars are not moving and construction work is on pause. This all hinders the demand for oil. Thirdly, a dispute between Russia and Saudi has resulted in Saudi maximizing their production levels on April 1st to more than 12 million barrels per day in a kind of 'price-war'. At the time of writing, that rift between Russia and Saudi looks like it is being healed and that should bring stability into the oil market. However, the first two problems of oversupply and



lives right now," he added. The launch comes amid surging use of Zoom, which was designed as a business video platform, and other online chat services.

Facebook users will be able to create virtual rooms and decide who to invite to join, according to Zuckerberg. "I could be hanging out on a couch on the weekend and send out an invite to all my friends to come to a 'hanging-out-on-the-couch room,'" Zuckerberg said. Fun features include augmented-reality effects such as bunny ears and aliens, along with immersive fake backgrounds.

### Everyone invited

In an unusual step, people don't need Facebook accounts or apps to visit Messenger Rooms. "People can just send a link to their grandmother or

falling demand remain and will ensure lower oil prices for Oman's export market in the medium term, regardless of the outcome of the latest OPEC+ meeting and production cuts. However, once these short-term factors are relieved then it is not unreasonable to expect oil prices back into the \$40-60 a barrel range in 12 months' time.

### What's the currency pair most likely to see weakness in the next two months? (CAD/JPY)

Currencies are traded in pairs. If the COVID-19 crisis continues and most of the world remains shut down, then we can expect oil prices to continue to find sellers focused on the slowing demand for oil. As Canada's economy is heavily oil-dependent then this will result in Canadian dollar weakness. A slowing global growth prospect will result in Japanese Yen strength. Therefore, the currency pair situated to find weakness in a worsening COVID-19 crisis is the Canadian dollar and Japanese Yen pair which is traded as the CAD/JPY.

What is the single event - which investors should watch for - to turn this COVID-19 crisis around?

The single event to watch for in the COVID-19 crisis is not a financial headline, but a medical one. Any signs of a vaccine, existing medicine that can kill COVID-19 or an effective treatment will turn this crisis around overnight. At some point, a treatment will come, and when it does, it will also cure the struggling global indices and allow businesses to return to normal.

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whomever," Zuckerberg said. "You can tap on the link from anywhere and if you don't have the app it will open in your browser."

Facebook said it built in defenses to prevent unwanted guests from entering virtual rooms.

"There are tools to kick people out easily; lock rooms, or close them if things are going badly," Zuckerberg said. In the background, Facebook will make a priority of getting word of rooms to friends users show interest in engaging. Facebook does not view or listen to calls, and people who create rooms control who gets in, according to Messenger vice president Stan Chudnovsky.

Messenger Rooms was expected to be available to Facebook's nearly 2.5 billion users around the world in coming weeks. Use of video calls and conferencing has rocketed as people work, learn, and socialize remotely while staying home to avoid the coronavirus.

Many people have turned to Zoom, which has scrambled to stem security problems such as data hacking and harassment by individuals who crash sessions in what is referred to as "Zoombombing."

Video "presence" services from Facebook, Google, Microsoft and other technology firms have been ramping up capabilities and features to be the preferred platform. — AFP

## Business

# Ooredoo launches ProPing online gaming tournament today with Blink

## Internet bundles and exclusive gaming devices provided by FASTtelco and Blink

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, announced the launch of the ProPing Online Gaming Tournament, in collaboration with Blink Kuwait, the professional E-sport organizer, and leader in the PC and console gaming business in Kuwait. The tournament will take place virtually today and tomorrow: April 26 and 27. Gaming enthusiasts will be competing in the online game 'Call of Duty - Modern Warfare' from their homes. The tournament will consist of 32 teams made up to 128 players selected from an expected number of 1500 participants who will compete in side tournaments in a purely digital environment. Valuable prizes from Ooredoo, Blink and FASTtelco will be awarded to the winners who will be announced during the tournament.

In addition to the tournament, FASTtelco, a subsidiary of Ooredoo Kuwait and the only provider of

ProPing; which is a tailored-made internet service for pro-gamers is launching exclusive new sets of Pro Gaming PCs and gaming accessories bundles in cooperation with Blink, which can be purchased through FASTtelco's customer service center at 1886666.

FASTtelco will also be providing Shamel Home ProPing packages starting at KD 18 per month with tailor-made wireless and fixed internet bundle for pro-gamers, to provide an unparalleled gaming experience are available to be purchased through My Ooredoo App or the MyOoredoo application and the Company website Ooredoo.com.kw.

ProPing Online Gaming Tournament is aligned with the company's 'Be Safe. Be Home. Be Online' campaign, featuring an array of digital offers and services designed to support customers and to ensure they are well connected and informed during the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.



## NBK raises number of operating branches to 17

**KUWAIT:** Since the beginning of the health crises, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has committed to remaining at the service of its customers by providing its services without interruption through various channels that included 9 operational branches. NBK is now increasing the number of operational branches from 9 to 17.

These 17 branches will provide services during the Holy Month of Ramadan from 10 AM until 1 PM. Nine of these branches will serve individuals and Corporate Banking Customers and these comprise: Abdullah Al-Ahmad (previously head office), Cinema Al-Salmiya, Ahmed Al-Jaber, Sabah Al-Salem, Al-Andalus, Ahmadi, Hawalli, Saad Al-Abdullah and Al-Salam Mall - Salmiya. The rest of the branches will only serve individual customers and they are: Mishref, Kaifan, Surra, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Al-Rehab, Hadiya, Al-Daiya and Shamiya.

The bank is also taking precautionary measures to ensure the safety of customers and employees, and will be measuring the temperature of customers whom will also be asked to wear face masks and gloves before entering any of the operating branches. The number of customers allowed inside each branch is also limited,

while safe distances are mandated and supervised as per the preventative and health guidelines issued for social distancing and the safety of everyone.

Commenting on the expansion in the number of operating branches, Head of Local Branches at National Bank of Kuwait, Ghadeer Al-Awadhi, said: "Since the beginning of the global health crisis, we have endeavored to remain close to our customers by all means and provide them with all the support to meet their needs, while ensuring taking precautionary measures to facilitate the completion of banking transactions. We have therefore increased today the number of operating branches in order to serve our customers with the best banking services no matter the circumstances."



Ghadeer Al-Awadhi

Al-Awadhi added: "We are committed to satisfying the needs of our customers whether through our operating branches or other channels while abiding to the highest standards of security and safety within each branch in order to safeguard the safety of our employees and customers."

She encouraged customers to benefit from the easy and fast services that are available at their convenience and at any time of the day through NBK Mobile Banking and NBK Online Banking. Customers do not

need to visit the branch under the current circumstances thanks to these two services.

Al-Awadhi concluded by saying: "We hope everyone remains safe and healthy and that the current situation comes to an end at the earliest. We take this opportunity to also congratulate everyone on the arrival of the Holy Month of Ramadan, may God bless everyone."

The bank is also ensuring that customers who are outside of Kuwait continue to benefit from its banking services without interruption. Customers with an expiring NBK Credit or Debit Card within a month can call the dedicated numbers and request delivery of the renewed cards to them wherever they are in the world.

NBK continues to offer its banking solutions to customers through its various channels. They can manage their accounts and make transactions at their convenience and at any time with NBK Mobile Banking and NBK Online Banking. During this period as well, the bank continues to provide its banking services through the ITM located at Terminal 4 in Kuwait International Airport. NBK's ATMs and CDMs also remain at the service of customers across Kuwait thanks to a network of 327 ATMs, including more than 100 CDMs. Customers can also connect with NBK on its many platforms that include the NBK Contact Center and NBK WhatsApp at 1801801, as well as through its social media platforms where all inquiries are answered. The bank also provides the latest updates and guidelines relative to the current circumstances on the bank's social media platforms at nbkgroup.

## flydubai says thank you to you

**KUWAIT:** Dubai-based airline flydubai launched a video as a tribute to the frontline workers, its passengers across its network and the residents of the UAE for the role they are playing during these unprecedented times.

The video features content created by flydubai staff members from different departments, including pilots, cabin crew, engineers as well as members of its customer service team. The stories depict how the lives of those who feature in the video have changed and how they look forward to a time when together once again becomes our favorite destination.

Commenting on the release of the video, Ghaith Al-Ghaith, CEO at flydubai, said: "we dedicate this video to the frontline workers, those who have contributed so much and to everyone who has seen their lives change at this time. The video has been inspired by our own people and their genuine gratitude for the selfless contribution that is being made by everyone."



## Venezuela imposes price controls

**CARACAS:** Venezuela's government on Friday announced new price controls on food products, the first time it has done so in two years, as the coronavirus outbreak and an acute gasoline shortage cause inflation to accelerate.

New figures released on the Venezuelan central bank's website on Friday showed inflation rose 124 percent during the first quarter of 2020, and 13.3 percent in March. The opposition-controlled National Assembly earlier this month said its own data showed March inflation was 21.2 percent. The socialist government last year relaxed enforcement of price controls, which had been in place for nearly two decades, to allow the private sector to play a greater role in the import and sale of goods in the face of US sanctions.

But Vice President Delcy Rodriguez said the government was now imposing "supervised sales" on 27 products at food producers in order to limit price increases. Rodriguez said food company Polar, Venezuela's largest private firm, would be subject to the controls, along with another local company, Plumrose.— Reuters

## US meat giant shuttered beef plant for testing

**NEW YORK:** US meatpacking giant Tyson Foods on Thursday said it would temporarily close a massive beef slaughterhouse in Washington state to test its employees for coronavirus.

The closure of the Tyson Fresh Meats facility in Pasco, Washington, which the company said produces enough beef in one day to feed four million people, comes as slaughterhouses emerge as potential hotspots for spreading the disease. A spokeswoman for Tyson declined to say whether any workers had tested positive. In a statement, the company said it had taken measures such as creating more space in break rooms and putting dividers between workstations, as well as checking workers' temperatures and mandating that they wear masks.

"Despite these efforts, the combination of worker absenteeism, COVID-19 case and community concerns has resulted in a collective decision to close and test all team members," Tyson Fresh Meats group president Steve Stouffer said.

Workers will get paid and be asked to self-isolate as they wait for test results, which will be used to decide when to reopen the plant, the company said. "The closure will mean reduced food supplies and presents problems to farmers who have no place to take their livestock. It's a complicated situation across the supply chain," Stouffer wrote.

Several other slaughterhouses in the United States have closed after coronavirus broke out among the staff, including a massive pork plant in South Dakota run by Smithfield Foods that handles four to five percent of the country's production. JBS has shut two cattle slaughterhouses, one in Pennsylvania and the other in Colorado, while Tyson has closed a hog factory in Iowa and also announced it would close another one in Indiana to test its staff.

It's unclear if these plant shutdowns will lead to a meat shortage, particularly since many restaurants are closed or have curtailed their service.



It remains yet to be seen whether virus-caused slaughterhouse closures will lead to prolonged meat shortages in US grocery stores.— AFP

A World Bank report on Thursday warned temporary trade restrictions at the national level could snarl supply chains for food worldwide. While predicting generally stable agricultural prices this year, the World Bank said there could be "problems with food availability (and price spikes) at the local level due to supply chain disruptions and border closures in response to containment strategies that may restrict food flows or movement of labor."

### No supply issues

According to United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the union representing agri-food workers, activity has been temporarily suspended at 13 different sites—employing a total of 24,500 people—over the last two months.

This could lead to a 25 percent drop in pig slaughtering capacity in the country and a 10 percent drop for cows. The union called on authorities to better protect slaughterhouse employees by increasing testing or making social distancing measures in plants mandatory. To the UFCW's knowledge, 13 people working in slaughterhouses or meat processing plants have died from COVID-19.

While factory shutdowns have not yet triggered a widespread meat shortage in stores, the risk has increased, according to experts.

Rachel Gantz, head of communication for the National Pork Producers Council, said that for now the crisis is "on our farms and currently there aren't any supply issues." "There could be issues over the long term if we don't resolve plant disruptions," she told AFP. "If additional reductions in slaughter and processing operations occur over an extended period, then by mid-May changes in product availability may be realized," said Glenn Tonsor, an agricultural economist at Kansas State University.

