

# Minister: Kuwait could ease virus restrictions after Eid

More curbs sought on expat driving licenses • Global deaths top 200,000

## Crisis deepens as Yemen separatists declare self-rule

DUBAI: Yemeni separatists early yesterday declared self-rule of the country's south as a peace deal with the government crumbled, complicating a long and separate conflict with Houthi rebels who control much of the north. The Southern Transitional Council (STC) accused the government of failing to perform its duties and of "conspiring" against the southern.

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah expressed hope that coronavirus restrictions could be eased after the Eid Al-Fitr holidays, a month from now. But the minister said he cannot be absolutely certain that some of the restrictions will be lifted. Neighboring countries like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have eased massive shutdowns on the occasion of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, with UAE allowing shopping malls, cafes and restaurants to resume partial operations after adopting strict measures.

The number of coronavirus cases reported in Kuwait over the past two days increased after the health ministry said it was adopting "active surveillance" to test a larger number of people, especially in expat-dominated areas. A majority of the cases detected are among expat workers living in unhealthy houses and in overcrowded rooms. Of the 2,892 cases reported in Kuwait until Saturday, only 456 of them are Kuwaitis and the rest are expats, topped by Indians with 1,504 cases, followed by Egyptians with 279 cases.

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IZALCO, El Salvador: Handout picture released on Saturday shows inmates at the Izalco prison, northwest of San Salvador, during a security operation within the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic after President Nayib Bukele decreed a maximum emergency in all penitentiary centers housing gang members. — AFP

**Ramadan**  
K A R E E M

Imsak	03:35	Asr	15:21
Fajr	03:45	Maghrib	18:21
Dhuhr	11:46	Isha	19:44

The key to safety is staying home.

V O L V O

## Local

# Kuwait public works ministry builds 5,000-bed quarantine

## Health Minister confirms efforts to ease restrictions

Pandemic Diaries

### Collective hands



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

Yesterday, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah posted a thank you message on his official Twitter account: "To all my colleagues on the front lines. You have made incredible sacrifices, leaving your families, working tirelessly, and showing us the true meaning of resilience and sacrifice. You are combating this pandemic, to give life to our collective health and prosperity. Thank you."

The minister posted his comments in Arabic, English and Hindi - acknowledging the diversity of the health professional community in Kuwait and rightly thanking them all for their incredible hard work, sacrifice and dedication. He also demonstrated, through the inclusion of English and Hindi languages the importance of an integrated (rather than segregated response) to this pandemic.

Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah is right. We are all in this together and we will survive this as a collective or not at all. But there remain some problems with Kuwait's approach to dealing with this crisis. For instance, the segregation of COVID patients based on nationality - sending Kuwaiti patients to Jaber Hospital directly but expats must go to their local hospital first and then via a COVID ward either be sent to Jaber (if a child, female or high risk) or to Mishref field hospital (if male, low risk).

The lockdowns of Jleeb and Mahboula have also done little or nothing to slow the spread of the virus in the community but have created innumerable hardships for the people living in those areas. From food shortages and insecurity to lack of inability to earn enough money to live for many, the lockdowns further segregate the community - though on the basis of location rather than nationality.

The only division that should be driving health policy decisions at this stage is the one between healthy and unhealthy people. As Sheikh Dr Basel has so rightly acknowledged, our collective health and prosperity is in our collective hands.



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Fares and other officials tour the quarantine site, as the Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium is seen in the background. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Fares announced Saturday delivering a section of the Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium's quarantine to the Ministry of Health. The initiative was taken to back up efforts by the State and health authorities after increase of numbers of infections with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), said the minister in a statement. Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah attended the handover event. She praised Kuwait Red Crescent Society for its contribution to building the quarantine and lauded "frontline" volunteers partaking in the fight against the contagion. Ismail Al-Failakawi, the ministry undersecretary, said in a statement the quarantine was built in three weeks. The complex includes a field medical center, dormitories for medics and nurses, 5,000 beds, intensive care units and pharmacies. He explained that the delivered section included 1,250 beds, adding that the other units would be handed over later.

“No outbreak among medics”

#### Easing restrictions

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said that efforts were on to cut restrictions as much as possible, adding that work resumption is unlikely after Eid Al-Fitr holiday. Speaking to reporters while launching the new quarantine center, the minister said that the first phase of the medical facility, involving 1,250 beds and a field hospital, had been completed, adding that the whole quarantine center would go into service by the end of May. Furthermore, another 250-bed fully equipped medical facility will be opened at Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref, the health minister pointed out. However, he rebuffed recent local press reports on increasing COVID-19 infections among medics as "untrue", while urging people to follow relevant health guidelines, chiefly washing hands frequently, not touching face, maintaining social distancing and wearing face masks.



Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah poses with health ministry staff.

IN MY VIEW

### Great value in spare time



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

And then everybody was home! What a change, and what a new lifestyle - a lifestyle no one would have contemplated or followed or even thought about! Staying home nowadays is not one's choice, but is enforcement by authorities for the protection of everyone. This in turn has created a lot of spare time that should be utilized in a relatively productive manner.

In reality, spare time has great value, because it allows one to gain new habits and teach oneself new skills, and it is not something that calls for doing nothing. Successful people are those who use their time correctly, and know how to manage their free time in activities that may bring them more success.

To start with, there should be organization of time for worship, sleeping and eating. Many people resort to being lazy and sleep most of the daylight hours and stay up most of the night, and this is very detrimental to their physical health in many aspects. We must return to healthy habits of sleeping relatively early at night, because this will help our bodies carry out functions they were designed for. Going to sleep at normal times helps the body's immune system, and this is what we need under the current circumstances.

It is imperative that we watch our diet during the month of Ramadan and eat healthy meals at a reasonable rate, while avoiding eating sugary foods, which helps our immune system do its job of fending against harmful elements.

There are a good number of people whose moods change when fasting - this is something contrary to the purpose for which fasting was imposed in Islam. It is to have self-discipline and train oneself to be of good behavior in talking, working and dealing with others. It is not warranted for one to become edgy and nervous, and sometimes it can be obvious that this is artificial and not actual, and must be avoided.

Now for smokers, it is the most valuable opportunity to make your body learn how to live without the over 4,000 toxins a cigarette contains. It is 14 hours of fasting spent without a cig, which I call the cancer stick, so you must take the opportunity to keep the cig in the box for 29 or 30 days, and this will for sure clean your body of the addictive element nicotine, which gives the urge to smoke.

It is all about behavior - we must be calm, cool and collected at all items, not be offensive towards others and claim it is because of fasting, as this will defeat the purpose. I was at a major supermarket and bought a few vegetables and fruits, and went to the corner for weighing and pricing. There was a long line, when suddenly an elderly man came and stood ahead of all of us and started weighing! The man behind me thought I let the elderly man go ahead, and told me, "you lost your turn, and you should go behind." I asked, "are you sure?" and he replied "yes, it is my right!"

I did not argue much and left the line altogether to buy other things and returned later. Rights are sacred, I know, but what is really a right and what is not? See you tomorrow, Allah willing.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 2,892 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Saturday, in addition to 19 deaths. With the exception of 58 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, 806 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 2,067 people receiving treatment and 1,367 quarantined as of yesterday. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people. Meanwhile, Kuwait requires all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection.

#### Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) 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 vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

#### Amnesty

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

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

nationalities (April 26-30, 2020).

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

#### Hotlines

The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

#### Medicine delivery

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

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749

Razi Hospital: 97633487  
Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242  
Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113  
Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037  
Maternity Hospital: 98559531  
As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508  
Zain Hospital: 97552031  
NBK Hospital: 96931761  
Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470  
Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164  
Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786  
Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469  
KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day.

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

# Kuwaiti citizens' repatriation 3rd phase kicks off today

## Phase two of citizens' repatriation complete

**KUWAIT:** The third phase to evacuate stranded nationals from abroad begins today and will last for three days. Kuwait's Directorate-General for Civil Aviation (DGCA) Chairman Sheikh Salman Humoud Al-Sabah said on Saturday. In a press statement, Sheikh Salman said that the third phase will include 35 flights from the airports of London, Gatwick Airport, Manchester, Glasgow, Dublin, New York, Moscow, Armenia, Kiev and Hail, and is expected to transport 8,190 citizens. The second phase included the following destinations: Amman, Casablanca, Nouakchott, Istanbul, Vienna, Alexandria, Cairo, New York, Brussels, London, Paris, Manila, Bangkok, Dakar, Tunis, Malta, Beirut, Tbilisi, Baku, Mumbai, Delhi, Sarajevo and Amsterdam. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for providing all the needs and care for citizens in their areas of residence until they return to the homeland.

The second phase of repatriation flights for Kuwaiti nationals stranded overseas amid the coronavirus outbreak, including 57 flights, had concluded on Saturday. The three-day phase, which was carried out onboard domestic airlines Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways, targeted cities in Arab and global destinations. These included Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, Casablanca, Tunis, Nouakchott, Dakar, Istanbul, Malta, Larnaca, Tbilisi, Baku, Sarajevo, Brussels, Amsterdam, Vienna, Paris, London, Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangkok, Manila, and New York. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti citizens leave Kuwait International Airport upon their return as part of a repatriation plan on Saturday, and ahead of being taken to mandatory home quarantine. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Wellbeing Amidst Pandemic

## Helping children cope with pandemic

By Sadie Hussain

It is equally important to help children cope with stress and protect them from the hysteria surrounding the pandemic. Below are some coping mechanisms that may be used:

1. Answer questions and share facts about the pandemic in a way that children can understand.
  2. Respond to reactions in a supportive way, listen to concerns and give your children extra care, attention and support. Reassure your children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset.
  3. Share some of your coping mechanisms with them, teach them how you deal with stress so that they can learn how to cope with you.
  4. Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, or create new routines, especially if children must stay at home.
  5. Help them find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness. Every child has his or her own way of expressing emotions. Engaging in creative activities, such as playing or drawing can facilitate this process whilst also learning. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.
  6. Maintain regular contact with friends and family, such as twice-daily scheduled telephone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication in order to maintain some normality and to foster an interactive environment.
- During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss the pandemic with your children in an honest and age-appropriate manner. If your children have concerns, addressing them together may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times and therefore your wellbeing is of paramount importance and particularly during this time.
- The above advice should not be considered as a comprehensive report or medical advice concerning issues that may affect physical and mental wellbeing.



## Kuwait Amir receives more Ramadan greetings

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday received a phone call from Qatari Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. During the phone conversation, Sheikh Hamad congratulated His Highness the Amir on the holy month of Ramadan and wished both Arab and Muslim worlds a blessed Ramadan. He also wished His Highness the

Amir well and Kuwait more progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad. In reply, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad thanked the Amir of Qatar for this fraternal contact and good initiative, wishing him well and Qatar more progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received a phone call from Iraq's Wisdom Party Leader Sayyid Ammar Abdulaziz Al-Hakim. During the phone conversation, Hakim congratulated His Highness the Amir on the holy month of Ramadan and wished both Arab and Muslim worlds a blessed Ramadan. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked Al-Hakim for the

kind words and sentiments, wishing him good health and prosperity.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a call from Saudi Minister of State and Cabinet Member Saudi Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahad Al Saud. During the phone conversation, the Saudi prince congratulated His Highness the Amir on the holy month of Ramadan and wished both Arab and Muslim worlds a blessed Ramadan. His Highness the Amir, in reply, thanked him for this good initiative and fraternal contact, wishing him well. His Highness the Amir also received a contact from Iraqi Dr Ibrahim Mohammad Bahr Al-Ulloum, congratulating him on the holy month of Ramadan and wished both Arab and Muslim worlds a blessed Ramadan. He also wished His Highness the Amir wellbeing and good health. In reply, His Highness the Amir thanked him for this good initiative and fraternal contact, wishing him well. — KUNA

## Co-op workers test positive for COVID-19

**KUWAIT:** Al-Faiha Co-operative Society announced on Saturday that it was closing yesterday and today because a board member and a number of volunteers were infected with the coronavirus. The co-op will reopen its doors tomorrow. Also, Shamieh Co-operative Society announced it extended its closure until yesterday to allow for more employees' examining after several volunteers tested positive for coronavirus on Friday.

Meanwhile, a staff member in the maintenance department in Al-Sulaibikhat Co-operative Society was suspected of infection with coronavirus. The co-op said that the supermarket was closed on Friday and Saturday, noting that the employee

was not in any kind of direct contact with customers. In the meantime, the manager of the Police Co-operative Society and one of the employees there tested positive for coronavirus. The coop was closed yesterday.