In the short term, a recent report from the Department of Agriculture showed that the United States "began April with large supplies of meat as beef, pork and chicken supplies were all above prior year levels," Tonsor told AFP, noting that demand in the food service sector remained low in April.— AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: The Congressional Budget Office predicts the US economy will contract by double digits in the second quarter then start growing again in the latter half of the year as lockdowns to stop the coronavirus are lifted.— AFP

## US CBO sees deficit exploding amid recession

**WASHINGTON:** As data showing the severe economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic continues to pile up, the Congressional Budget Office said Friday the US budget deficit will explode this year to \$3.7 trillion. The estimate is more than triple the CBO's forecast last month, and comes after Congress rushed out multiple aid packages totaling nearly \$3 trillion to help workers and businesses amid the widespread lockdowns imposed to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

As the US death toll from COVID-19 hit 50,000 and most businesses nationwide remain shuttered or sharply curtailed, GDP in the April-June period is forecast to decline by 12 percent while the jobless rate averages 14 percent, Phil Swagel, head of the independent CBO, said in a blog post.

"The economy will experience a sharp contraction in the second quarter of 2020 stemming from factors related to the pandemic," Swagel said, noting that the forecasts include the expected effects of the federal rescue effort. The new estimates are far worse even than those issued in early April, as the CBO reviewed data through Thursday, when the Labor Department showed job losses soaring to more than 26 million since mid-March.

Private data and government reports have also shown home sales collapsing, while consumers are becoming more pessimistic and spending less.

And with the near total shutdown of airline travel, the Commerce Department on Friday reported that

new orders for durable goods plunged 14.4 percent, largely driven cancellations of orders for Boeing aircraft. That was caused by both the pandemic and the crisis over the 737 MAX, which has been grounded for more than a year after two fatal crashes.

Though worrisome, those reports only cover March, and economists expect things to be much worse on all fronts in April, when the shutdown of activity was more widespread and lasted the entire month.

"The recession triggered by COVID-19 is abrupt, deep and global in scope. Those looking for a quick snapback are overlooking hurdles to a comeback," Grant Thornton chief economist Diane Swonk said in an analysis.

### Rising US debt

Even as states like Georgia try to return to business as usual, Swonk said the economic restart "will be further complicated by the uneven pace (by which) different regions and different countries open."

Swagel said the CBO sees growth returning in the second half of the year as lockdowns are eased, but he also warned that the "challenges in the economy and the labor market are expected to persist for some time." The forecasts call for growth of 5.4 percent in the third quarter and 2.5 percent in the final three months of the year.

"Increases in consumer spending are expected to more than offset further declines in business investment during that period," Swagel said. In 2021, real GDP is projected to grow by 2.8 percent, well below the previous forecast, while the budget gap is expected to narrow to \$2.1 trillion, according to the forecast. Meanwhile, as the Federal Reserve has pledged to buy unlimited amounts of US Treasury debt, CBO sees federal debt levels rising to 101 percent of GDP by the end of the fiscal year in September.—AFP

# Alghanim Technologies puts forward MayaMD to help people over health

MayaMD is an initiative towards supporting govt and healthcare industry: Alghanim

KUWAIT: Alghanim Technologies, a member of the Fouad Alghanim and Sons Group of Companies puts forward the most accepted Digital Health Assistant Artificial Intelligence Application called MayaMD as being the best option for healthcare assistance adhering to social distancing.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for the people to consult by visiting doctors at the clinics. Understanding this, Reham Fouad Alghanim, Chairperson of Alghanim Technologies suggests MayaMD, a digital health assistant application that helps people find solutions to their health issues from the comfort of their homes in this challenging time.

Reham said that MayaMD is a great product to be offered from their end at this time of pandemic and related lockdown. The application provides the patients with a user-friendly interface, helpful features, assisting them to help themselves to manage their health issues right from their homes.

MayaMD app allows users to answer a series of questions based on the health issue and the symptoms associated. After all the questions are answered, the user will receive the report. This app being a resource based on artificial intelligence, it gives solutions virtually being at a distance from the doctors and the hospitals during this pandemic season. To answer the need of the current situation, the app offers Arabic interface

for COVID screening. This helps the user to switch from English to Arabic and get support in assessing the symptoms by themselves.

According to Reham, this is also an effort to support the local government to drive people adhere to social distancing while ensuring a stable health to all, while in quarantine.



### MayaMD

MayaMD is a personal healthcare system, built of artificial intelligence that promises to empower the health care sector of the entire nation. The system has the capacity to connect the physicians, patients, hospitals, labs, radiology centers, insurance providers and patients. This application helps an individual to know about their issues simply by inputting the symptoms.

In short, the medical complexities are simplified to reach the fingertips of the common people.

It diagnoses the health issues with appropriate questions and guides to the best of medical practitioners and labs in few seconds. It will also recommend urgency and provides optimizations. An impressive result you get out of using this application is that it generates your personal health record. This will help reduce the queue in hospital. Capacity of the clinical teams and quality of care will be improved and unnecessary expenses on investigations will be reduced.

## Care workers protect families with donated RVs

NEW YORK: Anish Samuel, a doctor specializing in pulmonary critical care, was changing his clothes multiple times an evening and eating separately from his family to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus. Life for Samuel, a fellow at St. Joseph's University Medical Center in New Jersey, was becoming untenable-but still, the risk remained.

Now Samuel is living in an RV in front of the family home. He moved into his new digs days after his wife Jessica Ripnick-Samuel, who has asthma, gave birth.

"Staying away from family is also hard. But I see them," said Samuel, who found his new living arrangement thanks to the volunteer group RVs 4 MDs. The organization is helping connect health workers fearful of spreading COVID-19 to their loved ones with camper owners who have a home on wheels to spare.

Samuel told AFP it's a better solution than one offered by his employer-moving into a hotel room about 25 minutes away by car. RV living is not a perfect option but it offers a semblance of normalcy, Samuel said-it allows him to be close by in case of emergency, and of course to see his newly expanded family.

"I would like to see them, even if it's through a window or outside in the backyard," he said.

The Facebook group RVs 4 MDs that started from scratch a month ago now has more than 30,000 members. The concept aims to help all essential workers who come into contact with potentially infected patients, including Sal DePaola, a firefighter who lives and works on Staten Island. Sixteen people in his department have tested positive for the virus, and DePaola doesn't see how he could have prevented coming into contact with it. For five weeks now, his only contact with his wife and children has been through the window or door.

"It's getting tougher as it goes because it's been a long time," DePaola said. "My kids are very difficult to handle." A similar situation is playing out in East Setauket, where a father of three who works as a resident physician at Long Island Community Hospital is living in Bud Conway's RV. "I thought it was a fantastic idea," Conway said of his nearly 30-foot (nine-meter) long vehicle. "All the county parks are closed so it sits in storage."

"So what am I doing with it? Let somebody use it." The doctor's wife-who now is juggling three kids and two jobs on her own, and wished to remain anonymous-said it's a matter of boosting her husband's "morale." "I feel it's helping him cope better," she said.

"If he was in a hotel, he would be in complete isolation-he would go from death and destruction at the hospital to an isolated hotel room, whereas here, he's coming home and his wife and kids are right here." — AFP

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## Lifestyle | Features



Two persons carry flour in the catering school of the 'Cuisine pour l'Emploi' in Paris on the 38th day of a strict lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP photos



French two Michelin stars chef Olivier Nasti prepares meals with his brigade in the kitchen of his restaurant 'Le Chambard' in Kaysersberg, eastern France, as the country is under a strict lockdown to stop the spread of the COVID-19 (the novel coronavirus).



French chef Thierry Marx (left) make bread for 'Les Restos du Coeur' in the catering school of the 'Cuisine pour l'Emploi' in Paris.

## Burned French chefs cook up post-COVID-19 cuisine

French chef Alain Ducasse pleaded with President Emmanuel Macron to allow a gradual reopening of the country's restaurants Friday, with the birthplace of haute cuisine badly burned by the coronavirus lockdown. With some of the greatest cooks in the world reduced to setting up food trucks and starting takeaway services to keep their heads above water, hard-pressed French restaurants are demanding bailouts and tax and rent holidays to get them through the crisis.

Almost all the one million people who work in France's hospitality industry have been left idle by its strict lockdown, with cafes and restaurants set to remain closed after the first restrictions are relaxed from May 11. In the meantime, leading culinary world figures like Ducasse are having to adapt. While he made the case to Macron for the cultural and economic necessity of France being able to eat out again, meals from his fashionable Paris establishments were being delivered by bicycle to clients who have been starved of gastronomic delights for five weeks.

The two-star Michelin chef Jean Sulpice - who was rival guide Gault & Millau's chef of the year in

2018 - has also had to compromise his unusually high-blown artistic creations to fit into a takeaway box. One of the first top chefs to go down the click-and-collect route, diners can pick up a saddle of lamb for a knockdown price of 22 euros (\$23) or veal sweetbreads with morilles mushrooms for 35 euros from his Auberge du Pere Bise near the shores of Lake Annecy in the Alps.

### 'We have to reinvent'

"We have to reinvent ourselves," Sulpice told AFP, saying he has now got used to cooking wearing gloves and a mask. "When we do reopen - and we still do not know when that will be - my professional life will not be the same," the young cook admitted. Alsatian chef Olivier Nasti has also had to improvise, delivering to homes within 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) of his restaurant at Kaysersberg, which takes in a swathe of country up to the German border.

"You have to find some way around this otherwise you would be knocked over," said the two-star chef, who is also setting up a food truck amid the village's famous vineyards. While his ideas are working for now

- he had 700 takeaway orders within the first four days - Nasti worries for the future of fine dining. With no vaccine or treatment in sight, he wonders if people will go back to sharing a small dining room after the paranoia unleashed by COVID-19.

### 'Tables three metres apart?'

"What are we supposed to do?" he asked. "Have tables three meters apart with masked waiters?" With the small high-quality producers and fishermen who supply top-end French restaurants also devastated by the lockdown, the hyper trendy Marseille chef Alexandre Mazzia is delivering crates of their gastronomic goodies with his own cooking.

Gault & Millau's chef of the year for 2019 wraps his own dishes like rillettes of dentex fish and curry and buckwheat tiramisu into packages containing the ingredients and recipes to recreate his creations at home. The Tour d'Argent in Paris, one of Europe's oldest and most venerable institutions which looks out onto Notre-Dame cathedral, has also got in on the takeaway act. The numbered fowl from which it produces its legendary pressed duck dish are now being

delivered oven-ready for those with appetites and pockets deep enough for the delicacy.

But many top chefs - including several of the small army of Japanese chefs making a name for themselves in France - have spent the lockdown cooking for health workers. Takashi Kinoshita has been delivering a daily menu of seasonal treats such as asparagus soup, gougeres a l'epoisses (profiteroles made with a deliciously stinky local cheese) and fluffy chocolate mousse to doctors and nurses in Dijon from his kitchen at the nearby Chateau de Courban.

"It's a way of saying 'arigato', thanks," Kinoshita said. "In Japan, when there is a natural or health-related catastrophe we look to see what we can do. One must always think of others," he said. Kinoshita has inspired a group of other Japanese Michelin-starred chefs in the Burgundy region south of Paris to join him in treating hospital workers with dishes such as Pinot Noir-marinated braised chuck steak and savoury macaroons with black currant mustard.— AFP

## Kanye West officially a billionaire: Forbes



US rapper Kanye West attends the WSJ Magazine 2019 Innovator Awards at MOMA on in New York City. Rapper/designer Kanye West has just made Forbes's billionaire list. — AFP

Rapper Kanye West is now a billionaire thanks largely to the basketball shoes bearing his name that he developed with Adidas, Forbes magazine said Friday. The rough figure of the wealth of Kim Kardashian's hubby is \$1.3 billion, the magazine said in announcing the musician is now on its list of people worth at least \$1 billion. The 42-year-old, Chicago-born rapper's Yeezy footwear often sells for more than \$200 a pair in the United States and elsewhere. West was associated with Nike for years but broke away in 2013, lending his name to Adidas as they launched their first shoe together in 2015. Forbes said that for years West has been pressing the magazine to be listed as one of its mega-rich but that it declined, for lack of proof.—AFP

## In locked down UK, the pub quiz moves online

Much of the world is in lockdown, there's a killer virus on the loose, but right now there's only one question that needs answering: who was Madonna's first husband? Half the faces on the computer screen look blank, but other people start writing, and the quiz master moves onto the next round. The weekly pub quiz is a fixture of life for many Brits - an opportunity to drink with their friends and show off their knowledge of largely useless facts.

The pubs are now shut because of the coronavirus outbreak, but with everybody stuck at home, quizzes are thriving online. "It's pure escapism for an hour or so," said Dan March, who used to run pub quizzes and now holds one a week for friends via the online videoconferencing service Zoom. It is a virus-free zone, with questions ranging from general knowledge to popular culture, and it's proving popular - last week he had 80 people logged in. "There is nothing more fun than extracting that joyous

factual nugget from the back of your brain," March told AFP.

"And also, just arguing with your friends about the answer." Even away from pubs, quizzes are a serious business in Britain. The gameshow "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" was developed here, and the fiendishly difficult "University Challenge" has been broadcast on primetime TV for years. They even risk becoming part of the arts, after the National Theatre announced monthly quizzes as part of its lockdown program, hosted by actors including Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen.

### Playing for glory

March is himself an actor but has been writing quizzes for pubs as a sideline for 15 years, including at McKellen's east London local. Unlike in the pub, the 46-year-old does not charge for his online quizzes, nor is there a prize. But he encourages people to have a drink and to play in teams, either within their household or to connect digitally with friends isolated elsewhere. Players are asked to mute their microphones while the questions are read out, but he allows "a bit of banter" in between. The teams mark their own answers, unlike in a pub, where the tradition is to pass them to a neighboring table. But March is not worried: "You're playing for glory, and if you cheat, there is no glory."

### Charity fundraiser

Rachel Walker has also found herself inundated for requests for quizzes since lockdown

began, and is currently hosting three or four a week. She only wrote her first one at the request of friends a few weeks ago, but is now using them to raise money for the charity she works for, Marie Curie. The organization specializes in end of life care and has more than 2,000 nurses working in Britain. Like many other charities in Britain, it has been hard hit by the lockdown.

"All of our fundraising events got cancelled. We've lost millions," she said. The quiz night donations are voluntary but it all adds up. "I like to think this is going to help in some small way," she said. Walker began by using questions from an old version of the general knowledge game Trivial Pursuit, "but everyone said it was too hard!" "So I started writing it. You don't want it too hard, because it puts people off. Although people moan more if it's too easy," the 46-year-old said.

Her quizzes are themed - the 1980s, London, one about rave music she drew up for industry types - and she encourages people to dress up to make it more of an event. Again, there is no mention of coronavirus. Walker moves quickly through the questions, so "you don't have time to think about anything else, you just focus on the quiz". Like the National Theatre, she is also bringing in celebrities to get a bigger audience, with former footballer Chris Kamara holding a family-friendly quiz next week. And that Madonna question? Sean Penn.— AFP

## WWII veteran tops music charts after record fundraiser

99-year-old British World War II veteran who shot to fame raising millions for health workers fighting the coronavirus has become the oldest artist to reach No 1 in the UK music singles charts. Tom Moore's rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone" - a much-loved and widely covered song from a 1945 musical - sold 82,000 units, the Press Association (PA) news agency said Friday, beating Canadian artist The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" in second place. "It's out of this world, truly amazing!" Moore, a captain who served in India, said on his official Twitter account.

The single, which features Moore singing alongside actor and singer Michael Ball and a choir from the state-run health service is also the fastest-selling single of 2020 so far, according to PA. The race to

the No.1 spot had been tight, Martin Talbot, chief executive of the Official Charts Company told PA, until The Weeknd tweeted his support Thursday for the "incredible 99 yr old war veteran", and his hope that Moore "can have a No 1 for his 100th birthday".

"My grandchildren can't believe I am a chart topper!" Moore, who turns 100 at the end of this month, told PA. Guinness World Records also announced Moore had broken the record for raising the most money in an individual charity walk - more than £27 million (\$33 million, 31 million euros). He initially set out to raise just £1,000 for Britain's National Health Service (NHS) by walking 100 laps of his 25-metre (82-foot) garden, with the help of his walking frame.

But his journey resonated with a public inundated with grim pandemic coverage and he became a

global phenomenon praised by British Olympic great Mo Farrah and Prince William. The final lap of his garden in Bedfordshire, south England, was met with a guard of honor from the Yorkshire Regiment and broadcast live on British TV on Thursday. "What a way to finish the week," Moore's latest tweet said. "It's simply wonderful and all for such a good cause. The NHS staff and the volunteers are the real heroes & they continue to do such a magnificent job THANK YOU!"— AFP

British World War II veteran Captain Tom Moore, 99, poses with his walking frame doing a lap of his garden in the village of Marston Moretaine, 50 miles north of London. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

# Online mystics cash in during Myanmar COVID-19 lockdown



Photo shows the Min Thein Kha app icon (bottom right) - a popular astrology app in Myanmar with some two million registered customers and 50,000 daily active users, on a mobile phone. Astrology has long been firmly intertwined with Myanmar's Buddhist beliefs, and few big decisions are made without a soothsayer's consultation. — AFP

Myanmar lawyer Thiri had been excited about her wedding and new job this year-before the coronavirus threw both into doubt. With the stars very much unaligned, she turned to an astrology app for help. For a fee of a few dollars, Thiri's online mystic advised the 26-year-old to carry out kind deeds around her home, from donating flowers to feeding animals on the street, to ensure good karma.

"I'm going to follow all her advice," Thiri tells AFP, praising the Min Thein Kha app for its convenience at a time when the doors to her usual real-life astrologer at a downtown Yangon temple are securely shut for the city's lockdown. The Min Thein Kha platform—the only one of its kind in Myanmar—was launched two years ago. Its creators claim to have two million registered customers and 50,000 daily active users.

Users log on, select one of the 23 astrologers profiled on the app and submit a question, paying in advance by bank or mobile phone transfer with the promise of an audio file reply within 48 hours. Uncertainty caused by the coronavirus outbreak has seen the number of questions rocket by 50 percent, says Bagan Innovation Technology, the company behind the virtual fortune-telling service. Astrology

has long been firmly intertwined with Myanmar's Buddhist beliefs, and few big decisions are made without a soothsayer consultation.

Former military rulers kept the nation largely offline and Min Thein Kha is part of a nascent digital community scrambling to catch up. The app is named after one of the country's most prestigious fortune tellers, whose family and devoted disciples made sure his legacy lived on after his death in 2008. "We've scaled up the personalized experience," says co-founder Ricky Thet. "I wanted to show digitizing isn't only for new creations but can also improve existing traditions."

### 'Tech revolution'

Requests for help with the naming of babies and businesses or choosing auspicious wedding and housewarming dates have been replaced with worries about work and fears for the health of family members as the deadly virus spreads in Myanmar. The underdeveloped country has so far recorded 144 confirmed infections and five deaths, but experts say the lack of testing means the real number is likely far higher.

Love is another recurring theme on the app.

Returning migrant workers ask after sweethearts left behind in Thailand, while other customers come laden with concerns for husbands or lovers working on oil rigs or as sailors, says Thet. "We can help lift people out of depression and bring back their self-confidence, their hope and future," says 70-year-old astrologer Win Zaw, a brother of the late Min Thein Kha. He has been in the fortune-telling business for 30 years and calls the switch to online soothsaying a "technological revolution". But he admits there are downsides.

In a face-to-face session, a trained eye can pick up valuable clues from a client's posture, where they place their hands or how they wear a hairpin, and so distance predictions are sometimes not as accurate, he explains. Fellow astrologer Htun Aung Lu, 45, claims he foresaw the 2014 Malaysian air crash and correctly predicted who would become Myanmar's president after the last election. In these troubled times, he offers grounds for optimism, forecasting the pandemic will stabilize in May before some "good news about a vaccine between 2nd and 12th June". — AFP

## In Mexico, 'lucha libre' masks en vogue in coronavirus fight

All around the world, the coronavirus pandemic has left people scrambling for protective face coverings. But in Mexico, where the masked stars of "lucha libre" wrestling are already cultural icons, people are using their colorful masks to ward off the disease in style.

The wrestling masks, fitted out with an added chin strap, are highly sought after since they cover both the nose and the mouth of the wearer, and hundreds have been sold since the outbreak began. The handmade masks use the same colors and designs worn by the most famous wrestling stars and are produced by a 53-year-old former wrestler, Jose Isaias Huerta, known in his days in the ring as "The Grey Cat." In less than a month, Huerta has sold 600 masks, churning out 30 a day - and he has a backlog of orders that will take more than a month to fulfill.

"Mexicans have lucha libre in their blood - the wrestler is a living hero for the fans," he told AFP. "I see that with this," he added, pointing at his masks. The emblematic masks of stars such as El Santo, Blue Demon or Parka have been recreated using regular fabrics, and the maker does not claim they have the protective quality of actual surgical masks. Huerta sells them for 50 pesos (around \$2) apiece - almost 10 times the price of a conventional mask sold in packets of 10 in pharmacies, which are not as thick as his.

### Kids 'feel like superheroes'

Huerta made his amateur debut in the wrestling ring at age 11 and had his first professional bout when he was 14. Since then, he has never strayed far from the canvas. After retiring, he got his hands on a couple of old sewing machines and started turning out - together with his sister - masks for both professional wrestlers and their fans. They sold well at the gates to the lucha libre arenas, given the widespread home-grown fan base and the curiosity of tourists looking for souvenirs.

But several weeks ago, all wrestling matches were suspended as part of the effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus, which left vendors and producers facing bankruptcy. But then Huerta stumbled on the idea of selling the masks as protective face gear. The inspiration came by chance, when he gave a mask to his eight-year-old grandson - also a big fan of the sport. That was when his son-in-law noticed how useful and attractive the mask could be for Mexicans facing the airborne virus.

Cristobal Lobato, a fan of the "tough guys" strain of lucha libre wrestling, whose adherents flout the rules and are craftier in the ring, was one of the first to buy in. "I saw them on the internet and hunted until I found out where to buy them," said the digital strategist who bought 10 masks to give to family members, especially the kids. "They don't really understand what is going on and putting on the mask of a luchador makes them feel like superheroes, while it also protects them," he said.

### 'Our idols'

The walls of Huerta's poorly lit workshop, where he works furiously to meet his orders, are covered with old newspaper cuttings and photos of him in his glory days as The Grey Cat. His newfound success came suddenly, when a local radio station in Puebla - 120 kilometers (75 miles) to the south of Mexico City - mentioned his masks and triggered a surge of interest.

Huerta has quickly cobbled together a crew of six friends and family members to churn out masks for as long as demand lasts. Every day, they have to figure out how to send packages to far-flung parts of the country, like prosperous Monterrey in the north. Having no experience of servicing nationwide demand, they have even had to ask their new clients if they know how much it costs to send packages across the country. "We're up front with them - we don't want to make a bad impression. We sell in small batches - five, 10, no more," said Huerta. —AFP



The Zeibig family watches the movie 'Loving Vincent' projected on the wall of a neighboring building from their balcony in Berlin's Kreuzberg district during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP photos



Staff members from Knalle Pop Corn prepare to hand out treats to residents watching the movie 'Loving Vincent' on the wall of a neighboring building in Berlin's Kreuzberg district during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

## Backyard cinema lights up lockdown for Berliners

After weeks of coronavirus lockdown in the German capital Berlin with bars, restaurants, shops and cinemas all closed, movies are coming to the people with projections on bare walls in the courtyards of apartment buildings. "We've got this blank wall here, and we've always thought, we should get a film up on there," says Carola Lauter, who successfully applied to the "Windowflicks" organization behind the backyard sessions.

The project backed by the local Yorck cinema group accepted her request to show "Loving Vincent", a fully-painted feature film about the life of artist Vincent Van Gogh, and as dusk gathers people in the block settle in to enjoy the movie's bright colors projected onto a neighboring building. "There's a certain lethargy, fear, uncertainty you can feel around here," says Lauter. "After all these weeks people are feeling fragile, and I thought it would be good for them to

have something positive, enlivening."

In little clusters at balconies and windows, people sit around by candlelight with takeaway food or snacks brought by workers from a local popcorn maker. "Since we haven't been able to go to the cinema for weeks, the cinema is coming to us," says building resident Undine Zeibig. "We think it's a really good idea." "We just hope that lots of people donate too," says her husband Uwe. "That will do some good for the artists, and they really need it desperately in these times."

### 'To Be Continued'

With ticket sales at zero, Berlin's cinemas got together to launch an appeal for donations dubbed "Fortsetzung Folgt" (To Be Continued), aiming to raise over 700,000 euros (\$755,000). By Friday, over 100,000 euros had been pledged according to their fundraising website, with an average donation of more

than 44 euros. "We said to ourselves, people want to experience something, so let's get them outside onto their balconies, into their windows," says Olaf Karkhoff, who picked the name "Windowflicks" as a play on "the well-known streaming service".