In other news, citizens and residents are allowed now to book an appointment to shop at Al-Forda Central Fruits and Vegetables Market. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a trial booking appointment for people to shop from Al-Forda through [www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop). The timing for appointment to shop is from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm. Meanwhile, the ministry noted that customers can register through the website to shop at co-ops only once a week.

## 'ClO2 product' not authorized by Health Ministry

**KUWAIT:** Several international organizations have warned against the use of chlorine dioxide and mentioned severe side effects caused by using it. Claims mentioned on chlorine dioxide products say the chemical protects against airborne viruses, bacteria and fungi, but this is not medically proven.

Health Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Medicine and Food Control Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said assertions on social media about a product that attaches to clothes are not correct and it is not authorized by the health ministry. He said that a study of the product on April 8 showed that it is a card containing ClO2, which is used in sterilization and disinfection of surfaces and medical equipment under certain technical conditions.

Several organizations have warned against the use of this card which con-

tains chlorine dioxide, such as the Saudi Food and Drug Agency, Qatar and Oman health ministries as well as Jordan's Food and Drug Public Authority. The US FDA warned on April 8, 2020 against the use of such products and eating them, as side effects appeared in those who ingested them, such as respiratory failure, drop in blood pressure, liver failure, drop in blood cell count, severe vomiting and diarrhea.

Bader said the product is not registered with any supervisory agencies around the world mentioned in the circulated social media ad, and there is no scientific evidence proving the safe use and effectiveness of the product. He warned against the use of any medical product for prevention or treatment until after making sure it is registered at the health ministry.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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## Local

# Zain launches annual Ramadan campaign with initiatives suited to current situation

## Company delivered 'Ramadan Machla' to underprivileged families

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of its annual campaign for the holy month of Ramadan with many humanitarian, religious, and sport initiatives that suit the current situation throughout the holy month.

Zain's program of various charitable and humanitarian initiatives planned for the Holy Month comes in line with the company's corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy that closely focuses on giving back to the community. The company carefully selected the activities and programs that most presented an added value to all segments of the society in light of the current circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this report, Zain showcases the initiatives and programs it will undertake during Ramadan this year:

### Ramadan Machla

Zain already kicked-off its Ramadan campaign before the beginning of the holy month, where it delivered 'Ramadan Machla' (supplies) to be distributed to underprivileged families in Kuwait via a number of non-profit organizations. The initiative aims at serving underprivileged families' food supplies needs before the upcoming Holy Month of Ramadan and during the current COVID-19 crisis.

Zain offered the 'Machla' via vouchers in collaboration with Oncost, one of Kuwait's biggest grocery markets, to give each family the opportunity to choose specific supplies as per their different personal needs. The company delivered the vouchers to a number of non-profit organizations: the Kuwait Food Bank, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers. These certified non-profit organizations will distribute the vouchers to underprivileged families in Kuwait, who may redeem them at Oncost's Qurain branch. The branch features a large collection of food and other consumer supplies.

As part of its national commitment during this crisis, Zain recently offered over 40,000 meals in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank, where a large number of the meals was distributed during the week dedicated by the Ministry of Health at Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref to conduct tests for residents who recently entered the country. The meals were a contribution by the company to ease the long waiting times while waiting in line. Many meals are also being

continuously distributed at Kuwait International Airport's gates dedicated for residents who are returning to their countries because of this crisis.

Zain also offers many smartphone charging stations at Kuwait International Airport to serve Kuwaiti citizens who are returning home as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' evacuation plan to bring Kuwaitis back home from all over the world during this crisis. This contribution aimed at facilitating communication between returning Kuwaitis and their families as soon as they arrive to Kuwait. Zain is also continuously distributing a large number of the meals to them in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

### Zain Quran App

As it does every year, Zain offers its free Quran App, which the company gifts to its customers during the Holy Month of Ramadan of every year. The app offers the best Quran reading experience on iOS, Apple Watch, and Android smart devices. The app features a user-friendly interface and many great features, including reading all pages of the Holy Quran, downloading and listening to the Holy Quran in the voices of over 20 famous reciters, read Tafseer (interpretations) to understand the meaning of verses, searching the whole text of the Holy Quran, as well as synchronizing usage between multiple devices.

The app also includes a dark mode feature for easy reading in the dark, prayer times and athan notifications, Qibla direction, and much more. Customers can download the app for free by searching 'Zain Quran' in the App Store and Google Play Store.

### 'Ya Baghi Al Khair Aqbel' 4

This Ramadan, Zain launches the fourth edition of its charitable initiative "Ya Baghi Al Khair Aqbel". As part of the initiative, Zain will donate 500 fils (half a KD) each time a customer pays their bill anytime during the holy month of Ramadan through one of Zain's electronic or direct channels, including Zain's website, Zain's smartphone app, any of Zain's Quickpay machines, and the company's main branches available during the official break. The collected donations will be used to support the country's Contribution Fund to Face the Emerging Coronavirus.



### Zain offers free Quran App



Zain's team delivering 'Ramadan Machla' to Kuwait Food Bank.

### Strategic Partnership with Give platform

As part of Zain's efforts to enrich and encourage charitable work during the holy month of Ramadan, Zain signed a strategic partnership with Give, the only online platform for donations in Kuwait. The non-profit platform aims at facilitating donations and encouraging giving by connecting donors with registered and certified charities in Kuwait. The platform also helps donors look for charity projects and opportunities in one place, as well as process their donations safely via a secure payment gateway.

All the charities listed in the Give platform are certified and licensed by the official authorities in Kuwait, and they currently feature 105 various charitable projects. The current list includes: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Direct Aid, Sheikh Abdullah Al Nouri Charity Society, International Islamic Charity Organization, Kuwait Society for Relief, Kuwait Humanitarian & Friendship Society, Rohamaa Baynahum Charity, Global Charity Association for Development, Al Sidra Association for Psychological Care of Cancer Patients, and Al Najat Charity.

Give includes many features that can benefit donors, including ease of access to charities and their projects through the website or smartphone app, using filters to look for certain projects, comparing projects between different charities, reading full details about each project to make an informed decision, view donation history and receive notifications about project updates or reports, and more.

### QDWA program with Shaikh Fahad Al-Kandari

Every Ramadan, Zain is keen on diversifying the content of its campaign to include cultural and religious programs. This year, Zain sponsors QDWA, a religious show hosted by Imam of Kuwait's Grand Mosque Sheikh Fahad Al-Kandari on Kuwait TV and YouTube. In the show, Sheikh Fahad Al-Kandari discussed many values from the story of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). The show was filmed in various locations, such as Makkah, Madinah, London, Birmingham, Jordan, Tunisia, Egypt and Kuwait.

### Strategic Partnership with HOT Life App

During the holy month of every year, Zain is keen on supporting sport and health initiatives and programs to encourage exercising during Ramadan and raise awareness of the importance of staying active while fasting. As the current situation does not allow being active outside, Zain was keen on strategically partnering with HOT Life, a sport app that offers recorded workout videos. Through the partnership, Zain offers its customers a subscription in the app for one-month FREE to encourage them to stay active at home.

HOT Life, a success story of the Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program, offers daily workouts that suits different people. The app also offers full programs to help users achieve their health goals, as well as family and kid-friendly workouts to encourage children to stay active indoors. All workouts are recorded in high definition videos and feature clear voice instructions in Arabic and English. The app is available on devices that support iOS and Android operating systems.

### Zain's Ramadan TVC

During the first weeks of every Ramadan, the public awaits the new Zain Ramadan televised commercial (TVC) that always reflects the joy and spiritual atmosphere the holy month brings. This year, Zain was keen on launching its Ramadan TVC, 'God will not forsake us', on the very first day of the holy month to send its message of hope early on, given the stressful times the whole world is going through these days.

Zain's new TVC addresses many beautiful values and messages on how people and children around the world deal with the current COVID-19 pandemic. The TVC invites everyone to many noble human values that are much needed these days, such as hope, unity, helping others, patience, joy, praying, and more. Towards its end, the TVC honors all those who work tirelessly in the frontlines to face the pandemic, sacrificing themselves to protect everyone.

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Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: One of the achievements of the post-oil era: Modern buildings by that time's standards lined up around a mosque in Kuwait City. The old mud houses were removed, and Kuwaitis were instead provided with houses built from concrete, with full services including water and electricity. The picture shows -income houses that the government of Kuwait built for its citizens. (Source: 'Kuwait Miracle on the Desert' by David Cooke, New York, 1970. — Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakarfa Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

The levels of fasting

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Ramadan is not just about abstaining from food, drinks, conjugal rites, and acts that nullify the Fast from dawn to sunset. Real fasting should bring about a real inner change in the Muslim individual and in a Muslim community at large. The Islamic Fast is not about a mere starvation or self-denial; rather it is an act of worship and obedience to Allah (the Almighty and Majestic), thanksgiving, forgiveness, spiritual training, and self-examination, etc. If you perform an act of worship during the month of Ramadan, your reward is doubled or even tripled. Fasting in Ramadan is very special for the reason that God Almighty Himself determines the amount of rewards you will receive.

What are the levels of fasting?

a. The fast of the masses, which entails abandoning food, drinks and satisfying one's carnal desires albeit licitly for some hours. Anyone who falls under this category will get abundant rewards from Allah (the Almighty and Majestic). Allah (the Almighty) says in Al-Hadeeth Al-Qudsi describing the condition of a fasting person, translated as: "... he abandons his food, drinks and conjugal rites because of Me. Therefore, fasting is for Me and I am the One to determine the nature and amount of rewards for him." (Al-Bukhari # 1904)

• Majority of the Muslims fall under this category. Therefore, I urge those who have resolved to fast this year to try their level best to upgrade their fast and fall under the highest of all the three categories of fasting. Our long-sought goal should be to please Allah (the Exalted in Might) and to keep Him in our minds with the realization that He watches over us all the time.

b. The fast of special people, which entails - not only abstaining from food, drinks and conjugal rites from dawn to dusk - but also keeping one's eyes, tongue, hands, legs, the sense of hearing and seeing as well as other parts of the body away from committing sins. Abu Huraira narrated that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, translated as: "Whoever doesn't abandon false speech or acting upon it, there is no need for him to abstain from food and drinks." (Al-Bukhari # 1,903)

• We infer from this prophetic narration that real fasting is to abstain from sins as much as possible. On this issue, Jaber bin Abdullah (RA) said, translated as: "When fasting, your ears, eyes, and mouth should shun lying as well as committing other sins. Moreover, there should be a change in you when fasting." In other words, you

should be a better person when fasting than when you are not. (Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Abi Shayba)

c. Fasting of the creme de la creme, which entails, keeping one's heart from lowly aspirations and motives as well as thoughts that would keep him far from Allah (the Almighty and Majestic). Anyone in this category is always pre-occupied with things that please Allah (SWT).

Once Umar's wife prepared for him sumptuous food, the ingredients of which she bought from her own savings. Umar (the second caliph in Islam) refused to eat until the poor and weak were invited to share the meal with him. After enjoying the food with the poor, he thanked Allah (the Majestic and Sublime) for that blessing. By this, Umar (RA) demonstrated that he was so much preoccupied with pleasing Allah (the Almighty) than satisfying his carnal desires. (Refer to Umariyyaat, pages 47 and 48). Fasting is given preference over other acts of worship for two major reasons:

1. It is a secret and an intrinsic act of worship that none can see except Allah (the Almighty) and the fasting person, and can't be tainted by dissemblance.

2. By fasting, a Muslim actually conquers the devil, which capitalizes on food, drinks and other carnal desires to lure human beings into committing sins.

In Ramadan, we are trained to strike a balance between our physical needs and our spiritual ones. According to Al-Balkhi (850-934), the body and soul both can be either healthy or sick. Signs of imbalance in the body are different ailments such as aches and pains, while an imbalance in the soul results in related symptoms such as anxiety, depression, anger, etc. (International Medical Journal. 4 (2): 76-79.2)

If you want to have a healthy mind, you need to have a healthy soul. If these two crucial aspects of one's self (physical body and soul) are not in balance, the person might struggle with finding the peace he craves for in life.

What is mental health?

Mental health is a status that is achieved once the soul is practicing to reach its full potential (of salvation) and being away from any factors that can disturb its peace. Therefore, those factors that can hurt and disturb your mind are originally those factors, which hurt your soul. Once you achieve a healthier soul, you will have a healthier mind.

— Courtesy of the TIES Center: the TIES Center 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, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

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Palestinians fear virus risk from Israel's jails

## Beijing bans 'uncivilized' behavior to improve hygiene

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BASRA: Iraqi children play at their window amid confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the southern city of Basra. — AFP

# Domestic abuse: Iraq's new pandemic

## Locked in by virus, domestic violence exacerbates

**BAGHDAD:** "More morphine!" Malak's mother cried, her 20-year-old daughter hospitalized after a marital dispute left her severely burned—the latest victim of domestic violence exacerbated by confinement in Iraq. The nationwide lockdown since mid-March is meant to keep coronavirus cases down in the country, but it has led to a spike in another sad statistic: domestic violence.

The head of Iraq's community police, Brigadier General Ghalib Atiyah, told AFP that its log of domestic violence cases has increased by an average of 30 percent since the curfew came into force—with some areas seeing as high as a 50-percent spike. In a single week, the United Nations in Iraq (UNAMI) reported: "The rape of a woman with special needs, spousal abuse, immolation and self-immolation as well as self-inflicted injuries due to spousal abuse, sexual harassment of minors, and suicide due to domestic abuse among other crimes."

In the southern province of Wasit, a 58-year-old doctor killed his wife after she refused to let him sell land that she owned, according to human rights lawyer Sajjad Hussein. To the north in Samarra, footage surfaced of a 10-year-old girl in tears, her arms apparently broken. "I don't want to see my dad any more, he hits me every day," says the child, identified as Saba.

"He tells us it's to 'educate us,'" her mother, who is divorced, is heard saying. But Malak Al-Zubeidi's case

made waves. Eight months ago, the young woman in the shrine city of Najaf married a policeman who physically abused her and barred her from seeing her family. Malak's mother told Human Rights Watch (HRW). On April 8, he beat Malak so badly she doused herself in gasoline and set herself on fire, her mother said, burning for several minutes before her father-in-law put out the flames.

### Afraid to seek help

Footage of her swollen, burned face and pained wails in the hospital went viral, but public support could not save her: the young woman died 10 days later. "All Malak wanted was to be able to see her family," said Hana Edwar, a longtime women's rights advocate in Baghdad. Her NGO, Amal (hope in Arabic), has documented a "dramatic" rise in domestic violence cases during the curfew, she told AFP.

"Everyone is spending long periods of time together inside the house. The most insignificant thing can turn into a controversy that eventually leads to violence," she said. Extended families often live together in one household in Iraq, swathes of which still

hold on to conservative religious and tribal customs. In those areas, many girls are married at a young age and subject to domestic violence. According to the U.N., 46 percent of married women in Iraq have survived some form of abuse at home, of which a third report physical and sexual assault. They have few pathways to seek help.



## UNAMI reports rape, immolation, self-immolation

women entering stations alone. The community police has work to do to erase that taboo but cannot reach out to communities through its usual town halls because of the curfew, Atiyah said.

### 'Total impasse'

There are also few shelters available for victims and legal accountability seems far-fetched. Article 41 of

Iraq's penal code gives men the right to "punish" their wives and children "within the limits of law and customs", a clause frequently used to dismiss cases brought against relatives. Many abuse cases are "resolved" in tribal courts, which have their own legal framework that includes settlements to aggrieved families outside of official tribunals. And "honor killings", or violence meted out extrajudicially against someone who broke a social norm, are usually met with light sentences by Iraqi courts.

After the public outcry over Malak, three of her male relatives were slapped with six-month jail sentences for "failing to assist someone in danger". Activists have long pushed Iraq's parliament to adopt a more robust domestic violence law that would better protect victims and deter possible abusers. "Every time, MPs bring up religion's role or pretend they're worried such cases would clog the courts," said advocate Afrah Al-Qaisi. "It's a total impasse," she said.

Now, the UN and HRW have seized on the wave of abuse under lockdown to point a spotlight at the issue. Iraq's parliament should quickly revise, pass and enforce a domestic violence law in line with international standards, the New York-based HRW said. "It should not take a global pandemic for Iraqi legislators to address the other deadly pandemic of domestic violence, but failure to do so will cost more lives," HRW's Belkis Wille said. — AFP

## Pakistan doctors launch hunger strike

**LAHORE:** Dozens of Pakistani doctors and nurses have launched a hunger strike demanding adequate protective equipment for frontline staff treating coronavirus patients, the lead organizer of the protest said Saturday. Health workers have complained for weeks that the country's hospitals are suffering chronic shortages of safety gear, prompting the arrest of more than 50 doctors who called for more supplies in the city of Quetta earlier this month.

Frontline staff have been left vulnerable, with more than 150 medical workers testing positive for the virus nationwide, according to the Young Doctors' Association (YDA) in worst-hit Punjab province. Several Pakistan doctors and nurses have died from COVID-19, including a 26-year-old physician who had recently started his career, and an official told AFP that a specialist at a state-run hospital died from the disease Saturday. The protesters have kept working in their hospitals while taking turns to demonstrate outside the health authority offices in provincial capital Lahore.

"We do not intend on stopping until the government listens to our demands. They have been consistently refusing to adhere to our demands," said doctor Salman Haseeb. Haseeb heads the province's Grand Health Alliance, which is organizing the protest, and said he had not eaten since April 16. "We are on the front line of this virus and if we are not protected then the whole population is at risk," he said. The alliance said about 30 doctors and nurses were on hunger strike, with up to 200 medical staff joining them each day for demonstrations.

Punjab's health worker union is supporting



LAHORE: In this handout photograph released by the Young Doctors Association (YDA) Punjab, doctors wearing facemasks sit in during a hunger strike protest at the Punjab Health Secretary in Lahore. — AFP

the alliance and also demanding adequate quarantine conditions for medical staff. Nearly three dozen doctors, nurses and paramedics contracted the virus in one hospital in the city of Multan, while seven members of a doctor's family were infected in Lahore, it said. "We are simply demanding justice for our community," said doctor and YDA chairman Khizer Hayat. Hospital staff would not escalate their protest by walking off the job, he added.

### Calls for tougher lockdowns

Provincial health department officials told AFP that hospitals had now been provided with adequate protective gear after an earlier "backlog" was resolved. Earlier this month the Punjab government announced that frontline workers would be awarded a pay bonus and life insurance.

Almost half of the nearly 12,000 confirmed

COVID-19 infections across Pakistan have been recorded in Punjab. The number of infections in the country is believed to be far higher because of a lack of testing in the impoverished country of 215 million. Shehzad Akbar, medical director at a public hospital in Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told AFP that an ear, nose and throat specialist working on the COVID-19 ward died Saturday of the disease.

The doctor's death prompted renewed calls for tougher government action and complete lockdowns to stem the spread of the coronavirus. The Islamic holy month of Ramadan officially began in Pakistan on Saturday, with concerns that the light restrictions imposed on mosque gatherings will not stop a potentially rapid spread of the virus. Medical workers across the world have been grappling with shortages of vital safety equipment since the start of the pandemic. — AFP

## COVID: Abu Dhabi hospital disinfects N95 face masks

**ABU DHABI:** Dozens of N95 protective face masks hang on a line in a room of an Abu Dhabi hospital to be decontaminated so they can be used again by medical staff should there be a shortage due to the new coronavirus pandemic. Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi this month started disinfecting N95 masks with ultraviolet light, a method used by other hospitals to extend the wearability beyond single use.

"We want to make sure we can give N95 masks to all of our caregivers," Sterile Processing Manager Jason Unger told Reuters. "We are getting up to just over 200 masks a day which greatly increases our supply and will help us in case we have any supply chain problems." The hospital has treated over 100 patients with COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, and is currently testing over 800 people a day for the virus.

All medical staff treating infected or potentially infected patients wear N95 masks, which fit extremely closely and filter airborne particles. They are considered essential for protecting healthcare professionals and are in short supply in many places. The UAE, which has ramped up testing, has the second highest infection count among the six Gulf Arab states at more than 8,000 with over 50 deaths.

Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi said it began stockpiling personal protective equipment in the early days of the outbreak in the United Arab Emirates, which began in late January, and currently has a sufficient supply. But demand has soared globally. It has not been able to stockpile produce for the hospital kitchen however, such as strawberries, asparagus and herbs due to the impact on global supply chains. Like other Gulf states, the UAE relies heavily on food imports. "We have had a lot of challenges, but challenges are minimal," Raghuprasad Pillai, who works in the kitchen, told Reuters. — Reuters

## International

# In 4 US state prisons, nearly 3,300 inmates test positive for COVID-19

## Mass coronavirus testing expands in prisons

**OHIO:** When the first cases of the new coronavirus surfaced in Ohio's prisons, the director in charge felt like she was fighting a ghost. "We weren't always able to pinpoint where all the cases were coming from," said Annette Chambers-Smith, director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. As the virus spread, they began mass testing.

They started with the Marion Correctional Institution, which houses 2,500 prisoners in north central Ohio, many of them older with pre-existing health conditions. After testing 2,300 inmates for the coronavirus, they were shocked. Of the 2,028 who tested positive, close to 95% had no symptoms. "It was very surprising," said Chambers-Smith, who oversees the state's 28 correctional facilities.

As mass coronavirus testing expands in prisons, large numbers of inmates are showing no symptoms. In four state prison systems—Arkansas, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia—96% of 3,277 inmates who tested positive for the coronavirus were asymptomatic, according to interviews with officials and records reviewed by Reuters. That's out of 4,693 tests that included results on symptoms.

The numbers are the latest evidence to suggest that people who are asymptomatic—contagious but not physically sick—may be driving the spread of the virus, not only in state prisons that house 1.3 million inmates across the country, but also in communities across the globe. The figures also reinforce questions over whether testing of just people suspected of being infected is actually capturing the spread of the virus.

"It adds to the understanding that we have a severe undercount of cases in the US," said Dr Leana Wen, adjunct associate professor of emergency medicine at George Washington University, said of the Reuters findings. "The case count is likely much, much higher than we currently know because of the lack of testing and surveillance." Some people diagnosed as asymptomatic when tested for the coronavirus, however, may go on to develop

symptoms later, according to researchers.

The United States has more people behind bars than any other nation, a total incarcerated population of nearly 2.3 million as of 2017—nearly half of which is in state prisons. Smaller numbers are locked in federal prisons and local jails, which typically hold people for relatively short periods as they await trial. State prison systems in Michigan, Tennessee and California have also begun mass testing—checking for coronavirus infections in large numbers of inmates even if they show no sign of illness—but have not provided specific counts of asymptomatic prisoners.

Tennessee said a majority of its positive cases didn't show symptoms. In Michigan, state authorities said "a good number" of the 620 prisoners who tested positive for the coronavirus were asymptomatic. California's state prison system would not release counts of asymptomatic prisoners. Each state manages multiple prison facilities. Ohio, for instance, has 49,000 prisoners in 28 facilities. A total 3,837 inmates tested positive for the coronavirus in 15 of those facilities.

But the state has not yet provided results on symptoms for 1,809 of them and did not identify the total number of tests conducted across the prison system. Arkansas and Tennessee have also taken a targeted approach by conducting mass testing in several of their facilities. Michigan, North Carolina, California and Virginia have started with one facility each. Most state prisons did not provide the age or other demographic details of those who tested positive for the coronavirus, which has killed 197,872 people across the globe, including 51,791 in the United States.

### Vast undercount

Reuters surveyed all 50 state prison systems. Of the 30 that responded, most are only testing inmates who show symptoms, suggesting they could be vastly undercounting the number infected by the coronavirus. Florida and Texas, whose inmate populations are bigger than Ohio's, report a combined total of just 931 cases—far fewer

than the 3,837 inmates who tested positive in Ohio. New York, the epicenter of the US outbreak, has reported 269 positive cases among 51,000 inmates. All three states are testing only symptomatic prisoners.

"Prison agencies are almost certainly vastly undercounting the number of COVID cases among incarcerated persons," said Michele Deitch, a corrections specialist and senior lecturer at the University of Texas. "Just as the experts are telling us in our free-world communities, the only way to get ahead of this outbreak is through mass testing." Prison officials in Florida and Texas said they were following guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention along with state health officials when testing only inmates showing symptoms of the virus.

New York's Department of Corrections said its policy of only testing prisoners who show symptoms was "reflective of testing procedures in the general public."

Tennessee took an aggressive approach after a dozen inmates tested positive at the Bledsoe County Correctional Complex in the city of Pikeville last week. The state's Department of Correction has tested 3,503 prisoners at Bledsoe, the Northwest Correctional Complex and the Turney Center Industrial Complex.