On top of recreating some neighborhood sense of community, "we wanted to support the To Be Continued campaign," Karkhoff adds. And beyond simply showing films, the group has other ambitions, like "a concert, or several concerts, in 100 courtyards simultaneously," Karkhoff says with a smile. But his personal pet project is convincing (French travel writer) Sylvain Tesson to let us show his photo montages. "We could shoot them up onto the wall with a classical music backing track." — AFP

## Meghan tabloid privacy case begins in UK court

The first court hearing in a tabloid breach of privacy case brought by the Duchess of Sussex began in London on Friday, over the publication of a letter she wrote to her estranged father. Meghan Markle is suing Associated Newspapers, which publishes the Mail on Sunday and Mail Online, for printing parts of her letter to Thomas Markle in August 2018. The preliminary hearing was held at the High Court in London, with the judge in attendance but lawyers participating remotely because of coronavirus restrictions.

Lawyers for Associated Newspapers sought to strike out parts of the duchess' claim, in particular that the newspaper was responsible for causing the rift between father and daughter. The US former actress has alleged her "vulnerable" father was "harassed and humiliated", "manipulated and exploited" by reporters before the publication. But Anthony White, representing the organisation, said some of the allegations were irrelevant and had no proper legal basis.

It was "highly unlikely that she has any credible basis for these allegations of impropriety" towards her father, as she has had no contact with him since she got married to Prince Harry in 2018, he said. The publisher had also not "acted dishonestly" in summarizing or editing parts of the correspondence, which was standard practice in media reporting, he added. Associated Newspapers denies it breached privacy in publishing the letter, and that the letter was edited to change its meaning.

It also facing a claim for copyright infringement and breach of data protection. The legal action is separate to a claim brought by Prince Harry, who is suing another news organization for allegedly intercepting voice messages. Harry has accused sections of the media of wag-



Britain's Prince Harry and his fiancée US actress Meghan Markle pose for a photograph in the Sunken Garden at Kensington Palace in west London. — AFP

ing a "ruthless campaign" against his wife before and after their marriage in a glittering ceremony at Windsor Castle in May 2018. He has said he feared "history repeating itself" given the treatment of his mother, Diana, princess of Wales, during her lifetime.

She was killed in a high-speed car crash in Paris in August 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi photographers. Earlier this week, the couple said they would no longer speak to or cooperate with four major British tabloid newspapers, including the Daily Mail, accusing them of "distorted, false and invasive" reporting. Meghan's 75-year-old father has said he felt pressured to share the letter after its contents were misrepresented in a magazine article. —AFP

## Aussie celebrity chef fined for peddling virus 'light machine'

Australian celebrity chef Pete Evans has been fined thousands of dollars after promoting a "light machine" which he claimed could help treat coronavirus. Evans was handed the Aus\$25,000 (US\$16,000) fine on Friday over his claims the BioCharger device - which looks like a cross between a blender and a lava lamp - could be used to help beat the "Wuhan coronavirus". "Just briefly it's programmed with about a thousand different recipes, there's a couple on there for Wuhan coronavirus," Evans said in a Facebook live video published earlier this month.

The World Health Organization has warned against referring to the novel coronavirus by a specific geographical location over concerns such terms could lead to a rise in discrimination. Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) said in a statement his claim had "no apparent foundation" and it had received a number of complaints about the livestream. "Any claim that references COVID-19 is of significant concern to the TGA given the heightened public concern about the pandemic," the regulator said in a statement.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners President Harry Nespolon welcomed the fine and told people to ignore the paleo-pushing chef's health advice, in a series of tweets on Friday. "This 'light machine' doesn't do anything but drain your wallet," Nespolon said. "Stick to cooking mate." The makers of the device, Advanced Biotechnologies, describe it as a "Subtle Energy Revitalisation Platform" and issued a statement following Evans' video, distancing themselves from the COVID-19 claim. —AFP

## Isolated by virus, Faroe Islands offer virtual tours

The Faroe Islands had planned to close to tourists for a weekend this April to protect its fragile ecosystem. However, isolated due to the pandemic, the Danish archipelago is now offering people a chance to discover the islands with virtual tours online.

"We do these tours for people who were supposed to come to the Faroe Islands and visit now and had to

cancel their tours. This is kind of our way of giving them the experience they otherwise would have had, (but) through our eyes, ears and body," Kristina Sandberg Joensen, one of the virtual guides working for the Faroese tourism office, told AFP. The self-governing territory in the North Atlantic, which has 187 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus, closed its borders in mid-March.

In order to visit the islands virtually, "tourists" take in the stunning views on their phone or computer free of charge as their guide explores the local landscape in real time, either on foot, on horseback or at sea. Each tourist can even control the direction their guide takes for 60 seconds, using on-screen joystick controls. Between 20,000 and 40,000 people have taken part

in virtual tours since they started on April 15, the tourism office said.

Known for its high cliffs, dramatic waterfalls and open expanses, the archipelago of 1,400 square kilometers is home to 50,000 people and 80,000 sheep spread out over 18 islands. Some 110,000 tourists visited the Faroe Islands in 2018, with their numbers increasing by 10 percent per year the past five years. The archipelago had originally planned to close its main tourism sites on April 18 and 19, asking only a select number of volunteers to come help clean up the local ecosystem. The operation has instead been postponed until September because of the coronavirus crisis. — AFP

# Emirati police deploy smart tech in coronavirus fight

## Dubai launches home tests for virus • UAE reopens malls, eases curfew

**DUBAI:** Police in the United Arab Emirates are deploying smart helmets that can scan the temperatures of hundreds of people every minute in their effort to combat the new coronavirus. The helmets, which need less time and less contact than traditional thermometers, can measure temperatures from five metres away and scan up to 200 people a minute, triggering an alert if a fever is detected.

Chinese company KC Wearable says it has sold more than 1,000 of the temperature scanning helmets and has received orders from the Middle East, Europe and Asia. "We've implemented the smart helmet during this time of crisis, with COVID-19, across all police stations in Dubai, as well as at patrolling stations whose duty requires them to be on the frontline," police officer Aly Al-Ramsy told Reuters. "In the case of someone with a high temperature, we take the necessary measures to stop the person ... and then the person is dealt with by paramedics and taken to the closest medical facility."

Dubai police are using the helmets to screen people in densely populated areas, including sealed off neighborhoods. Gulf Arab states have ramped up testing after recording a growing number of cases among low-income migrant workers in overcrowded housing. The UAE has the second highest infection count among the six Gulf states. Like other countries around the world, Gulf states have deployed technology in the struggle to rein in the virus, including smartphone apps that track sufferers. Civil liberties groups have criticized such apps as an invasion of privacy.

Dubai on Friday launched a mobile testing service to carry out free coronavirus screening at home for the elderly and most vulnerable, after slightly easing strict confinement measures. The new "Mobile Laboratory Units" are converted

ambulances fitted with auto-sterilization equipment, thermal scanners and safe storage cabins for samples, state news agency WAM said. They will "play a key role in reducing pressure on hospitals amidst the COVID-19 crisis and help protect people at high risk," it said.

Dubai and fellow members of the United Arab Emirates decided Thursday to reopen malls, cafes and restaurants and to ease lockdown restrictions imposed last month to prevent the spread of the illness. The measures were timed for the start Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The UAE has declared more than 9,000 cases of the COVID-19 illness, with 64 deaths.

Dubai had been the only emirate that imposed a total curfew, while the other six members of the federation had restricted movement at night. Dubai has also authorized public transport, including its metro, to resume services from today. Residents are however required to wear face masks at all times, with violators to be fined 1,000 dirhams (\$272).

Curfew will be from 10 pm to 6 am while malls were allowed to operate for 10 hours daily starting from midday on Friday, the first day of Ramadan, an official statement cited by the state-run WAM news agency said. Supermarkets, food outlets, groceries and pharmacies will be allowed to operate round the clock, but mosques will remain shut during the holy month, the statement said.

Dubai government said in a statement that family entertainment facilities will remain shut while restaurants and hotels can be run only by 30 percent of their staff at a time. Restaurants and cafes are not permitted to serve shisha or buffet dining and customers must observe social distancing. The restrictions have hit businesses hard, particularly retailers who had expected to cater to a rush of Ramadan shoppers. — Agencies

## Sick, stranded, broke: Crisis...

Continued from Page 1

numbers of coronavirus cases. Riyadh says foreigners account for 70 to 80 percent of recently discovered cases.

To try to reduce transmission, Gulf authorities have moved workers from camps into temporary lodgings, while establishing mass screening centers and using drones in some neighborhoods to warn people against congregating. The UAE has been the most vocal among Gulf countries in demanding governments repatriate workers, many of whom have been laid off or gone unpaid as business halts and oil prices plummet.

As of April 20, some 22,900 foreigners had been repatriated on 127 flights from otherwise closed airports, officials said. But India, which has 3.2 million citizens in the UAE alone, has refused to cooperate, saying that repatriating and quarantining millions of returning citizens would be a logistical and safety nightmare.

Bangladesh has reluctantly agreed to take back thousands of its citizens to avoid punishment from Gulf states in the future, its Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen said. "If we don't bring them home... they won't recruit people from us once their situation improves," he told AFP, adding that thousands of undocumented workers and hundreds of prisoners are being flown back, including a planeload from Saudi Arabia last week.

Pakistan has allowed repatriations to proceed but warned it is hindered by the lack of testing and quarantine facilities at its airports. Its diplomats in

Dubai appealed to Pakistanis not to go to the consulate, after a large number - desperate to return home - gathered to demand seats on limited special flights. "We are worried about our brothers in the Gulf. The lockdown and closure of daily business in the Gulf have rendered many overseas Pakistanis without a livelihood," Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said last week.

A UAE spokesman said it owed migrant workers a "debt of gratitude" and that it was providing healthcare, food and accommodation, and relaxing immigration rules for those with expiring visas. The pandemic has highlighted the problem of migrant workers living and working in conditions that leave them vulnerable to disease, said Rothna Begum, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Attempts by Gulf states to curb the virus were inflicting more hardship, with lockdowns that left workers short of food and water, she told AFP, adding that charities stepping in were overwhelmed. "Workers who are still required to work are being put on buses where they cannot socially distance, and sent to sites where social distancing is not being practiced or protective equipment and sanitation is not adequately provided," she said.

Millions of migrant workers face future uncertainty as the now unwanted workforce is haggled over by their governments and host countries. "I want to go back to my country... I don't have any money and I don't want to spend more time here," said an Egyptian man in Kuwait City who is being held at a camp for immigration offences.

Javed Paresh, a construction worker in the emirate of Sharjah, is among the tens of thousands of Pakistanis who have registered to fly home. "I have not been paid for the last six months. I just want to go home and see my family. My family will die of hunger as I am unable to send them money for many months," he said. — AFP

stay-at-home conditions, facing unprecedented bans on prayers in mosques and on the traditional large gatherings of families and friends to break the daily fast. In the Islamic holy city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia, the Grand Mosque, usually packed with tens of thousands of people during Ramadan, was deserted.

"We are used to seeing the holy mosque crowded with people during the day, night, all the time... I feel pain deep inside," said Ali Mulla, the muezzin who gives the call to prayer at the Grand Mosque. Despite the coronavirus threat, clerics and conservatives in some countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indonesia - the world's largest Muslim-majority nation - have pushed back and refused to stop gatherings in mosques.

In comments marking the start of Ramadan, Saudi King Salman, who is the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, lamented the need for social distancing during the holy month. "It pains me to welcome the glorious month of Ramadan under circumstances that forbid us from prayers in mosques," he said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency. "It doesn't feel special this year, we don't feel any Ramadan vibes," said Sarah, a mother-of-two in Riyadh.

At a near-empty Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, an imam called out the first Friday prayers of Ramadan across a windswept plateau almost devoid of worshippers. A handful of clerics in face masks knelt below the pulpit, keeping several feet apart to comply with coronavirus restrictions. "We ask God to have mercy on us and all of humanity and to save us from this lethal pandemic," the imam said. Ramadan typically draws tens of thousands of Muslims daily to the mosque and the adjoining Dome of the Rock. Worshippers will instead have to watch prayers on television. — Agencies

## Tea, wheat, garlic: How world copes...

Continued from Page 1

Twitter campaign: #ConLaCervezaNo, or "Don't mess with the beer."

Sri Lanka tried to keep its population from engaging in such vices: It has enforced a total ban on alcohol and cigarettes since its lockdown began on March 20, leading to an explosion in home brewing, an excise official said. The do-it-yourself distilling has caused a run on sugar, a key ingredient in producing the local moonshine known as kasippu. There had even been suspected "staged" robberies of liquor stores as shop owners tried to sell the precious commodity under the radar.

In Iraq, staying at home means long afternoons watching television or chatting with relatives - and that requires salted sunflower seeds. Supermarkets are running out of the popular snack faster than ever as parents and students wile away hours they would have normally spent at work or school. For Libyans in the war-ravaged capital Tripoli, home-schooling has been particularly tough.

"We've run out of printer paper, so I've fished out all of my husband's unused old office agendas for them to write down lessons and solve math exercises," said Nadia Al-Abed, a stay-at-home mother with three young children whose school has been shuttered. "I've been begging them to write as small as they possibly can, bribing them with candy," she added.

Schools, airports and non-essential businesses around the world have been shut down for weeks as countries try to curb the novel coronavirus' lightning-fast spread. Some are looking to protect themselves by naturally boosting their immunity. The former Soviet countries of Central Asia have seen a boom in demand - and in prices - for wild rue. The

herb, also known as harmala, is traditionally burned in households to ward off illness and protect prosperity. In Bulgaria, people scrambled to buy ginger and lemons as immunity strengtheners, while in Tunisia, citizens hunted down garlic - despite World Health Organization warnings that these home remedies do nothing against the novel coronavirus.

Far and away the most popular coping mechanism, however, has been baking. Supermarkets across France, Spain, Greece and other parts of Europe have reported shortages in flour, chocolate and yeast as cooped-up citizens try their hand at elaborate cakes. France's entrepreneurial home bakers skip the overwhelmed grocery stores and buy the raw ingredients directly from their local bakeshop to use at home. Romanians joke about "yeast dealers" making a fortune selling the now-rare leavening agent on the black market. Fake real estate ads even offer to "swap a downtown flat for one pound of yeast".

And with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan starting, households are stocking up on ingredients for the large sunset meals that will break their daily fasts. That has made semolina, a golden wheat flour used for bread and pastries, a precious commodity in Algeria. "The small quantities that are delivered to me, I reserve them for my regular customers," said a shop owner in El-Ashour, a district of Algiers. In Argentina, it's eggs: 30 of them once cost just 160 pesos, or \$2.35, but now run at 240 pesos or \$3.52.

If many countries emerge from their lockdowns with a new class of professional chefs, Australia will see home gardens blooming all over the country. "We've seen an increase in popularity across all plant types over the past month," said Alex Newman of the Bunnings Warehouse hardware store. In a sign that Australians are bracing themselves for a longer lockdown, Bunnings' most popular online guide includes tips on the fastest-growing plants to create a screen from neighbors - providing extra privacy for those staying at home. — AFP

## Sunlight destroys virus; remdesivir...

Continued from Page 1

Pathogen, offering hope that its spread may ease over the summer. "Our most striking observation to date is the powerful effect that solar light appears to have on killing the virus, both surfaces and in the air," he said. "We've seen a similar effect with both temperature and humidity as well, where increasing the temperature and humidity or both is generally less favorable to the virus." But the paper itself has not yet been released for review, making it difficult for independent experts to comment on how robust its methodology was.

It has long been known that ultraviolet light has a sterilizing effect, because the radiation damages the virus's genetic material and their ability to replicate. A key question, however, will be what the intensity and wavelength of the UV light used in the experiment was and whether this accurately mimics natural light conditions in summer. "It would be good to know how the test was done, and how the results were measured," Benjamin Neuman, chair of biological sciences at Texas A&M University-Texasarkana, told AFP. "Not that it would be done badly, just that there are several different ways to count viruses, depending on what aspect you are interested in studying."

Bryan shared a slide summarizing major findings of the experiment that was carried out at the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center in Maryland. It showed that the virus's half-life - the time taken for it to reduce to half its amount - was 18 hours when the temperature was 21 to 24 degrees Celsius with 20 percent humidity on a non-porous surface. This includes things like door handles and stainless steel.

But the half-life dropped to six hours when humidity rose to 80 percent - and to just two minutes when sunlight was added to the equation. When the virus was aerosolized - meaning suspended in the air - the half-life was one hour when the temperature was 21 to 24 degrees Celsius with 20 percent humidity. In the presence of sunlight, this dropped to just one and a half minutes.

Bryan concluded that summer-like conditions "will create an environment (where) transmission can be decreased". He added, though, that reduced spread did not mean the pathogen would be eliminated entirely and social distancing guidelines cannot be fully lifted. "It would be irresponsible for us to say that we feel that the summer is just going to totally kill the virus and then if it's a free-for-all and that people ignore those guides," he said.

Previous work has also agreed that the virus fares better in cold and dry weather than it does in hot and humid conditions, and the lower rate of spread in southern hemisphere countries where it is early fall and still warm bear this out. Australia, for example, has had just under 7,000 confirmed cases and 77 deaths - well below many northern hemisphere nations. The reasons are thought to include that respiratory droplets remain airborne for longer in colder weather, and that viruses degrade more quickly on hotter surfaces, because a protective layer of fat that envelops them dries out faster. US health authorities believe that even if COVID-19

cases slow over summer, the rate of infection is likely to increase again in fall and winter, in line with other seasonal viruses like the flu.

Meanwhile, the experimental coronavirus treatment remdesivir has failed in its first randomized clinical trial, inadvertently released results showed Thursday, dampening expectations for the closely watched drug. A draft summary went online briefly on the website of the World Health Organization (WHO) and was first reported by the Financial Times and Stat, which posted a screenshot. But Gilead Sciences, the company behind the medicine, disputed how the now-deleted post had characterized the findings, saying the data showed a "potential benefit".

The summary said the Chinese trial involved 237 patients, with 158 on the drug and 79 in a control group. Remdesivir was stopped early in 18 patients because of side effects. The authors said remdesivir was "not associated with a difference in time to clinical improvement" compared to the control. After a month, 13.9 percent of the patients on remdesivir had died compared to 12.8 percent of those in the control group. The difference is not statistically significant. The WHO told the Financial Times that the draft is undergoing peer review and was published early in error.

A spokesman for Gilead told AFP: "We believe the post included inappropriate characterizations of the study," saying it was terminated early due to low enrollment and was therefore not statistically meaningful. "As such, the study results are inconclusive, though trends in the data suggest a potential benefit for remdesivir, particularly among patients treated early in disease," the spokesman added. The study does not represent the final word on the matter, and there are several large-scale trials in advanced stages that should soon provide a clearer picture.

Remdesivir, which is administered intravenously, was among the first drugs suggested as a treatment for the novel coronavirus and as such has great hopes riding on it. Stephen Evans, a professor of pharmacoepidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, who was not involved in the research, said "the trial was too small in numbers recruited" to detect either benefit or risk. But he added: "If the drug only works well when given very early after infection, it may be much less useful in practice."

Last week, Stat reported it had shown significant efficacy at a Chicago hospital where patients who are part of one of the major trials are being treated. The US National Institutes for Health also reported it had proven effective in a small experiment on monkeys. Remdesivir, which previously failed in trials against Ebola, belongs to a class of drugs that act on the virus directly - as opposed to controlling the abnormal and often lethal autoimmune response it causes.

It mimics one of the four building blocks of RNA and DNA and gets absorbed into the virus's genome, which in turn stops the pathogen from replicating. The antimalarial drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine are also being widely used on COVID-19 on a so-called "compassionate basis" pending results from large trials, with early studies decidedly mixed. Other therapies that are being studied include collecting antibodies from COVID-19 survivors and injecting them in patients, or harvesting antibodies from genetically-engineered mice that were deliberately infected. — Agencies

## Virus toll nears 200,000 as...

Continued from Page 1

Global COVID-19 deaths have climbed past 195,000, according to an AFP tally, but new reported cases appear to have leveled off at about 80,000 a day. The daily death toll in Western countries seems to be falling, a sign hopeful epidemiologists had been looking for, but the WHO has warned that other nations are still in the early stages of the fight. The unprecedented situation has left the world staring at its worst downturn since the Great Depression, and world leaders are trying to balance public health concerns with economic needs.

Some countries have already started loosening restrictions. Sri Lanka said it would lift a nationwide curfew tomorrow after more than five weeks, as Belgium became the latest European nation to announce an easing from mid-May. On the other side of the world in Australia and New Zealand, people held vigils from the isolation of their own driveways to pay tribute to their war veterans on Anzac Day. Official memorials were held behind closed doors.

"We (usually) go away to our various watering holes, pubs or clubs, and we enjoy our mates... you talk about the old times, whilst you were serving and you talk about someone who's missing this year that was there last year," said Ray James, an Australian veteran of the Vietnam War. "It's going to be sad this year because we won't be able to do that."

Across the Muslim world, hundreds of millions of faithful opened the Ramadan holy month under



Stars

**Daily SuDoku**

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

medium


**Friday's Solution**

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

hard

STAR TRACK

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




Be sure to answer all phone calls and open all letters and emails today, Aries. You're likely to receive some interesting news. You might get word from a former boss that you'd be perfect for a new position opening up in his or her office. Or perhaps an old lover makes tentative inquiries about renewing old bonds. Your eyebrows will rise in surprise at least once during this day. Expect the unexpected!

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



Today is full of possibilities, Libra. You could fall in love at first sight, or at least meet someone who captures your interest! You should be feeling especially loving, passionate, and eager to devote yourself to a worthy cause or creative activity. Don't expect everything to fall into place right away. You could hit a few obstacles, but the ultimate result will be worth the bumps along the way.

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




Just as a watched pot never boils, so, too, do anxiously awaited checks or letters refuse to arrive in the mail, Taurus. Beyond double-checking that the person or company has your correct address, there isn't much you can do but continue to wait. Trust that it will arrive shortly, and then your financial difficulties will be behind you.

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



You're looking beautiful and feeling passionate, Scorpio. If only your passions could be reciprocated! Even though there may not be anyone special in your life right now, that's no reason to not treat yourself well. Go out for a nice meal or, better yet, order take-out and dine at home, complete with music, candles, and your finest china. You should appreciate yourself even if no one else does at the moment.

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




No doubt you're feeling attractive and passionate today, Gemini. Don't be surprised if a former lover gets in touch with you to try and rekindle the old flame. The attention is flattering, to be sure, but you're unlikely to have any desire to pursue the relationship. You're happy with what you have right now. And as they say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"

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




This could be a frustrating day in the romance department, Sagittarius. Communication is blocked at all levels. You're anxious to speak with your loved one, but simply can't reach him or her. Perhaps the phone system is malfunctioning or email is acting up. You feel as though the Universe is conspiring against you. Take heart. Your partner will contact you soon enough, and your reunion will be electric!

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



As you get older, you're drawn more and more to spiritual matters, Cancer. It isn't so much that you're embracing any particular religion, more that you're quite curious about the supernatural and some of the ancient arts. Take some time today to visit the library or bookstore and do some reading on the subject. You might want to form a study group with other like-minded individuals.

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




You have certainly felt better than you do today, Capricorn. We'll pause here while you go and fetch the aspirin. The stomachache and headache are simply the result of recent overindulgence. Don't worry - you'll be fit as a fiddle by tomorrow morning. Next time someone offers you multiple helpings of food or drink, however, you might want to consider politely declining!

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



Don't hesitate to try something new today, Leo. If you've thought about joining a book club or taking a class, do it today! You're likely to meet some interesting people and enter a new social world. You might be tentative at first, but you'll find the group warm, friendly, and eager for your input. You'll talk like old friends by the end of the second meeting. This is just the infusion of fun you need!

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




You could be feeling playful today, Aquarius. Your romantic partner will certainly appreciate your fun-loving mood. Why not plan a fun day together doing something other than your usual routine? Rather than dinner and a movie, how about lunch and a visit to a museum or art gallery? You have both been working very hard lately. Your relationship will benefit from an injection of spontaneity.