As of Friday, 651 were positive, and most of them were



**SANTEE:** Inmates sew protective masks at Las Colinas Women's Detention Facility in Santee, California. Inmates and Sheriff's deputies at the prison are practicing COVID-19 measures including wearing masks, staying keeping a safe distance and doing more frequent cleaning at the facility. —AFP



**96% without symptoms**

## From 9-11 to virus, New Yorkers once again put to a test

**NEW YORK:** Nearly two decades after Manhattan's Twin Towers fell in history's deadliest attack on US soil, the coronavirus pandemic is once again testing the storied mettle of New Yorkers. The September 11, 2001 terror attack on the World Trade Center left nearly 3,000 people dead and shocked the city with its devastation. In comparison, New Yorkers say the deadly coronavirus pandemic, which has likely killed some 16,000 in the city, is more of a "slow cancer."

"9-11 was supposed to be the darkest day in New York for a generation," said New York state's governor Andrew Cuomo during one of his recent press briefings. But with the virus's spread the governor said "there was no explosion, but it was a silent explosion that just ripples through society." "With the same randomness, the same evil," Like Cuomo, many New Yorkers have been evoking 9-11 in comparison to the rapid spread of coronavirus, which has ravaged the densely populated city home to some 8 million people.

Maggie Dubris, a paramedic who was dispatched as part of an ambulance crew to the World Trade Center

site on 9-11, thought she already had lived through "the biggest disaster of my lifetime." But the pandemic frightens her even more. "After the Trade Center, you knew you'd survive," the lower Manhattan resident said. "I would see people down there, there was a reunion, we'd see each other, we'd hug," Dubris said.

With the coronavirus pandemic "you can't touch anyone, and you don't know who really will survive this, we have no idea what is to come here." Susan Barnett, a New Yorker who covered the 2001 attacks as a producer at the ABC network, agrees. "9-11 was shocking, this I find so much more frightening because of the global consequences," she said. "I am more scared now, I think the consequences are global and they could be absolutely dire, in terms of human health and survival," said Barnett, who now works for a non-profit helping hospitals in developing countries.

### 'Slow cancer'

Dubris and Barnett both live in neighborhoods that were ensconced in clouds of smoke and closed to non-residents for weeks following the 9-11 attacks. Both women see parallels between that era-defining tragedy and the current coronavirus crisis. When crowds clap and cheer to honor essential workers at 7 pm each evening, they recall the cheers for rescue workers heading to the WTC site, and those who offered them meals. During a rare outing in deserted Manhattan, Dubris recently happened upon refrigerated trucks used as a temporary morgue.

go pick somebody up.

The United States was finally beginning to mobilize against the pandemic and Florida had shut down non-essential businesses. "The phone did not go off once in 10 hours," said Amate, who is 31 and settled in Miami five years ago after fleeing Venezuela's economic, political and humanitarian crisis. Miami, where you hear Spanish just about everywhere and Cuban exiles have contributed much to the city's development, has become the hub of the Venezuelan diaspora in the US over the past two decades.

There are no clear estimates on how many Venezuelans moved to the US, as many of them are undocumented. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center study, 421,000 Venezuelans resided in the United States in 2017, a 352 percent increase since 2000. More than half live in Florida. A lawyer back home, Amate has worked at just about everything in Miami. He also cooked, but 70 percent of his income came from Uber. When his wife, an accountant, saw her hours cut in half, they started to panic. "We were worried because we had money for a week and thought, 'then what?'"

Amate's neighbor Rafael Delgado, also a Venezuelan and a part-time Uber driver, was laid off

an international body founded in 1945 with the express mission of preventing and containing global crises?

Diplomats and experts surveyed by AFP were less than sanguine. Gandhi once said that being late can itself be an "act of violence," one ambassador recalled, speaking on grounds of anonymity to express impatience with the UN's top body for its embarrassing silence in the face of the worst global crisis since World War II. The Security Council has conferred only once on the pandemic, and that was in virtual session—a videoconference held April 9 at the initiative of Germany and Estonia.

The current resolution, jointly proposed by Tunisia and France, calls for "enhanced coordination among all countries," a "cessation of hostilities" and a "humanitarian pause" in countries in conflict. The resolution aims to

support the efforts of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and of several UN agencies struggling to contain the devastating political, economic and social consequences of the deadly virus.

The text is partly "a face-saving device that allows the Security Council to claim that it has not been entirely inactive," said Richard Gowan, UN director of the International Crisis Group, a center for analysis. "But it does have some substantive benefits too." Might the benefits of a resolution binding on all UN members be seen in crisis zones in Syria, Yemen or elsewhere in the Middle East? In Afghanistan, Colombia or Africa? "A global ceasefire is very laudable, but the challenge is how you translate that into actions in individual country context," another ambassador said. —AFP

from the hotel where he worked. So he proposed to Amate they start cooking and selling a Venezuelan appetizer called a tequeno—small cheese sticks wrapped in fried dough. "We felt a lot of anxiety. But you cannot just sit back and do nothing," said Delgado, who is 29. His wife was also furloughed so the two couples are now churning out 1,000 tequenos a week and getting by.



**NEW YORK:** In this file photo taken on September 11, 2001, the rubble of the World Trade Center smolders following a terrorist attack in New York. Almost 20 years after this apocalyptic shock, the COVID-19 pandemic is more like 'a flood of pain' or 'a slow cancer,' according to New Yorkers caught in both tragedies. —AFP

"I remembered the morgue being set up at the WTC," she said. "There is that same sense that something terrible, with a lot of deaths, has happened." But the differences between the two catastrophes are equally pronounced. Ken Paprocki, a photographer who before 9-11 worked as an international flight attendant, dubbed the attack "a lightning strike, where the human mind could not keep up with the pace in which events were unfolding." —AFP

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### 'Times for opportunity'

An Uber official told AFP the company has no figures on how many of its associates are Latin American immigrants but confirmed that most of its drivers in Miami speak Spanish. The official did not give figures for Miami but reported in March ridership nationwide was down 60 to 70 percent. With times hard—once again, for these Venezuelans—others are cooking up dishes from back home, too.

Jesus Escalona, for instance, makes "pastichos," a sort of Venezuelan lasagna. Manuel Freitez drives around the city delivering Venezuelan cinnamon rolls. They are the work of his wife, a furloughed hotel chef named Natasha Echevarreneta, 30, and her father, a musician who used to earn all his income from Uber. —AFP

support the efforts of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and of several UN agencies struggling to contain the devastating political, economic and social consequences of the deadly virus.

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## Venezuelans inured to crisis show coping skills in Miami

**MIAMI:** Hop into an Uber in Miami before the pandemic and it was easy to hear a driver speaking Spanish with an accent from Venezuela—many of its people ended up here after fleeing an economic meltdown back home. Now, with the US economy largely shut down because of the COVID-19 crisis, those idle Venezuelan Uber drivers are displaying the coping skills they developed while trying to survive under President Nicolas Maduro.

Some get by as home chefs, cooking up Venezuelan dishes and marketing them on social media for people hunkering down because of the lockdown. They are doing OK, in fact, so well they might keep cooking after the pandemic ends, whenever that is. Mario Amate, who used to drive for the ride sharing company, recalls the day in mid-March when his phone just stopped pinging with alerts to

## Security Council nears virus resolution, and perhaps a new path

**UNITED NATIONS:** After more than a month of controversy, a UN Security Council buffeted between the United States, China and Russia is finally expected this week to adopt its first resolution on the coronavirus pandemic, amid calls for intensified international cooperation. A hopeless task? A wake-up call for multilateralist forces crushed by resurgent nationalism? Or perhaps a first step toward a geopolitical reorganization and the recasting of

asymptomatic, the department said. "It's what makes the pandemic more difficult to manage," said Marc Stern, former medical director for the Washington State Department of Corrections and a faculty member at the University of Washington's School of Public Health. "There are a whole lot of people who are asymptomatic."

After a recent spike in cases at the Neuse Correctional Institution in Goldsboro, North Carolina, state correctional officials tested all 723 prisoners last week. Of the 444 who were infected by the virus, 98% were asymptomatic, the state's department of public safety said. One inmate has died at the prison. Similarly, mass testing at two Arkansas prisons—the Cummins Unit in the city of Grady and the Community Correction Center in the state capital Little Rock—found 751 infected inmates, almost all of them asymptomatic, the state corrections department said. It did not provide the total number of inmates who were tested.

Arkansas' prisons have faced contagious disease outbreaks before, such as scabies and chickenpox, but those episodes were easier to manage because inmates showed overt symptoms, said Arkansas Department of Corrections spokeswoman Dina Tyler. "But with this virus, you have no idea because so many are asymptomatic. It makes it very challenging to contain," she said. —Reuters

## Cuba sends doctors to South Africa to combat COVID-19

**HAVANA:** Cuba sent 216 healthcare workers to South Africa on Saturday, the latest of more than 20 medical brigades it has sent worldwide to combat the coronavirus pandemic, in what some call socialist solidarity and others medical diplomacy. The Communist-run country has sent around 1,200 healthcare workers largely to vulnerable African and Caribbean nations but also to rich European countries such as Italy that have been particularly hard hit by the novel coronavirus.

The administration of US President Donald Trump has urged nations not to accept Cuba's medical missions on charges it exploits its workers, which Havana denies. But the calls have largely gone unheeded as overwhelmed healthcare systems have welcomed the help. Cuba, which has confirmed 1,337 cases of the virus at home and 51 deaths, has one of the world's highest number of doctors per capita and is renowned for its focus on prevention, community-oriented primary health care and preparedness to fight epidemics.

"The advantage of Cuba is that they are a community health model, one that we would like to use," South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize told a news briefing earlier this month. South Africa has recorded 4,361 cases, including 86 deaths, with 161,004 people tested for the virus as of Saturday.

The country has a special relationship with Cuba, which supported the fight against apartheid—a conflict that included Cuban troops who fought and died in southern Angola. After Nelson Mandela was freed from prison in 1990, he repeatedly thanked revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. South Africa sent medical supplies to Cuba to assist in the fight against coronavirus in the plane that is now returning with the Cuban medical brigade, Cuba's embassy there wrote on Twitter.

"These are times of solidarity and cooperation. If we act together, we can halt the spread of coronavirus in a faster and more cost effective manner," Cuba's ambassador to South Africa, Rodolfo Benítez Verson, said in a statement. Cuba has sent its "armies of white robes" to disaster sites and disease outbreaks around the world largely in poor countries since its 1959 leftist revolution. Its doctors were in the front lines in the fight against cholera in Haiti and against ebola in West Africa in the 2010s.

Cuba also exports doctors in exchange for cash, often sending them to remote, impoverished locations where local doctors do not want to work. Medical services exports are its top source of hard currency, ahead of tourism or sugar, despite the governments of Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador sending their Cuban doctors packing in recent years after shifting to the right. Cuba has more than 37,000 health care workers in 67 countries worldwide, according to the foreign ministry. —Reuters

## International

# Beijing bans 'uncivilized' behavior to improve hygiene amid COVID-19

## A new set of regulations to improve public hygiene

**BEIJING:** Beijing has banned "uncivilized" behavior such as not covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, the city government said yesterday, in a new set of regulations to improve public hygiene amid the coronavirus outbreak. The laws aim to promote "civilized behavior" and relate to combating the pandemic which has infected more than 82,000 in China alone.

Rulebreakers will be slapped with fines for offences including not wearing a mask in public when ill, the municipal government said on its website. The laws also require public places to set up one meter distance markers and to provide communal chopsticks and serving spoons for shared meals. Citizens must also "dress neatly" in public and not go shirtless - an apparent reference to the so-called "Beijing bikini" practice where men roll T-shirts up to expose their stomachs in hot weather.

The state-run Global Times said the rule equaled a "total ban" of the practice in public places. Beijing already discourages a range of

"uncivilized" behaviors including public spitting, littering, walking dogs unleashed, throwing things from high buildings, public defecation and smoking in places where it is prohibited. But the latest rules - passed on Friday - outline new specific punishments. Fines for littering, spitting and defecation in public were upped to a maximum of 200 yuan (\$28), from a previous upper limit of 50 yuan.