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



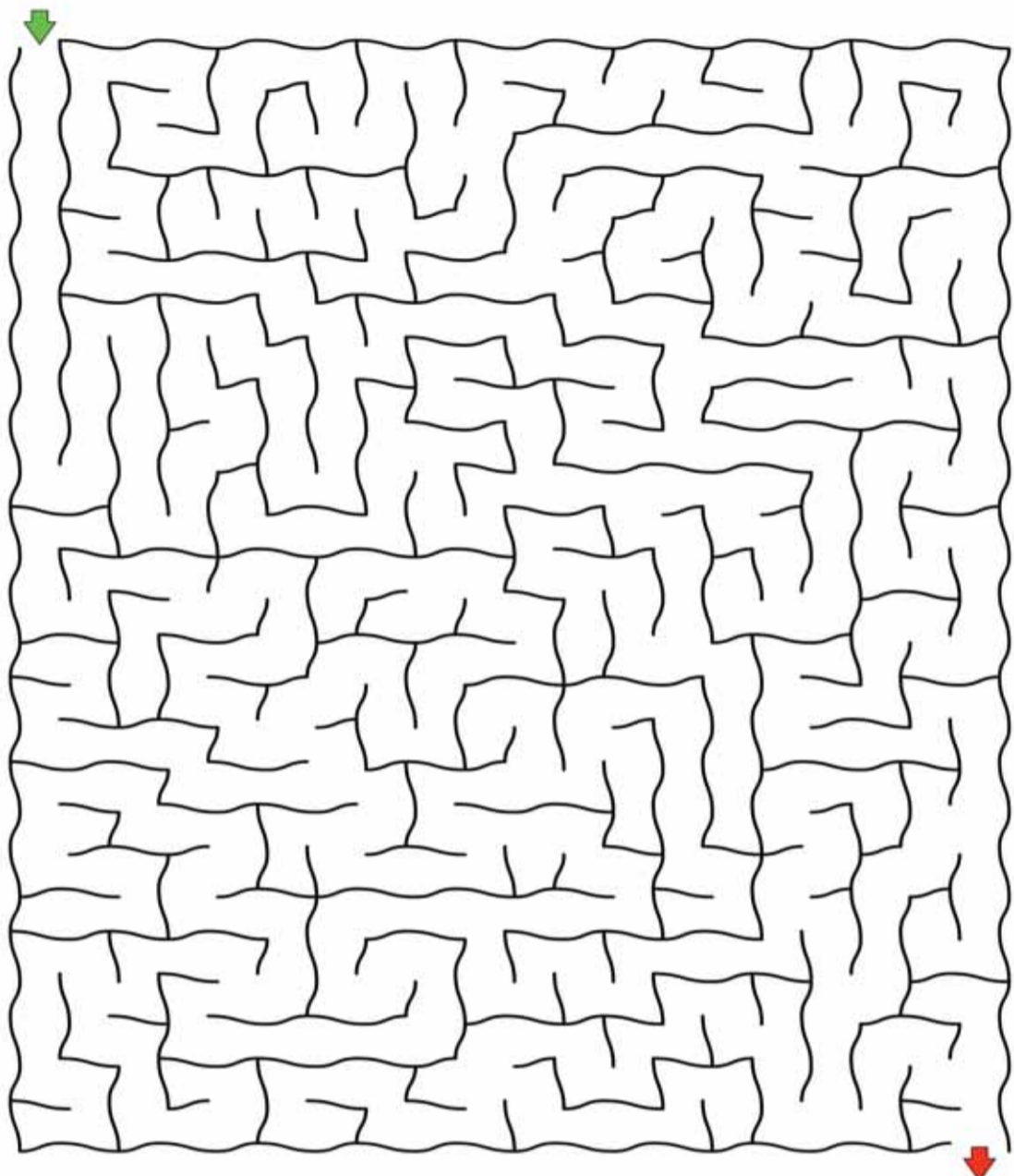
You're likely to feel optimistic and enthusiastic about life today, Virgo. You might also feel especially sexy, a feeling you should definitely take advantage of! Why not plan a romantic evening with your loved one? Don't hesitate to talk about your travel dreams over dinner. You never know, he or she just might share your dream. Before you know it, the two of you could be winging your way to exotic lands.

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

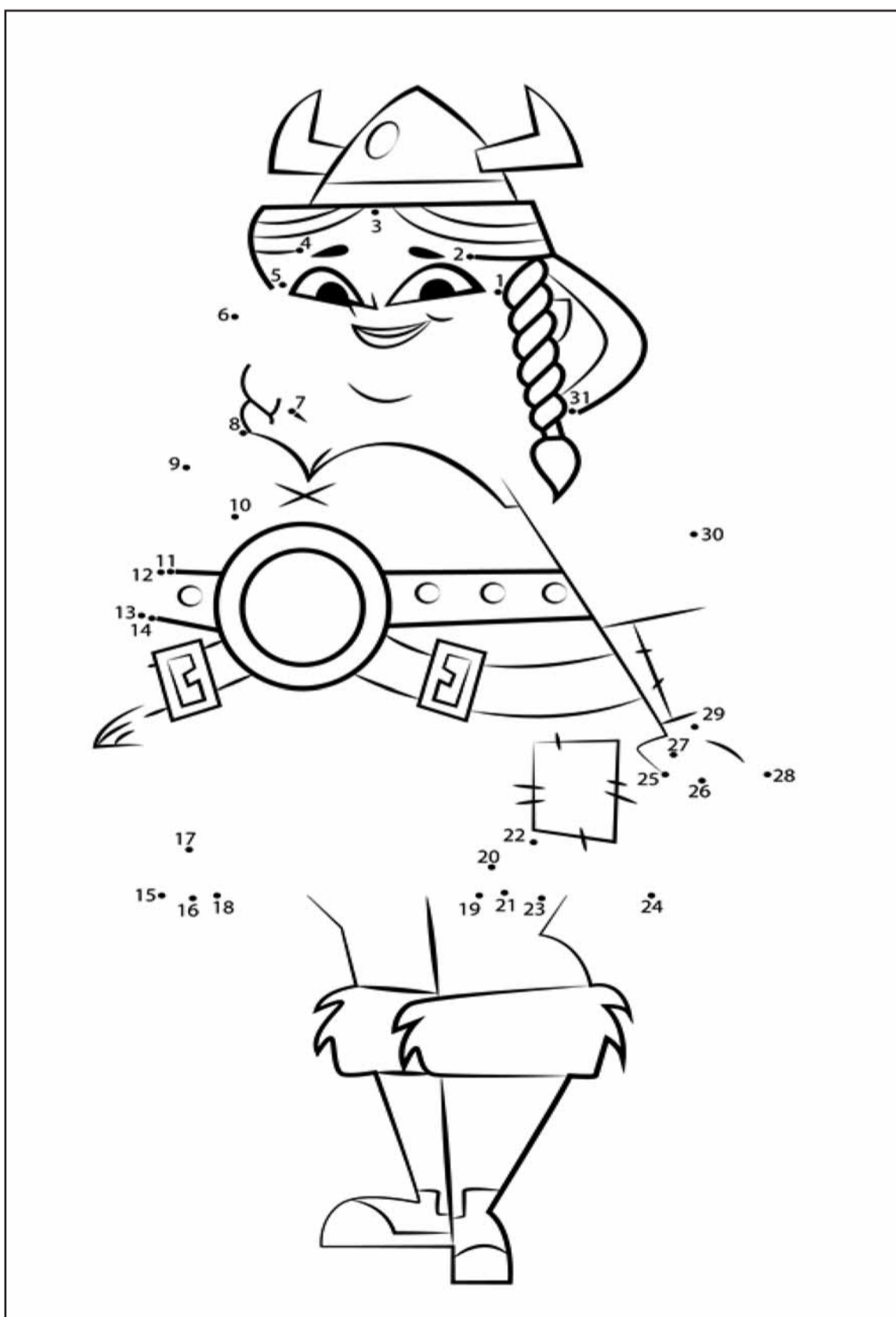


Don't be surprised if you have a desire to redecorate. The celestial energies have put you in the mood to rearrange your house a bit. Take care to not go overboard, Pisces. You have a tendency to turn little projects into big ones. For now, content yourself with buying some flowering plants and perhaps new area rugs and throw pillows. Leave the kitchen and bath renovations for later.

Find the way




Join the dots



Crossword

**Sports Challenge Crossword**



**Across**

7. Oldest organized sport in North America.
8. You need snow for this sport.
9. Players score by throwing a ball through a hoop.
11. You need water for this sport.
14. Played on an indoor alley.
19. Bat and ball sport AND the name of an insect.
20. Another name for ping-pong.
21. Game with scrums and an oval ball.
23. It involves hiking, throwing, catching and

**Down**

1. Unarmed combat sport using holds and leverage.
2. Played with rackets.
3. Waling in the countryside.
4. Might be played on the beach.
5. Graeco-Roman contact sport.
6. Unarmed combat sport using the hands and feet to deliver blows.
10. Fist fighting.
12. Played by two teams on ice skates.
13. Might be done on parallel bars.
14. Played on a "diamond".
15. Played with a shuttlecock.
16. The US name for a sport the rest of the world calls football.
17. The Tour de France features this sport.
18. Might be done on concrete or ice.
22. Played with clubs.

**Word Bank**

Badminton	Golf	Skating
Baseball	Gymnastics	Skiing
Basketball	Hiking	Soccer
Bowling	Ice Hockey	Swimming
Boxing	Judo	Table Tennis
Cricket	Karate	Tennis
Cycling	Lacrosse	Volleyball
Football	Rugby	Wrestling

## Sports

Photo of the day



Miles Daisher performs a BASE jump at The Treasury in Petra, Jordan. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## WADA wants answers after banned Sun's 'training call-up'

SHANGHAI: The World Anti-Doping Agency demanded answers Friday after reports that Chinese swimming star Sun Yang was called up for national training for the Tokyo Olympics in an apparent breach of his doping ban.

The latest incident in the colourful career of the three-time Olympic champion comes two months after he was given an eight-year ban for refusing to provide a doping sample.

Unless he is successful with an appeal, the 28-year-old will not be eligible for the Tokyo Games in 2021 and his career is effectively over.

However, Chinese media said on Thursday that Sun had been included on a list of swimmers called up for national training between April 1 and June 30.

Media published a notice purporting to show Sun's name on the list for preparations for the Olympics, which have been moved to the summer of 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Chinese Swimming Association (CSA) subsequently said that the 1500m freestyle world record-holder is "still serving (his) suspension." "The previous notice is invalid," CSA said in a short statement.

But that may not satisfy WADA, who said in a short statement to AFP on Friday: "We are following up with the relevant authorities to establish the facts in this matter."

Sun has kept a low profile since he was banned. It was his second doping violation, having been suspended for three months in 2014 for taking a banned substance.

Sun said in the immediate aftermath of February's Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling that he would appeal to the Swiss Federal Tribunal.

He is accused of refusing to provide blood and urine samples when drug testers visited his home in China in September 2018. A vial of his blood was smashed with a hammer during the tempestuous testing session. —AFP

# NFL Packers bring the Love, but Rodgers not feeling it

## 'I still feel like I have a ton of years left playing at a high level'

NEW YORK: First-round NFL Draft pick Jordan Love appears to be the Green Bay Packers' quarterback of the future, but Aaron Rodgers doesn't plan to surrender his starting job anytime soon. The Packers chose Utah State's Love with the 26th selection in Thursday's annual allocation of college talent, trading up four spots to get him.

"This was not something we set out to do," Packers general manager Brian Gutekunst said. "He just happened to be a guy we liked who fell to us. Given the value on the board, this was the best pick for the Packers."

Rodgers, who led the Packers to a 2011 Super Bowl victory, guided Green Bay within one win of the Super Bowl for the third time in six seasons this past January before the Packers fell to San Francisco 37-20.

At 36, Rodgers is the same age that former Packers star Brett Favre turned during the season after Rodgers arrived in the 2005 NFL Draft. Rodgers, who has four years remaining on his contract, was upset Love's selection came as a surprise to him, ESPN reported Friday.

"I still feel like I have a ton of years left playing at a high level," Rodgers told Milwaukee radio station WKTI last month. "I'm confident enough. I've always felt like it doesn't matter who you bring in, they're not going to be able to beat me out anytime soon."

"I understand the business and the nature of it... I wouldn't have a problem," Gutekunst says he expects Rodgers, who tossed 26 touchdown passes last year

with only four interceptions, will be fine with Love.

"We've got the best quarterback in the NFL and we're going to have him for a long time," Gutekunst said. "I think he'll be a pro's pro. He's playing for legacy-type things, historic-type stuff. I know he's very motivated."

Packers offensive tackle David Bakhtiari, Rodgers' blindside protector for seven seasons, expects the veteran to be more motivated now. "Let me tell y'all something right now: Look out. Aaron is about to be on fire," Bakhtiari said on a draft show on NFL social media.

"He's already great when he is just chill. But I've seen him when he gets riled up... Woo. Getting my hair raised up right now thinking about this." Love, thrust into an instant drama, said he yearns for the chance to understand a star like Rodgers.

"I can learn a lot from Aaron Rodgers," Love said. "That's one of the guys I grew up watching, learned how to do it from him. This is a really good situation to be in, not being thrown out there. You've got a lot of learning to do."