In the past, these regulations were enforced in a patchy way and the habits have not been stamped out completely. Those who do not sort their rubbish correctly can be fined up to 200 yuan, and residents responsible for noise pollution in public spaces and who walk their dogs unleashed can be fined up to 500 yuan. The laws also encourage police to report serious offences, which may affect a person's social credit score - a fledgling system which aims to assess individual actions across society - though it did not provide more specifics. — AFP



### Citizens must 'dress neatly'



**BEIJING:** People wear face masks amid concerns of the COVID-19 coronavirus as they walk to a subway station in Beijing. — AFP

## In Albania, Ramadan under lockdown revives memories of communism

**TIRANA:** Stuck in their Tirana flat under a coronavirus lockdown, 81-year-old Osman Hoxha and his family quietly mark the start of Ramadan, recalling the communist era when practicing religion meant risking death. Like many parts of the world, mosques in Muslim-majority Albania are eerily empty while iftar supper tables have fewer chairs than normal as families shelter at home to curb the spread of the virus.

For older generations, the intimate settings inevitably stir up memories of how they were forced to furtively keep their faith alive under the long and brutal reign of the late communist dictator Enver Hoxha, who outlawed religion. "We had to pray behind the walls of our homes for fear of ending up in prison or being sentenced to death," remembers Osman, wearing a black cap and grey vest, after the first day of fasting in his Tirana home.

Decades later, the country faces a different kind of enemy. "During communism we had to observe fasting discreetly because if someone saw us it could cost us our lives, whereas today we risk death from a virus that can kill you," says Osman's wife Minire, 74. Enver Hoxha, the dictator whose common surname Osman's family shares, adopted the Marxist motto that religion was the "opium of the people" and declared Albania the world's first atheist country in 1967.

Under his 40-year reign, hundreds of mosques and churches were destroyed or transformed, dozens of priests and Muslim clerics were sentenced to hard labor and many others died in prison or were murdered by firing squad. In total, some 6,000 people were executed by the paranoid regime for alleged crimes ranging from treason to foreign travel or practicing a faith. Tens of thousands more were sent to prisons or camps for forced labor or internment.

Among them was Osman. As a young man in the 1960s, he was forced to work at a stone quarry after his brother fled the country, bringing suspicion on the rest of his relatives. But the family nevertheless nurtured their faith, practicing Islam in secret until houses of worship were able to reopen in 1990, just before communism collapsed. The country has since seen a religious revival. More than half of the 2.8 million population identifies as Muslim, mostly of a moderate strand, while around 30 percent are Catholic and Orthodox Christians.

In recent decades, Osman's family has been celebrating the iftar meal with some 20 people at their dinner table. This year the group is down to seven, among them the grandparents, their son Agron and his wife and children. "I wish this table was big and my house could be full of friends and relatives," Minire said as she prepared supper with her daughter-in-law Rezarta. — AFP



**TIRANA:** Grandfather Osman Hoxha (center), his son Agron Hoxha (left) and his grandchildren pray at their home prior to the iftar, the meal after sunset, during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan in Tirana. — AFP

## Pakistanis flock to markets, mosques as Ramadan starts

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistanis on Saturday celebrated the country's first day of the holy month of Ramadan by flocking to mosques and markets, ignoring advice to stay home as coronavirus cases rise. Prime Minister Imran Khan has come under pressure for his handling of the virus crisis, after causing confusion by saying Pakistan could not afford the type of sweeping lockdowns seen in other nations.

His government also caved to religious pressure, allowing daily prayers and evening congregations at mosques during Ramadan, albeit with some protective measures in place. In a snub to Khan's leadership, Pakistan's powerful military on Friday urged people to pray at home, warning the "next 15 days

are crucial". But that advice was largely ignored or downplayed across much of the country, home to about 215 million people who often live in cramped, multi-generational quarters.

In Rawalpindi, the garrison city adjacent to Islamabad, thousands of shoppers thronged popular markets, some without wearing protective gear, to buy food for evening iftar meals that celebrate the end of each day's fasting. Similar scenes unfolded in the northwestern city of Peshawar and in the eastern city of Lahore. Muneeb Khan, 27, said he was fed up with wearing a mask and gloves. "How long are we going to wear them? I am tired of it, now it depends on my mood, sometimes I wear it and sometimes not," he told AFP as he shopped at a pharmacy.

At Islamabad's mosques, worshippers were thinner on the ground than typical for Ramadan's first day, but elsewhere social distancing guidelines and a ban on older worshippers were widely ignored. Zafar Mirza, the prime minister's special advisor for health, decried the rush to the markets and pleaded with people to stay home. "This is against the guidelines and directives," he told reporters.

"Pakistan is passing through a very crucial phase and if we do not take preventive measures, this disease will spike very quickly."

Doctors associations have repeatedly called on the government to impose a comprehensive lockdown as pressure grows on the country's already struggling health system. So far Pakistan has recorded more than 12,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections and 256 deaths-but with only limited testing, the real numbers are believed to be much higher. The World Health Organization has warned that without effective interventions, Pakistan cases could soar to 200,000 cases by mid-July.

"The impacts on the economy could be devastating, doubling the number of people living in poverty. We must act in solidarity, with a coherent, coordinated approach," the WHO, quoting chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said on Twitter. Asad Umar, who heads the national coronavirus task force, told reporters authorities had approved a "smart lockdown" aimed at testing people, then tracking or quarantining those who are positive. "Ramadan is a decisive month," he said. — AFP



**RAMALLAH:** Family members of 18-year-old Palestinian Amir Naji, released by Israel from prison, hand out chocolates and celebrate ahead of his arrival while clad in latex gloves and face masks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, at a checkpoint near the city of Ramallah. — AFP

## Palestinians fear virus risk from Israeli prisons

**RAMALLAH:** When Palestinian Amir Naji was released from an Israeli prison he was told not to hug his family, but emotion overwhelmed him and he clutched his mother tight. After a moment his father pushed away the 18-year-old, who was wearing a face mask, plastic suit and gloves. Naji briefly waved to other family members in the city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank before being hurried to a nearby hotel for two weeks of isolation alongside other released prisoners.

Israel's response to the coronavirus pandemic has included efforts to prevent outbreaks in prisons, including regular sterilization, checking temperatures of staff daily, and stopping visits from family and lawyers. But advocates are calling for more — urging the Jewish state to release at-risk prisoners. More than 5,000 Palestinians are currently detained in Israeli jails. So far Israel says no cases have been detected among inmates.

But the Palestinians said one released prisoner was infected and the justice ministry has called for an investigation. The International Committee of the Red Cross urged for those over 65 or with health conditions to be released. "Those measures are meant to reduce the number of detainees and to limit the potential exposure for the most vulnerable," said David Quesne, head of the ICRC's mis-

sion in Jerusalem. "We would like them released to the extent possible and if not then removed from the risk."

### Pain has 'multiplied'

Israel has nearly 15,000 COVID-19 cases, while in the Palestinian territories around 350 have been reported, though testing rates are lower. Palestinians are fearful that the disease will be brought into the West Bank by Palestinians returning from Israel, including the tens of thousands who work in the Jewish state and those released from prisons. Naji, who was jailed for a year after being accused of throwing stones at soldiers during a protest, was not released due to coronavirus but because his term ended.

He said there was real fear of an outbreak in the prisons. "Life for prisoners in Israeli prisons is tough, but after the spread of corona(virus) their pain multiplied," said Naji, who holds American and Palestinian citizenship. The Palestinian Prisoners' Club, a Ramallah-based NGO, said dozens of prisoners had been released since the coronavirus arrived in Israel. Like Naji, they were all tested after being released and sent to quarantine, said the NGO's Amani Sarahneh.

She said one released prisoner, who had been detained for just four days, later tested positive for the virus. Israel poured scorn on the claim, saying the man was healthy when he exited the prison. The Israeli Prisons Service told AFP it had "prepared for months to prevent the entry and spread of the coronavirus in its facilities." Each prisoner was given two multi-use facemasks and new prisoners are isolated for 14 days, it said, condemning what it called "false reports" in Palestinian media and elsewhere. — AFP

## Beaches eyed as US takes steps toward reopening

**WILTON, Connecticut:** Many Americans flocked to beaches on Saturday as one Florida county expanded access and California experienced a heat wave, even as new coronavirus cases hit a record high in the United States the day before and deaths topped 200,000 worldwide. Hair salons and other shops in Georgia, Oklahoma and some other states opened for a second day as pockets of the country sought to restart their economies following a month of government-ordered lockdowns.

The tentative steps toward restarting life run against the warnings of many public health experts, who say the increased human interaction could spark a new wave of cases of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the highly contagious virus. The United States on Friday recorded 36,491 new cases of COVID-19, a record daily high, according to a Reuters tally. Global deaths linked to the virus passed 200,000 on Saturday, more than one quarter of them in the United States, the tally shows.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo repeated his warning that reopening businesses too soon was risky, while Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo pushed back against a protest at the State House in Providence as short-sighted, arguing it could force her to delay her restart date of May 8 at the earliest. "At this point to violate social distancing rules, it's just selfish," Raimondo told a briefing, referring to the protest. "If everybody today went out and violated the rules I will definitely have to push back the date at which we can reopen the economy."

Volusia County, home to the famed Daytona Beach, opened lots at its coastal parks on Saturday to handicapped visitors, one step in a phased reopening that has so far limited its beaches to those wanting to walk, surf, bike or swim. In a briefing on Friday, County Manager George Recktenwald had portrayed the relaxed parking provision as an incremental step and warned against gathering in groups. But one resident said many beachgoers were not heeding the advice.

"I know they have rules and restrictions, but people aren't listening," said John Overchuck, 45, an attorney who lives in a beachfront home with his wife and toddler daughter just south of Daytona Beach in New Smyrna Beach. "I walked on the beach 10 minutes ago and it's packed. That wasn't supposed to happen." Overchuck said he fears the return of thousands of spring breakers and tourists who in normal times are drawn to Smyrna and other county beaches. Some were already parking cars and pitching tents right on the beach, he said. A heat wave brought thousands of Californians to the open beaches in Newport Beach and Huntington Beach on Friday despite stay-at-home orders for people across the state, and similarly large crowds hit the beaches on Saturday. — Reuters



# Business

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**11** Countries, firms risk billions in race for virus vaccine



NEW YORK: People enjoy Central Park during the coronavirus pandemic on Saturday in New York City. New York City, the financial, cultural and tourism capital of the United States, is gingerly preparing to get back to business after more than a month of coronavirus shutdown. — AFP

## New York plans how to return to business

### Coronavirus in New York could destroy 475,000 jobs

NEW YORK: Banks are considering letting some employees keep working from home indefinitely, and staggering the shifts of those who do come into the office. Hotels are trying to figure out a way to let arriving guests go straight to their rooms without signing in at the reception desk.

New York - the financial, cultural and tourism capital of the United States - is gingerly preparing to get back to business after more than a month of coronavirus shutdown. "When will we return to work?" is a question on many people's minds these days," said Jane Fraser, the number two official at Citigroup. She has assembled a committee of veteran bankers to come up with conservative scenarios for a return to something resembling normalcy.

Most Citigroup employees currently work from home, including CEO Michael Corbat. Like its rivals, Citi has set up market-watching computer terminals for traders at home, although some traders have been sent to especially disinfected facilities to do their jobs. The bank anticipates that some employees will be reluctant to return to work, with no treatment or vaccine yet available for COVID-19. For those employees "we will want to do our best to provide them the flexibility to continue working remotely," said Fraser. Financial services represents nearly 10 percent of private sector jobs in the city,

which is home of the New York Stock Exchange, Nasdaq and headquarter offices of several large banks. Finance also represents 29 percent of the city's GDP.

**In no hurry**

At JPMorgan Chase, one of the city's largest



**\$9.7bn budget deficit for NY estimated**

employers, the return to work will be modeled somewhat after how New York's economy was restarted after the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic. "Employees will return to work on-site in a phased approach over a period of time," read an internal memo seen by AFP. This won praise from Patrick Foye, chairman and CEO of the Metropolitan

Transportation Association, who said that staggered office shifts will reduce congestion, and chances of contagion, on the city subway, trains and buses.

Having people come in three days a week, as opposed to five, as well as having them stay at least six feet apart, would be helpful measures, Foye told journalists in a recent video conference.

New York is the most densely populated US city, with 11,000 inhabitants per square kilometer. The epicenter of the US coronavirus pandemic, New York has been through crises before, including the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and the great recession of 2008. But those challenges are minor compared to the task of reopening the Big Apple this time.

**Big budget deficit**

Measures taken to curb the spread of the virus will probably destroy 475,000 jobs through March 2021 and leave New York with a 9.7 billion dollar budget deficit, according to the Independent Budget Office. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has said the city will gradually return to business, area by area, but gave no date or conditions.

The city's 25,000 bars, restaurants, and night clubs are wondering if they will be allowed to operate full-steam in a world now shaped by social dis-

tancing. "If you have to open up 50 percent reduced occupancy-we understand that from a public health perspective, but many businesses are not financially viable," said Andrew Rigie, head of the New York City Hospitality Alliance, which represents restaurants and nightlife venues.

Many businesses have unpaid rent and bills, and no savings to dip into. Many small businesses have also yet to receive emergency loans promised in massive relief packages approved by the US Congress, as banks tasked with disbursing the money prefer to give it to larger companies.

A huge question mark also hovers over everything: will people be comfortable gathering in large groups in small spaces again? "We do not know what consumer purchasing behavior is going to be like," said Rigie. He estimates that at least a quarter of the city's nightlife spots will shut down.

Coogan's, a popular Irish pub and restaurant in Manhattan, was one of the early victims, shuttering on April 21. On Broadway, at the Metropolitan Opera and in museums, the city is getting ready to welcome people wearing masks. The idea that life will not return to normal for some time is sinking in. Nor is it clear if tourists — 65 million in 2019, many of whom came to see Broadway shows-will return in large numbers. — AFP

### Embraer hits out after Boeing scraps \$4.2 billion tie-up

SAO PAULO/PARIS: Boeing Co on Saturday pulled out of a \$4.2 billion deal to buy Embraer's commercial jets division, sparking a furious response from its jilted partner and leaving plans for a US-Brazil alliance from regional jets to jumbos in tatters.

The collapse, first reported by Reuters, came hours after a midnight deadline expired with no agreement on how to implement a deal first aired in 2018, partially in response to a similar Canadian acquisition by Europe's Airbus. Boeing accused Embraer of failing to meet conditions for closing the transaction, but Embraer said Boeing had torpedoed it because of wider financial problems it faces as a result of the coronavirus crisis and the grounding of its 737 MAX.

"Embraer believes strongly that Boeing has wrongfully terminated the (agreement)," the Brazilian company said. Boeing struck a more

emollient tone but behind the scenes, both sides were bracing for months of argument over the breakup.

"Over the past several months, we had productive but ultimately unsuccessful negotiations ... We all aimed to resolve those by the initial termination date, but it didn't happen," Boeing senior vice-president Marc Allen said in a statement. The rift halts the second half of a major reshaping of the global duopoly between Boeing and Airbus as both companies sought to expand into regional jets. Airbus bought the Canadian CSeries in 2018 and renamed it A220, which has sold well.

Industry sources say Boeing was interested in Embraer mainly for access to lower-cost engineers and new manufacturing options, but it is now pondering cutting 10 percent of its workforce while also seeking US federal help for the aerospace sector. The feud also breaks a previously close relationship between two of the world's top three planemakers, who have adopted similar positions on trade battles with Europe and Canada.

"This is not the kind of statement you see very often in this industry," Teal Group consultant Richard Aboulafia said. The deal calls for a \$100 million breakup fee but Embraer is poised to sue Boeing for significantly more, alleging that the long

period of uncertainty has hampered sales of its E2 jets. It said it would pursue "all remedies" against Boeing, without elaborating.

**Financial, paperwork disputes**

In addition to the deal on commercial aviation, a separate joint-venture to find new markets for Embraer's KC-390 military cargo plane is also off. But a more simple agreement to "market and support" the KC-390 signed in 2012 will remain. The prospect of an abrupt collapse was first reported by Reuters on Friday after sources reported slow progress in talks with hours left before a midnight cut-off.

On Saturday, plans for simultaneous announcements were abandoned after Reuters quoted sources as saying Boeing had notified Embraer late on Friday that it would refuse to extend the midnight deadline, effectively blocking the deal. People familiar with the matter said Boeing had raised objections during talks about funding and legal matters, which Embraer regarded as a deliberate bid to frustrate the deal. Others said the dispute revolved around how much Embraer had invested in the commercial aerospace unit pending a final deal, as well as the progress of technical and contractual paperwork. — AFP



This combination of file pictures shows the first Boeing 737 MAX 9 airplane (top) and Embraer's new passenger jet, the ERJ 170. — AFP

## Business

# As earnings loom, Big Tech to highlight pandemic efforts

## Top firms helping research, protecting workers and easing pains of consumers

WASHINGTON, DC: Big Tech firms set to report quarterly results in the coming days are facing the challenge of spotlighting their roles battling the coronavirus pandemic without seeming as though they are cashing in on upheaval from the health crisis. The normal talk on profits and revenue projections are likely to be replaced by discussions on how the world's most powerful companies are helping research for a COVID-19 treatment, protecting workers and easing the pains of locked-down consumers.

Quarterly updates are due this week from Google parent Alphabet, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon and Apple, all of which will see an impact from the pandemic. "We'll see is a big portion of their earnings presentations about what they've done to fight COVID-19," said Patrick Moorhead, analyst with Moor Insights & Strategy. "It's important not to talk about new share buybacks. If they haven't made huge investments in trying to help COVID victims or find a cure, they may be announcing more about that."

The novel coronavirus crisis has disrupted operations at tech powerhouses known for disrupting traditional businesses. Fewer people are buying new smartphones; more people are online and using social platforms but online advertising is slumping; cloud computing needs are growing; and more consumers are relying on delivery of essential goods from Amazon.

### Shareholders vs consumers

The tech companies will be highlighting their

social responsibilities but also sending a message to shareholders and investors, said analyst Jack Gold of J. Gold Associates. "They will tell people how many jobs they are creating, how many local businesses they are powering, they will talk about their charitable contributions," he said.

They need to reassure consumers that they are not exploiting the situation, highlighting their free and discounted services, Gold noted. Amazon will get special scrutiny because of its importance for essential goods, and because of employee safety concerns for its warehouse, store and delivery personnel.

While Amazon has faced protests over safety in its logistics network, it has also unveiled plans to test its employees for the virus, and has announced it is hiring some 175,000 new workers as millions of other jobs disappear. Gold said the pandemic is a doubled-edged sword for Amazon: it is likely to boost sales, but also heighten concern about its dominance in electronic commerce. "Do people trust Amazon to be the sole provider of everything I need?" he said. "Amazon will have to do something to show they are helping the community."

### Building goodwill

Some tech firms are building goodwill with their efforts, such as the Google-Apple collaboration to help virus "contact tracing" by enabling their smartphones to communicate across platforms. But it also shows the companies "are penetrating more profoundly into our lives," said David Behiri of the consultancy Fabernovel. "This is increasing our person-



WASHINGTON, DC: Quarterly updates are due this week from Google parent Alphabet, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon and Apple, all of which will see an impact from the pandemic. — AFP

al and professional dependency on them." Google has also offered free access to its Stadia gaming service and online meeting services, while Apple has given consumers free access to some of its streaming television content.

Microsoft, likely to see gains in cloud computing services, has been spearheading artificial intelligence use in virus research and has offered free services to nonprofit organizations.

The online advertising market dominated by

Google and Facebook is in disarray due to economic conditions and the reluctance of marketers to place messages alongside the grim content about the pandemic. "You can see three weeks in, how advertising has changed," said David Sidebottom of Futuresource Consulting. The costs for online ads has dropped, which will likely mean lower revenues for firms like Facebook and Google. Sidebottom said these firms have "big cash reserves (and) will be able to withstand this." — AFP

### News in brief

#### S&P downgrades Greece outlook

ATHENS: Ratings agency Standard & Poor's has downgraded its outlook for Greece on forecasts the economy will plunge into recession on the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, while maintaining the country's credit rating. S&P forecast the Greek economy would contract by around 9 percent in 2020 on "uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic and resulting economic crisis", revising its outlook from "positive" to "stable". The agency reaffirmed its sovereign credit rating for the country at "BB-/B" and added it expected its economy to rebound in 2021. After a nearly decade-long debt crisis and the loss of almost a quarter of GDP, the Mediterranean country had expected growth of at least 2.4 percent for 2020. — AFP

#### Algeria businesses to reopen

ALGIERS: Algeria has taken further steps to ease restrictions over the novel coronavirus by allowing several businesses to reopen "to reduce the economic and social impact of the health crisis" caused by the pandemic, the prime minister's office said on Saturday. It said shops to be reopened including those for materials for building and public works, appliances, fabrics, jewelry, clothing and shoes, cosmetics and perfumes, home and office furniture, pastries and hairdressers in addition to urban transport by taxi. The government on Thursday decided to ease confinement measures by shortening the curfew for some provinces but called on citizens to be "vigilant". — Reuters

#### Venezuela firm fights supervision

CARACAS: Venezuelan food and beverage producer Empresas Polar, the largest private company in the socialist country, on Saturday called a new government move to supervise the company's food unit's sales amid rising prices nationwide "arbitrary." Vice President Delcy Rodriguez announced the measure on Friday as part of a slew of steps to try to control prices and slow inflation during the coronavirus pandemic, which together with an acute fuel shortage complicating the transport of goods is prompting a rise in consumer prices. Inflation was 124 percent in the first three months of 2020, according to the central bank. — Reuters

## US airlines received \$12bn in aid so far

NEW YORK: The Trump administration said Saturday that it has disbursed \$12.4 billion to 93 air carriers to help them preserve jobs as the sector struggles to survive the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a statement, the Treasury Department said it would "continue to make additional payments on a rolling basis."

The aviation sector has been struck with devastating force by the pandemic, which is keeping travelers at home, forcing airlines around the world to cancel thousands of flights. Cargo air carriers are also suffering. The Treasury statement added that those carriers that "receive \$50 million or less of payroll support and contractors that receive \$37.5 million or less of payroll support will not be required to provide financial instruments" in exchange for the aid. — AFP

## When oil became waste: A week of turmoil for crude

NEW YORK: The magnitude of how damaged the energy industry is came into full view on April 20 when the benchmark price of US oil futures, which had never dropped below \$10 a barrel in its nearly 40-year history, plunged to a previously unthinkable minus \$38 a barrel. In just a few months, the coronavirus pandemic has destroyed so much fuel demand as billions of people curtail travel that it has done what financial crashes, recessions and wars had failed to ever do - leave the United States with so much oil there was nowhere to put it.

While the unusual circumstance of negative oil prices may not be repeated, many in the industry say it is a harbinger for more bleak days ahead, and that years of overinvestment will not correct in a period of weeks or even months. "What happened in the futures contract the other day indicated things are starting to get bad earlier than expected," said Frederick Lawrence, vice president of economics and international affairs at the Independent Petroleum Association of America. "People are getting notices from pipeline companies that say they can't take their crude anymore. That means you're shutting down the well yesterday." Evidence of the erosion of value for a product that has been a mainstay of global society since the late 19th century abounded across the world last week.

In Russia, one of the world's top producers, the industry is considering resorting to burning its oil to take it off the market, sources told Reuters. Norwegian oil giant Equinor slashed its quarterly dividend by two-thirds. Next week will bring earnings reports from the world's largest oil companies including Exxon Mobil Corp, BP PLC and Royal Dutch Shell PLC. They are all expected to detail additional spending cuts, and investors will be watching closely for how those companies plan to manage dividends. US billionaire Harold Hamm's Continental Resources Inc sent servicers out into fields in Oklahoma and North Dakota in the middle of the week to abruptly shut wells, and the company

## Polish farms hit with one-two punch of virus, drought

WARSAW: Poland's farmers have already been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, which has deprived them of seasonal workers from Ukraine. Now, an unprecedented drought is making things even worse. "Everyone's panicking. We don't know what's going to happen to us," Adrianna Bukowska-Lazarska, whose farm usually produces more than 300 tonnes of strawberries per year near the central village of Czerwinski nad Wisla, said.

Agriculture Minister Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski has warned that the drought could hurt food production, implying that while there is no risk of a shortage, prices may very well go up.

President Andrzej Duda has also expressed concern, calling on residents on Wednesday to be reasonable with their water use. "We haven't seen water levels this low since we began recording them a century ago," said Grzegorz Wajlowski, spokesman for Poland's IMGW weather institute.

"The same goes for flow rates. It's never been this bad," he told AFP, adding that forecasts for the



LONG BEACH: Oil tankers are seen anchored off the coast of Long Beach, California, after sunset on Saturday. Companies are using the tankers to store excess supplies of crude oil due to lack of demand during the novel coronavirus pandemic, US media reported. — AFP

declared it could not make crude deliveries to customers due to poor economics.