### Best pick for the Packers

#### 'A LOT OF WORK AHEAD'

The situation recalls the arrival of Rodgers in 2005 and the bitter split the Packers had three years later with NFL legend Favre, who led Green Bay to a 1997 Super Bowl triumph. After an over-time loss to the New York Giants in the 2007 season National Conference final, Favre retired in March 2008, but then asked the Packers in July to let him make a comeback

the second round ... and the way our board was, we just felt this was the right thing to do."

Hurts transferred to Oklahoma for his senior year after three impressive seasons at Alabama. He finished a distant runner-up in Heisman Trophy voting last year, behind LSU quarterback Joe Burrow, after completing 69.7 percent of his passes for 3,851 yards with 32 touchdowns and eight interceptions.

The Sooners went 12-2 last season and lost to LSU in the College Football Playoff semifinal. As a freshman at Alabama in 2016, Hurts led the Crimson Tide to a 14-1 record and a berth in the College Football Playoff championship game, won 35-31 by Clemson in the final second.

The following year, Hurts guided Alabama to a 12-1 mark and another berth in the national-title game. However, with the Crimson Tide trailing Clemson 13-0 at halftime, coach Nick Saban subbed in then-freshman Tua Tagovailoa at quarterback, and Alabama rallied for a 26-23 overtime win.

Hurts remained at Alabama as a backup in the 2018 season before transferring to Oklahoma for his final year of college ball. In three seasons with the Crimson Tide, Hurts completed 62.9 percent of his passes for 5,626 yards with 48 touchdowns and 12 interceptions.

He was the fourth quarterback selected in the draft, the first taken in the second round. Wentz's backup last season with the Eagles was Josh McCown, who is currently a free agent at age 40. McCown took over when Hurts got hurt early in his postseason debut, Jan. 5 against the Seattle Seahawks, and the veteran reserve completed 18 of 24 passes for 174 yards in Philadelphia's 17-9 loss.

Wentz was 1 of 4 for 3 yards in that game before exiting due to a head injury following a helmet-to-helmet hit. He had just appeared in all 16 regular-season games for the first time since his rookie year of 2016. Philadelphia's third-string quarterback last year was Nate Sudfeld. —Reuters



Jordan Love

with another club. Only after a tense August meeting with club officials was he released so Green Bay could move on with Rodgers. Favre continued his career with the New York Jets in 2008 and Minnesota in 2009 and 2010 before retiring for good at age 41. The Packers scrapped plans to retire Favre's number 4 jersey in the 2008 home opener, eventually doing so in 2015.

Rodgers, meanwhile, led the Packers to a championship in the 2010 campaign, taking Super Bowl Most

Valuable Player honors as the Packers beat Pittsburgh 31-25 for the title. Rodgers would win the NFL season MVP award twice in the next four seasons.

Love, who will wear number 10 for the Packers, threw for 32 touchdowns in 2018 but only 20 last year with 17 interceptions. "Down the road he certainly has the ability to be a difference-maker," Gutekunst said. "But these things take time. He has a lot of work ahead of him." —AFP

## Eagles select QB Hurts in second round

PHILADELPHIA: Adding protection for injury-prone quarterback Carson Wentz, the Philadelphia Eagles selected Oklahoma quarterback Jalen Hurts in the second round of the NFL draft on Friday.

Hurts was chosen 53rd overall. Wentz has battled knee, back and head injuries over the last three seasons, failing to finish any of the three in the postseason. The 27-year-old North Dakota State product also had a broken wrist in college.

Wentz extended a welcome to Hurts via Twitter: "Welcome to the best football city in America brotha!" Eagles coach Doug Pederson explained the pick of Hurts in a conference call with reporters, saying the team could look to utilize Hurts in tandem with Wentz the way the New Orleans have with Drew Brees and Taysom Hill, and the Baltimore Ravens did previously with Joe Flacco and Lamar Jackson.

"He has a unique skill set," Pederson said of Hurts. "You see what Taysom Hill has done in New Orleans. It's something we want to explore. He's a great runner, he throws well on the run. He has a unique set of skills we're going to take a look at."

Eagles general manager Howie Rosman told reporters, "For better or for worse, we are quarterback developers. We want to be a quarterback factory. We have the right people in place to do that. No team has benefited more from developing quarterbacks than the Philadelphia Eagles...."

"Earlier today, I spoke to Carson about the options at this pick, and one of them was Jalen, so he had a heads-up ahead of time. We're sitting here at the end of

## Commentators get creative during virus lockdown

LONDON: Dogs chasing rubber bones, "competitive" road crossing and the thrills of grilled chicken have become the new currency for sports commentators looking to entertain fans during the coronavirus lockdown.

With virtually no sport being played anywhere in the world due to the pandemic, under-employed TV pundits are keeping the sporting public amused with social media commentary on the more mundane aspects of life.

BBC commentator Andrew Cotter has worked at the Olympics and Wimbledon, but during the health crisis he has kept his voice in action by focusing on his two labradors, Olive and Mabel.

Cotter took to Twitter to share a commentary on his dogs as they munched from separate food bowls — "Olive, focused, relentless, tasting. Nothing left but the bowl to lick now. Great rivals but great friends. You see the swapping of bowls there at the end."

His post of the eating contest has been viewed by more than 10 million people and was retweeted by Hollywood actor Ryan Reynolds. A follow-up effort featuring the dogs fighting over an orange rubber bone — "So into the final minute and Olive in possession, but this is where Mabel is strong, chasing the game, using that intensity" — has been watched 18.4 million times. "It just shows how much we are all missing sport and what we term 'normal life'. We absolutely take it for granted and we are at last realising that," Cotter said.

Freelance rugby commentator Nick Heath, who usually works for the BBC and Sky, has gone viral with

his hilarious "life commentaries" while sport is on hold.

Filming people going about their business in south London, Heath gives the run-of-the-mill activities a tongue-in-cheek sports flavour.

His many comedic gems include people crossing the road to his excitable voiceover — "Crossroad dash, light turns to red, we wait for the beeps, there they are."

"Now then, JD Sports man, he's got a decent start, leggings on the outside. Oh! JD Sports a bit distracted over the shoulder, and leggings is going to get there. She does it again, three titles in three days. Off past Vegas Gold for the lap of honour. Victorious!"

#### 'TWO FLIES ON A WALL'

Heath also muses on competitive vegetable-buying in a market, an "international 4x4 pushchair formation final" as mothers wheel their babies through a park and a "spaniel speedway" commentary that was so popular he has started a website to sell T-shirts with the slogan on.

His ironic take is inspired by British commenting icons, as well as television character Alan Partridge.

Heath, whose Twitter following is now more than 126,000, told AFP: "It's been much more popular than I expected. I was just doing the parody voice I used when I was writing some comedy a few years ago."

"There's some Brian Moore, Barry Davies, a couple of dollops of Partridge. I saw my character as someone who could make two flies on a wall sound interesting."

Heath and Cotter are not alone among the commenting fraternity in turning to people's daily routines to provide light relief during the lockdown.

In the United States, Fox Sports commentator Joe Buck was working on the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl victory over the San Francisco 49ers just weeks before the virus took hold.

But now Buck, one of America's most celebrated announcers, is asking his 268,000 Twitter followers to send him short videos for him to add mock commentary. —AFP

## Sports

# Coronavirus test key to English cricket season, says ECB chief

## Start of 2020 season pushed back again until July

LONDON: England cricket chief Tom Harrison says the fate of the season depends on access to coronavirus testing as officials work to cushion the financial blow for struggling counties.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive warned fans that the sport would be a long way down the pecking order in terms of getting hold of testing equipment.

The ECB announced on Friday that the start of the 2020 season had been pushed back again until July at the earliest — nearly three months after the original scheduled start. Attempts will be made to reschedule international fixtures for the period from July until the end of September, including the West Indies Test tour of England, which had been planned for June.

Harrison said even if Britain's lockdown eased to allow cricket, games would likely be played behind closed doors, a concept he said the ECB were "starting to get comfortable with". "Clearly there will need to be a significant testing regime in place," he said in a conference call.

"Right now testing elite athletes or testing people in respect of sport just cannot be a priority in the context of the national health crisis and the issues frontline workers and vulnerable people are facing," he added.

"At the right time this becomes a relevant discus-

sion and government tells us when that is the right time. It's not yet, clearly."

### INTERNATIONAL REVENUES

The ECB have made it clear that their priority is to preserve lucrative Tests and limited-overs internationals. There have been suggestions those fixtures might be moved to potentially "bio-secure" venues such as Old Trafford and Hampshire's Ageas Bowl, which have on-site hotels that allow for easier monitoring of players and officials.

"I'm not sure if 'quarantined' is the right word but there will need to be areas of the ground where only certain people are allowed to go at certain points," said Harrison. As well as the West Indies series, England are also meant to play a home Test series against Pakistan and limited-overs internationals against Australia and Ireland this season. But health and travel restrictions imposed by foreign governments could prove a huge stumbling block, with Harrison saying getting international sides into the country was one of cricket's "biggest challenges".

Harrison has previously warned a season without any cricket at all could cost the game in England and Wales more than £300 million (\$370 million), echoing dire warnings from other regions.

Even before the outbreak of COVID-19 there had



Tom Harrison (right)

long been a debate about whether the domestic game could support 18 first-class counties, with several clubs dependent on ECB grants funded by broadcast deals.

Harrison said the board wanted to do all they could to "keep the networks with the lights on", given the counties are run independently of the

board. The ECB chief, as he had done when announcing the ECB's £61 million aid package last month, again said English cricket's cost base was "too high".

But he added: "Don't draw the conclusion that not everyone can survive, because that's not the right conclusion to draw from that statement." — AFP

## Woakes ready for 'quarantine' Tests

LONDON: England paceman Chris Woakes believes players will accept being "quarantined" if that helps Test cricket resume following the coronavirus outbreak. Cricket worldwide has been brought to a standstill by the spread of COVID-19, with the start of the English season delayed until May 28 at the earliest.

England are meant to begin a three-Test series against the West Indies on June 4 but it now looks increasingly likely those matches will have to be rescheduled, if they are played at all.

Should Britain's current lockdown be relaxed sufficiently to allow cricket to go ahead, Tests could be played behind closed doors at 'bio-secure' grounds such as Hampshire's Ageas Bowl, Headingley and Old Trafford, all of which have on-site hotels where players and officials could be monitored while restricting their access to the outside world.

None of those venues are meant to stage matches in the West Indies series, with the second Test currently scheduled for Woakes's home ground of Edgbaston in Birmingham. But Woakes told reporters in a conference call on Wednesday: "If players have to be put in quarantine for a period of time...After what the world has been through, if it was at a venue where we stayed on site, players would be happy to do so."

"If it was a three-four week window, I think guys would be open to do that without too many issues." The Warwickshire favourite, who said even pacemen such as himself could go from their living rooms into the Test arena in a "mini-



Chris Woakes

mum" of two weeks if required, added: "I think the players are happy to play behind closed doors if that is the only way for cricket to go ahead in the near future."

### 'FAMILY FIRST'

Woakes's decision to pull out of a £160,000 (\$197,000) deal with the Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League — itself now suspended — had been put down to the need to stay fit for England duty. But the 31-year-old said Wednesday that other factors were at play.

"I didn't say it at the time, but we're expecting another baby in September and that added to the

decision as well. "My wife wasn't exactly very well at home during that time. The idea of being away from home for three months was going to be too much. I felt family had to come first."

A huge difference in home and away form means World Cup winner Woakes's 33-Test career has largely been a stop-start affair. Tests in England have seen Woakes average an impressive 23.45 with the ball compared to an expensive 51.68 abroad.

But there were signs of improvement during his two most recent Tests, with Woakes taking four wickets on a flat pitch against New Zealand at Hamilton before Christmas and striking against South Africa at Johannesburg in January.

"I am the first to admit my away record hasn't been as good as my home one," Woakes said.

But he stressed he had made a "breakthrough" under new England head coach Chris Silverwood, who brought in fellow former Test quick Darren Gough to advise the current pacemen.

"In the past I have probably been a bit safe and bowled a bit short whereas actually with the Kookaburra (ball), you still have to give it a chance to move laterally and get it up there," explained Woakes. "He (Gough) talked me through that and said I needed to bowl a fuller length away from home."

The start of England's tour of South Africa saw the squad laid low by a 'mystery' virus. Asked if it might have been COVID-19, Woakes said: "You do look back on it and kind of wonder I suppose, Woakes said, however, players then had mostly suffered with diarrhoea-type illness, rather than the persistent coughing associated with coronavirus.