Continental's decision to declare force majeure - usually reserved for wars, accidents or natural disasters - came as a shock, bringing a sharp response from the leading refinery industry group. But some say there is a logic behind it, even if it may not pass muster in court.

"You sign contracts based on the average norms that a society has experienced over the last 100 years. If we have a new event that is not covered by those norms, it goes into force majeure. That's what Harold Hamm and others are saying - that these are circumstances outside the norm," said Anas Alhaji, an energy market expert based in Dallas.

Even the long-rumored decision by the White House to tell Chevron Corp last week it could no longer operate in Venezuela, where it has had a presence for nearly 100 years, met with a shrug.

"The global climate is terrible," said one person close to a Western oil company in Venezuela. "The license almost didn't matter anymore." The market is forcing the hands of all producers. Across the world, governments and companies are preparing to shut down output, and many have already begun.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies had already committed to record cuts of 10 million barrels of daily supply that have yet to take full effect. That commitment was not enough to prevent oil's fall below zero. Saudi Arabia has said it and other OPEC members are prepared to take further measures, but made no new commitments. It is a measure of the depth of

demand destruction that even if OPEC stopped producing altogether, supply may still exceed demand.

More than 600,000 barrels per day in production cuts have already been announced in the United States, along with another 300,000 bpd of shut-ins in Canada. Brazil's state-run Petrobras has reduced output by 200,000 bpd. Azerbaijan, part of the group of nations known as OPEC+, is forcing a BP-led group to cut output for the first time ever. Oil majors in those countries have generally been excluded from government-imposed cuts.

"We have never done it before since they came to the country in 1994 and signed the contract of the century," a senior Azeri official told Reuters. That accommodation can no longer be made with the world running out of space to put oil. As of Thursday, energy researcher Kpler said onshore storage worldwide is now roughly 85 percent full. Demand is expected to fall by 29 million bpd in April, the International Energy Agency estimated. Paris-based IEA expects consumption to pick up in May, but researchers cautioned that its expectation of a mere 12 million bpd fall in year-over-year demand may be too optimistic.

"I'm sure hearing the same numbers about demand destruction of 20 to 30 million barrels a day," said Gene McGillian, analyst at Tradition Energy, who was working at the New York Mercantile Exchange when US crude futures were launched in 1983. "Until we see some kind of alleviation of that, you have to wonder what is in store." — Reuters



WARSAW: A Polish woman feeding her poultry in the village next to Warsaw. Poland's farmers have been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

next couple of months are not looking good either. Poland is no stranger to droughts, but the phenomenon is getting worse.

### Europe's Egypt

The EU member's Supreme Audit Office (NIK) warned last year that already only 1,600 cubic meters of water is available for each Pole per year. "Our (water) resources are comparable to those of Egypt," the office said in a report bearing the ominous title "Poland, European Desert." The drought has aggravated huge fires ravaging Poland's largest nature reserve, the Biebrza National Park in the country's northeast. The extent of the problem is

also visible in Warsaw: sandbanks normally hidden a couple of meters (six feet) underwater have emerged out of the Vistula, Poland's largest and longest river. Its water level has sunk to 60 centimeters (24 inches), according to official measurements.

"We had no snow this winter. Now there's no rain. We need a week's worth of light rain-not a heavy downpour, where the water disappears quickly without penetrating the soil," said Marian Sikora, president of the Polish Federation of Agricultural Producers. "The ground is dry. You have to dig a 15-centimetre hole to find moisture," he told AFP. Bukowska-Lazarska's strawberries are safe for now, thanks to a sophisticated watering system fed by a deep well that she had installed.

"But my costs have doubled. You need power to work the pumps, and also to filter and heat up the water, which is too cold." Though watering systems have kept strawberries and raspberries growing well, Bukowska-Lazarska says it is up in the air whether they will be harvested. For years now, that has been the job of seasonal workers from Ukraine and Belarus. But given the border closures and quarantine measures introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic, fewer of them are expected to arrive in Poland this year. In both 2018 and 2019, around 60,000 Ukrainians worked in the Polish farming sector, according to official figures from the EU member's agricultural ministry. — AFP

## Business

## Ooredoo adopts work from home strategy

## Strategy to provide customers with high quality telecommunication services

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, announced the successful implementation and execution of the 'Work from Home' strategy to make Ooredoo safer for everyone. The goal is to protect the health, safety, and well-being of all employees while allowing core operations to continue as smoothly as possible. The Company adopted various solutions to enable its employees to work remotely in a safe and efficient manner with the aim of increasing productivity and efficiency.



Work remotely  
in a safe and  
efficient manner

Commenting on this, Chief Human Resources and Administration Services Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait, Omar Al-Bassam stressed that Ooredoo Kuwait aims to continuously serve all its customers with high quality telecommunication services, while keeping in mind the safety and precautionary measures to ensure the



Omar Al-Bassam



Hassan El-Shami

safety and well-being of all employees. Al-Bassam further added, "We are committed to ensuring the safety of our customers and employees while ensuring that the Company's business and core functions continue to operate smoothly during this volatile period".

Regarding the telecommunication services provided by the Company, Chief Technology Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait, Hassan El-Chami said, "Ooredoo will guarantee that customers enjoy the best telecom service and internet connectivity while being home. In light of the above, being online and staying connected at all

times remain essentially important to all our customers as they expect uninterrupted connection and strong network coverage while staying indoors. Ooredoo continuously evaluates peak Internet data usage these days to stay on top of that demand".

Ooredoo Kuwait also launched its '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 Coronavirus outbreak in the country. The digital offers and services provided by Ooredoo Kuwait include subscription to any Ooredoo Surprise offer on My Ooredoo App, enjoying the best music, series, movies, and games, recharging online, joining ANA and free SIM delivery to customers' doorsteps, and amazing benefits from Shamel. Customers can also view Ooredoo's services as well as exclusive offers and their subscription data online through the MyOoredoo application and the Company website Ooredoo.com.kw in addition to contacting our call center through 121 around the clock for all enquiries and services.

Ooredoo Kuwait reaffirms its keenness to adhere to all instructions issued by the official authorities in Kuwait related to the current situation, confirming its cooperation and its complete readiness to implement the procedures followed in this regard during the coming period.



## Burgan Bank offers cash delivery service

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank is providing "cash delivery" service to its elderly, special needs, and Premier Banking customers in cooperation with "Qibla" concierge services company. To ensure providing the highest quality service to the bank's clients, the service includes door to door cash delivery. The safety of clients is the bank's utmost priority and this service guarantees their comfort by avoiding crowds from going to the branches during this covid-19 situation.

Nasser Al-Qaisi - Burgan Bank's Chief Retail Banking Officer said, "Burgan Bank always provides the best banking services that suit the needs of its customers, and in order to ensure the safety and health of our valued customers, especially the elderly and those with special needs, we provided a cash delivery service to their doorstep during this critical time. We were also keen to take all precautions and precautionary measures in cooperation with Qibla Company during the delivery service to our customers. We ask God for the recovery and health of all patients and to protect Kuwait from any harm". Customers can reach the new service by contacting 'Qibla concierge' on 22317755 between 10 am and 4 pm.

## Countries, firms risk billions in race for virus vaccine

NEW YORK: In the race to develop a vaccine to end the COVID-19 pandemic, governments, charities and Big Pharma firms are sinking billions of dollars into bets with extraordinarily low odds of success.

They're fast-tracking the testing and regulatory review of vaccines with no guarantee they will prove effective. They're building and re-tooling plants for vaccines with slim chances of being approved. They're placing orders for vaccines that, in the end, are unlikely to be produced.

It's the new pandemic paradigm, focused on speed and fraught with risks. "The crisis in the world is so big that each of us will have to take maximum risk now to put this disease to a stop," said Paul Stoffels, chief scientific officer at Johnson & Johnson, which has partnered with the US government on a \$1 billion investment to speed development and production of its still-unproven vaccine. "If it fails," Stoffels told Reuters, "it will be bad."

Historically, just 6% of vaccine candidates end up making it to market, often after a years-long process that doesn't draw big investments until testing shows a product is likely to work. But the traditional rules of drug and vaccine development are being tossed aside in the face of a virus that has infected 2.7 million people, killed more than 192,000 and devastated the global economy. With COVID-19, the goal is to have a vaccine identified, tested and available on a scale of hundreds of millions of doses in just 12 to 18 months.

Drug companies and the governments and investors that finance them are boosting their "at-risk" spending in unprecedented ways. The overriding consensus among more than 30 drug company executives, government health officials and pandemic-response experts interviewed by Reuters is that the risks are necessary to ensure not only that a vaccine for the new coronavirus is developed quickly, but that it is ready to distribute as soon as it's approved.

Investments from governments, global health groups and philanthropies have been aimed primarily at the most promising of the more than 100 vaccine candidates in development worldwide. But only a handful of those have advanced to human trials, the real indicator of safety and efficacy - and the stage where most vaccines wash out. Even among the more encouraging prospects, very few are likely to succeed. It's possible more than one will work; it's possible none will.

For companies in the race, there are some likely benefits: It's a proving ground for vaccine technologies and a chance to burnish reputations and boost shares. While some large companies, including Johnson & Johnson and GlaxoSmithKline Plc, have said they plan to make the

## Worst slump in 'centuries' looms for UK

LONDON: Britain may be in the grip of its worst economic slump in centuries, a Bank of England official warned, as the coronavirus lockdown pounded businesses this month with more force than even the most pessimistic forecasters had feared. Interest-rate setter Jan Vlieghe said the economy should recover its pre-coronavirus growth pattern once the pandemic is over, but it could take time.

Earlier, surveys showed a historic contraction in the economy is all but guaranteed as the government grapples with its biggest public health crisis in more than 100 years. Over 17,000 Britons have died from the novel coronavirus so far.

The government will need to issue 180 billion pounds (\$223 billion) of debt in the next three months alone to pay for the unprecedented measures launched to stem the collapse of the economy, the Treasury said on Thursday. "Based on the early indicators, and based on the experience in other countries that were hit somewhat earlier than the UK, it seems that we are experiencing an economic contraction that is faster and deeper than anything we have seen in the past century, or possibly several centuries," Vlieghe said in a speech delivered online.

"The economy's potential is severely disrupted at the moment, but once the pandemic is over, and other things equal, in principle it should return approximately to the pre-virus trajectory."

But he also said a slow, U-shaped recovery was

vaccine available at cost - at least at first - they may reap profits down the road if seasonal vaccination is needed and countries invest in stockpiles.

But finding a vaccine that works does little good without the ability to produce and distribute it. That means building manufacturing plants now. "We want to make investments up front, at risk, even before we know the vaccines work, to be able to (immediately) manufacture them at a scale of tens or hundreds of millions of doses," said Richard Hatchett, a physician who managed U.S. pandemic flu policy under former President George W. Bush and returned to advise the Obama White House during the 2009 swine flu pandemic.

Hatchett now heads the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a vaccine-development consortium supported by private donors as well as the United Kingdom, Canada, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. The organization has raised more than \$915 million of the \$2 billion it anticipates spending to accelerate testing and build specialized production plants for at least three coronavirus vaccine candidates.

In the United States, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), a federal agency that funds disease-fighting technology, has announced investments of nearly \$1 billion to support coronavirus vaccine development and the scale-up of manufacturing for promising candidates. One underlying fear, shared by everyone Reuters interviewed, is that even if a vaccine does prove effective, there won't be enough to go around.

Having reserves ready worldwide to immediately inoculate critical populations - health care workers, the elderly, people made vulnerable by medical conditions - would stamp out the pandemic faster and reignite economies, Hatchett said. The alternative, he said, is a replay of past pandemics, including the H1N1 influenza outbreak of 2009, with wealthy countries hoarding the vaccines.

If that happens, pandemic experts warn, infection hot spots will continue to pop up, each with the potential to create a new wave of illness.

## Full speed ahead

The scale of the coronavirus vaccine race has no historical parallels. CEPI has identified at least 115 ongoing vaccine initiatives worldwide. And the race is shattering norms of speed and safety in drug and vaccine development. Some developers are running safety and efficacy trials in tandem, instead of sequentially, as is typical, and short-cutting traditional testing protocols. Others are working with regulators in multiple countries simultaneously, looking for the quickest path to market.

The resulting uncertainty makes it especially risky to invest in manufacturing facilities for a given candidate, since different types of vaccines can require very distinct production lines.