"There are obviously fever-like symptoms as well so it's a tricky one," he said. "But of course, it has crossed your mind." — AFP

## Aussie NBA forward Ingles doubtful season will resume

WASHINGTON: Utah Jazz swingman Joe Ingles, an Australian in his sixth NBA season, said Friday he doubts more with each passing week the halted 2019-20 campaign will ever resume.

In a conference call with Utah media detailed by the Salt Lake Tribune, the 32-year-old playmaker from Adelaide said it would be difficult to leave wife Renae and three-year-old twins Milla and Jacob for a seclusion plan to finish the campaign.

Ingles was in Oklahoma City last month when French teammate Rudy Gobert tested positive for the coronavirus, prompting the NBA to put the season on hiatus.

"I assumed we would be in this two-week quarantine and then we'll be back," Ingles said. "That was very early on and I probably didn't know as much as we all do now with the whole thing that's going on."

"But honestly, my personal opinion is every week that we go along, it feels like it's a less and less chance that we're going to (return)."

Sequestering players in one spot to play out a two-month post-season isn't appealing to Ingles either.

"It would be extremely hard," Ingles said. "That would be basically the longest I've been away from the kids — which I don't know how much I'm willing to do that, as much as I love playing basketball."

Two days after his wife, a retired pro netball player, gave birth to the twins, Ingles left with the Aussie squad for the 2016 Rio Olympics.

"Back then, as hard as it was, it was easier because they were just like eating and pooping and that was it," he said. "Now that they've got personalities, they know when I'm leaving, they tell me they miss me, stuff like that. That makes it a lot harder to leave."

"Even just leaving to go to the supermarket, it's like they cry and they don't want you to leave and stuff, so two or three months without them would be borderline impossible for me."

Nevertheless, Ingles is keeping himself ready, having bought a hoop this month for his house, which also has a gym.

Ingles said his father in Australia has been fired while his mother "works in a nursing home so she's still working. That's considered essential at the moment." — AFP

## Dhoni won't play for India again

NEW DELHI: Veteran off-spinner Harbhajan Singh said he doesn't think Mahendra Singh Dhoni will play for India again, adding to the guessing game over the future of the superstar former captain.

Dhoni, 38, has not appeared for club or country since last year's 50-over World Cup and India's coronavirus lockdown could threaten his chances of getting back into the national team.

The Indian Premier League, the main platform before this year's scheduled T20 World Cup, is likely to be truncated or cancelled because of the

## West Indies postpone tour of England

LONDON: The three Test series between the West Indies and England in June has been postponed due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, Cricket West Indies (CWI) said on Friday. The West Indies had been scheduled to play June 4-8 at The Oval, June 12-16 at Edgbaston, June 25-29 at Lord's.

The decision to postpone the tour came as the result over the uncertainty

pandemic.

Harbhajan, who plays with Dhoni at IPL side Chennai Super Kings, said international retirement was on the cards for Dhoni and that he was increasingly being asked about his teammate.

"It's up to him. You need to know whether he wants to play for India again," Harbhajan said in an online forum. "As far as I know him, he won't want to wear India's blue jersey again. IPL he will play, but for India I think he had decided (the 2019) World Cup was his last."

Dhoni, who gave up Test cricket in 2014, started training for the Super Kings in March but has not commented on his international future. Dhoni led India to win the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in 2007. He hit a six to seal the 2011 World Cup final victory and, along with it, his status as a national hero. He has amassed 10,773 runs from 350 ODIs. — AFP

surrounding the safe resumption of the sport in Britain as well as international air travel.

"We continue to be in regular dialogue with the ECB on when and how we might be able to rearrange the test series," said Cricket West Indies chief executive Johnny Grave in a statement.

"Clearly playing in June is now not possible and we will continue our discussions with the ECB and other International Boards on trying to find new dates. "We will only travel to England to play the series if our players can be assured that it is safe to do so." The CWI said the proposed window for the staging of this series is now July until the end of September. — Reuters

## Tendulkar's 'Desert Storm' voted his top ODI innings

NEW DELHI: A blistering 143 scored against Australia in 1998 was voted Sachin Tendulkar's greatest one-day innings in an International Cricket Council poll released for his 47th birthday.

The 131-ball knock, with nine fours and five sixes, became known as the 'Desert Storm' after a sand storm in Sharjah interrupted India's chase. Tendulkar took on the likes of Shane Warne, Damien Fleming and Michael Kasprovic but his side lost.

Tendulkar's blitz narrowly edged out his match-winning 98 against arch-rivals Pakistan in the 2003 World Cup group match. "It was neck and neck" until the end, the ICC said in releasing the results of its poll.

Tendulkar, who played 200 Test matches and is now India's biggest cricket legend in retirement, used his birthday to urge fans to stay indoors during the nationwide coronavirus lockdown.

"They encouraged me and they prayed for me. What did they pray for? That Sachin shouldn't get out and I should be at the crease," he told Indian broadcaster Star Sports. "My wish for them is that they should also not get out. They should also stay inside the crease which means that they should stay at home, safe and healthy."

Meanwhile the Board of Control for Cricket in India relived the master blaster's unbeaten century against England in the Chennai Test in 2008 in excerpts released on its Twitter feed.

Tendulkar smashed 103 in the second innings to guide India to a six-wicket win. BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, a former India teammate, and other past and present cricketers paid tribute to Tendulkar.

Current India skipper Virat Kohli said: "Happy birthday to the man whose passion for the game of cricket has inspired many."

The right-handed Tendulkar made his debut for India aged just 16 in 1989 and broke almost every batting record before retiring in 2013. The former India captain is the only cricketer to have scored 100 international centuries and is the highest run scorer with 34,357 runs across formats. — AFP

## Vanuatu defies shutdown with women's final

SYDNEY: The Pacific island nation of Vanuatu is defying the coronavirus-led shutdown of global sport by scheduling their Women's Super League cricket final and streaming it on social media yesterday.

Most sport around the world, including all international cricket, has been brought to a halt because of the social distancing measures put in place to control the pandemic.

Vanuatu, some 2,000 kilometres off the east coast of Australia, has a population of 300,000 but has not yet recorded a single case of COVID-19.

"We're lucky here in Vanuatu and life is returning to normal so we thought it was our duty to provide the world with some live sport," Shane Deitz, chief executive of Vanuatu Cricket, said in a video posted on Twitter.

"We really hope that everyone around the world can tune in and watch some fantastic cricket coming from Vanuatu and break up the boredom you must be suffering stuck in your living rooms."

Power House Sharks will play Tafea Black Birds in the semi-finals in the morning before the winners take on Mele Bulls in the final of the four-team competition.

The women's final was preceded by a men's exhibition match and streamed live from the capital Port Vila on the Vanuatu Cricket Twitter feed and Facebook page. — Reuters

**18** NFL Packers bring the Love, but Rodgers not feeling it



**19** Coronavirus test key to English cricket season, says ECB chief



**19** Woakes ready for 'quarantine' Tests



LONDON: File photo taken on February 22, 2020 shows Sheffield United's Irish defender Enda Stevens (2nd L) celebrates with teammates after scoring the goal of the English Premier League football match between Sheffield United and Brighton and Hove Albion. Sheffield United announced on April 21, 2020, that their players will defer part of their wages until the end of 2020 to help the Premier League club ride out the economic storm caused by coronavirus. —AFP

## UEFA open to seasons ending early

### Champions League qualification should be 'on sporting merit'

PARIS: UEFA left the door open for leagues to bring an early end to their seasons during the coronavirus pandemic but said qualification for the next Champions League should be "based on sporting merit".

The announcement by European football's governing body came after a videoconference meeting of its Executive Committee and with several countries awaiting approval to end their seasons because of the complications brought about by imposed virus lockdowns.

In a statement, UEFA said completing seasons in their original formats remained "the ideal scenario, should the pandemic situation permit it." If not, leagues were urged to find ways of restarting "with a different format", which could mean play-offs being introduced in some cases.

"If a domestic competition is prematurely terminated for legitimate reasons...UEFA would require (leagues) to select clubs for the UEFA club competitions 2020/21 based on sporting merit" in the current season.

That would appear to definitively rule out any possibility of seasons being voided altogether. Instead, national associations are left with the choice of trying

to restart somehow or, if needed, calling an end to the season with current tables considered final and Champions League and Europa League places dished out on that basis.

The "legitimate reasons" outlined by UEFA for ending seasons now included leagues being prevented from doing so by governments "before a date that would make it possible to complete the current season in good time".

Earlier this week the Dutch football federation (KNVB) announced its intention to call an end to the season following a government decision to extend a ban on large gatherings until September because of the pandemic, which has caused more than 110,000 deaths across Europe.

Ending the Eredivisie season now would mean Ajax being declared champions although they are level on points with second-placed AZ Alkmaar with nine games still to play. AZ have won both league meetings with Ajax this season.

The Belgian Pro League is hoping to confirm next week that it will end its season, thereby declaring Club Brugge champions.

The Scottish league could do the same after a controversial resolution passed last week by the 42 member clubs to award positions on a points-per-game basis. The lower leagues have already been declared over and doing the same for the Premiership would mean Celtic being handed a ninth successive title with eight games still to play.

In contrast, the German Bundesliga is hoping to restart early next month, with games behind closed doors. It remains to be seen if Europe's other leading leagues — halted since mid-March because of the health crisis — will be able to do the same.

There are still 11 rounds of matches left in Spain's La Liga, for example, yet UEFA remain keen to get the 2019-20 season over and done with by the end of August. That would mean fewer delays in starting next season.

UEFA's own calendar working group has been working on two potential scenarios, with one seeing domestic and European competitions restarting in parallel and the other seeing domestic leagues being played out before the Champions League and Europa League are completed in August.

In the latter scenario, the Champions League final would be pencilled in for August 29, with the Europa League final two days earlier. Both competitions are currently frozen in the last-16 stage, but any resumption depends on travel restrictions being lifted. —AFP

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The ideal scenario

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### 'Everything clouds over and goes dark', Iniesta on depression

MADRID: Andres Iniesta has described his struggle with depression while playing for Barcelona, which his mother says was a "bottomless pit" that caused her 25-year-old son to ask to sleep with his parents.

Iniesta recalls his experience with the illness in a Rakuten TV documentary, 'Andres Iniesta - The Unexpected Hero', which was released on Thursday and covers his move to Japanese side Vissel Kobe in 2018.

After winning the Champions League under Pep Guardiola in 2009, Iniesta was battling injury and then hit by the death of his friend Dani Jarque, the 26-year-

old Espanyol defender who suffered a heart attack.

"The days pass and you realise you're not improving, you don't feel good, you're not yourself. Everything clouds over and goes dark," Iniesta said.

On Jarque's death, Iniesta added: "That was like a body blow, something powerful that knocked me down again and I was pretty low, clearly because I wasn't very well."

Iniesta's depression is described by those closest to him, including his mother Maria Lujan and father Jose Antonio.

"I noticed he wasn't well one night when we were sleeping downstairs and he came down and said, 'mum can I sleep here with you?'" Maria said. "Then the world came down on my head."

Jose Antonio said: "Our 25 year-old son coming down at midnight and wanting to sleep with his parents means he can't be well. He said, 'I'm not well dad.' I said, 'what's wrong?' 'I don't know, I don't feel well.'"

Iniesta's father admitted he thought his son might

have to take a break from football. "At one stage I thought he would have to stop because the most important thing was him," said Jose Antonio.

Iniesta began having sessions with psychologist Inma Puig, who said the Spaniard's recovery owed much to those around him, including Guardiola.

"Guardiola said this is the first time I've been in this situation as a coach," said Puig. "I remember he said, 'the most important thing now is Andres, the person not the player.'" "They're people and this is a very human thing which affects millions of people around the world," said Guardiola. "They have to know we are there for them."

"Guardiola tried to get him out of that bottomless pit he was in," said Iniesta's mother Maria. Iniesta came through Barcelona's La Masia academy and went on to win nine La Liga titles and four Champions Leagues with the club.

He also lifted the World Cup with Spain in 2010, after scoring the winning goal against the Netherlands



Andres Iniesta

in the final. Despite receiving a hero's farewell from Barca, Iniesta hinted his relationship with the board influenced his decision to go to Japan.

"People at the club never imagined I could leave," Iniesta said. "It's like everything, in relationships if you don't discuss things at the right time there comes a time when there's no way back." —AFP