Many of the candidates attracting the most investment rely on proven vaccine approaches being adapted

more likely than a quick, V-shaped rebound.

The monthly IHS Markit/CIPS Flash UK Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) showed the extent of the damage. It fell to record low of 12.9 from 36.0 in March - not even close to the weakest forecast in a Reuters poll of economists, a reading of 31.4. The picture was similar in France and Germany.

"Like those across Europe, these are shocking figures," said ING economist James Smith, who predicts it will be 2022 at the earliest before Britain's economy recovers to its pre-outbreak size.



LONDON: The government will need to issue 180 billion pounds (\$223 billion) of debt in the next three months alone to pay for the unprecedented measures launched to stem the collapse of the economy, the Treasury said on Thursday.

by Big Pharma companies with regulatory and production acumen. Some funders are gambling on smaller biotech companies and academic labs, which may have promising technologies but little to no experience getting a drug or vaccine approved and produced at scale.

BARDA, the US R&D agency, is one of the biggest vaccine funders, with some \$5 billion to spend. The agency plans to invest in five vaccine candidates, focusing mostly on projects from experienced drug makers. "Each is coming with a lot of prior experience," said Rick Bright, who until this month was BARDA's director. "They all know how to scale up."

In one of its biggest bets, BARDA is pouring nearly \$500 million into a J&J effort.

J&J's coronavirus vaccine candidate uses a cold virus, rendered harmless, to deliver genes derived from the spiky, crown-shaped proteins on the surface of the new coronavirus, prompting an immune response.

J&J is using the same technology to develop vaccines for other viruses, including Ebola. While none has completed testing and won full US approval, trials so far in tens of thousands of people have produced data showing the basic approach is safe, which could speed regulatory approval for the new coronavirus vaccine. But it's far from a sure bet: Animal test data, due this summer, will give the first hint of the vaccine's effectiveness and human trials will begin in September.

"By end of the year, we'll know whether it protects humans," said Stoffels, J&J's chief science officer.

In China, CanSino Biologics Inc has vaccine technology similar to the one being used by J&J. CanSino is further along with its testing, having announced this month that its candidate had cleared initial safety trials in humans and was set to advance to the next stage.

Sanofi SA, the world's largest vaccine maker, has attracted BARDA money for another proven approach, based on its approved Flublok flu shot. Sanofi uses insect cells instead of the traditional chicken eggs to grow the genetically altered virus proteins used to spur an immune response.

Not all the vaccine projects getting attention have a Big Pharma pedigree.

Moderna Inc, a biotech firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the first in the United States to begin human trials when it began testing its vaccine last month. Working with the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the company received seed money from CEPI, and this month, BARDA kicked in \$483 million to support the vaccine's development and help scale up manufacturing. That includes hiring 150 skilled workers to eventually produce vaccine around the clock.

Moderna's vaccine uses genetic material called messenger RNA (mRNA) to instruct cells in the body to make specific coronavirus proteins that then produce an immune response.

No mRNA vaccine has ever been approved for public use, but the technology is drawing interest, in part because it makes a vaccine easier to design and produce in vast quantities.

Another survey showed manufacturers were more pessimistic about the outlook than at any time since records began in the 1950s. A Reuters poll of economists pointed to a roughly 13percent contraction in the current quarter, the largest since records began after World War Two. Data company IHS Markit said its figures raised questions about the cost of the lockdown and how long it will last. "Seeing the numbers in cold hard print and witnessing the depths of the reported falls in output is sobering," said Investec economist Victoria Clarke. — Reuters

"The end game is millions of doses," Tal Zaks, Moderna's chief medical officer, told Reuters. The company hopes to have an approved vaccine available as early as March 2021, and possibly before then for health-care workers. German vaccine makers CureVac and BioNTech SE, which is partnering with Pfizer Inc, are preparing to begin trials with similar mRNA-based vaccine candidates. So is Lexington, Massachusetts-based Translate Bio Inc, which is working with Sanofi.

## Extraordinary shortcuts

Even for vaccine hopefuls already in human tests, it will be months before there's conclusive evidence on safety and effectiveness - something funders are keenly aware of.

The rush has prompted scientists to consider previously unthinkable shortcuts.

Normally, vaccines would need to undergo clinical trials involving thousands of people before widespread inoculation is allowed. But after testing a prospective vaccine in a smaller group to ensure it is not toxic, Swiss researchers seek to "immunize a lot of the Swiss population in the next six months and then produce for a world market," Dr Martin Bachmann, head of immunology at Inselspital, the University Hospital of Bern, said this week. A spokesman for Swissmedic, the country's drug regulator, said it was in contact with Bachmann's group and would not allow trials until the agency is assured that safety risks are addressed.

The Swiss vaccine employs virus-like particles to provoke an immune response, an approach that theoretically is considered safer because it does not directly expose people to the actual coronavirus. So far, it has only been tested in mice. Dr. Gregory Poland, a vaccine researcher at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, is among those worried about the risks of injecting a large group of people with a vaccine that has only been through minimal testing in humans.

"I don't see how this is possible," he told Reuters, referring to Inselspital's plan.

The war on COVID-19 is haunted by lessons from the fight against another virus a decade ago. In the spring of 2009, the H1N1 swine flu virus emerged in the United States and Mexico and spread worldwide. Within weeks, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it the first pandemic since 1968.

Wealthier governments that had provisional contracts with vaccine makers immediately exercised them, "effectively monopolizing the global vaccine supply," according to Hatchett and numerous official reports. The US alone ordered 250 million doses, and Australia, Brazil, France, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and Britain all had vaccine.

Under pressure from the WHO, those countries ultimately committed to share 10% of their stockpiles with poorer nations. But due to production and distribution snarls, only about 77 million doses were shipped - far less than needed - and only after the disease had peaked in many regions. — Reuters

# Pet adoptions, fosters skyrocket in US amid coronavirus pandemic

LOS ANGELES: Animals shelters across the United States are emptying out thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, as people confined to their homes are adopting or fostering animals in droves. "We've never seen anything like this," said Kitty Block, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, which partners with some 400 shelters nationwide.

"The fostering and adoptions have just been through the roof," she told AFP. "Every shelter is reporting out the same thing. It's amazing to see how many lives have been saved." Block said as the COVID-19 outbreak took hold, shelters—many of which were forced to close because of stay-at-home orders—launched adoption appeals, and the response has been overwhelming.

Dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs and even hens have found homes, as people all over the country look for pets to help them cope with confinement. "We've always talked about having a dog, but it was never the right time until now," said Jalene Hillery, a teacher who lives in San Diego, California, and who recently adopted Mason, an American pit bull, from the local shelter. She said the fact that she and her husband, as well as their two young sons, are home has allowed for a smooth adoption, given that they have time to care for the dog and help him adjust to his new home.

"We get to connect with him, train him, and that's really been fun," she told AFP. Hillery said Mason has also proven a great companion for her boys, aged 9 and 11, who are missing their school friends and



CALIFORNIA: Wyatt Garley a Wildlife Care Specialist catches pigeons and doves to give them a quick health assessment at the Wildlife Center at the San Diego Humane Society. — AFP photos



CALIFORNIA: Mase - a pit bull plays in the grass with Delonte Hillery in a park in Escondido, California. Mase was adopted a week ago by the Hillery family from the San Diego Humane Society.

needed something to help ease anxiety. "The dog is filling a need... and is able to provide comfort and love and play," Hillery said. "He's definitely filled the void in our home that we didn't even know existed. "It's almost like it's too good to be true."

Shelters nationwide, from Wisconsin to North Carolina and Virginia to Colorado, are reporting that the number of people fostering animals has also skyrocketed. Sherri Franklin, founder of the Muttville Senior Dog Rescue in San Francisco, said

she has never seen such an outpouring of support from the community in the 25 years she has worked in animal rescue. "When the shelter-in-place order came down (in March), we had 86 dogs in our care, and we moved them all to foster homes in 48 hours," she said.

Franklin said adopting or fostering a pet during these unusual and stressful times is beneficial for both animals and humans. "Adopting a dog during this time is an equal win for both the dog... but it's

even more so for the human that does need a reason to get up, and does need a connection in this world and does need something to alleviate isolation and stress," she noted. For Sarah Chan, 25, who lives in the San Diego area with her partner Morgan Miller, also 25, adopting Silvia was a no-brainer after they saw the cat's picture on the local shelter's Instagram account.

"She's given us companionship and is a good distraction," said Chan, who

works for a semiconductor company. Lauren Amaral said she decided to foster two guinea pigs—Ally and Emi—as a way of helping her local shelter during these uncertain times and also for comfort. "Having them just makes me happy. They bring me a lot of joy," said Amaral, 20, who plans to get a nursing degree. "Whenever I pet them, I just feel a lot better 'cause it is a stressful time, and these little pigs are just the sweetest girls in the world." — AFP

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Tele:1802 555

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A mother and her two children takes a "selfie" at Mount Rushmore National Memorial on April 23, 2020, in Keystone, South Dakota.—AFP photos

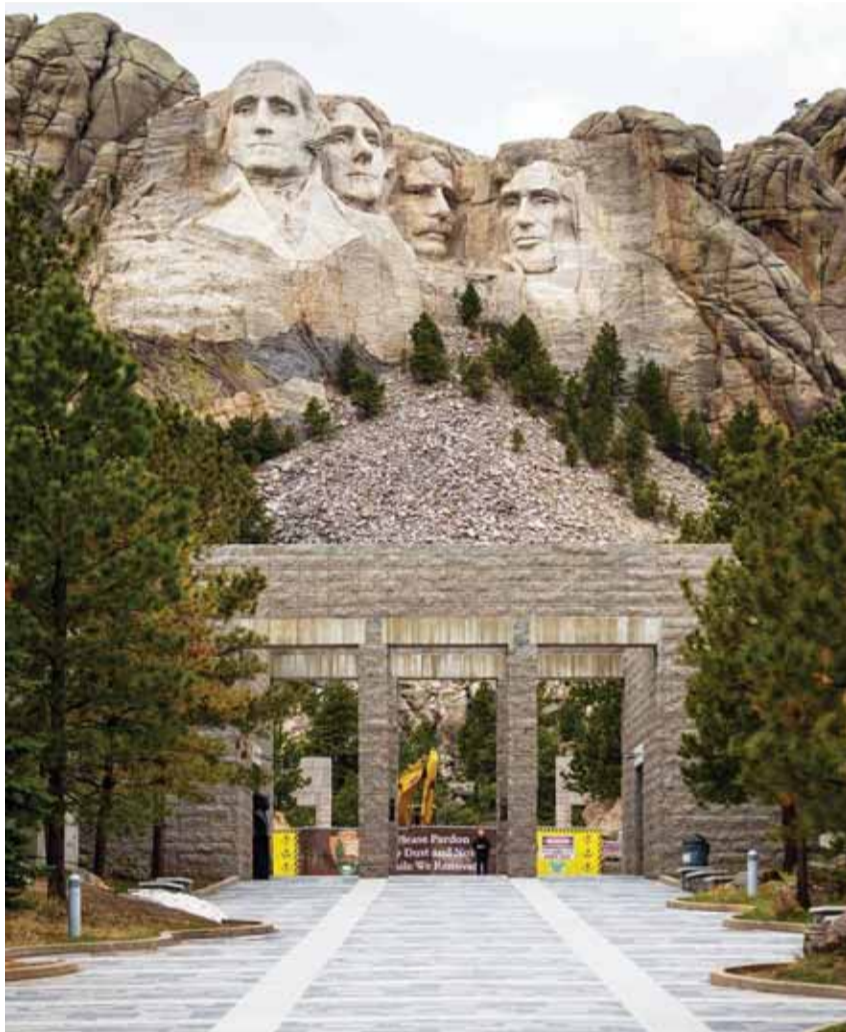


Tourists take photos of Mount Rushmore National Memorial.



Jatonna Miller (left) and Duston Cox (right) take a "selfie" at Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

## Mount Rushmore drawing visitors escaping US virus lockdowns



Mount Rushmore National Memorial on April 23, 2020, in Keystone, South Dakota.

The steep and winding roads leading up to the iconic Mount Rushmore memorial are deserted these days. This hub of tourism in South Dakota, which ordinarily swarms with tourists, is now drawing only the occasional handful of visitors desperate to escape their extended confinement in the time of the coronavirus. Linda and Stevie Easterling had grown weary and depressed by the steadily mounting toll of COVID-19 deaths in their hometown of Chicago. Longing for fresh air and a change of scenery, they piled into their car for the 14-hour drive west. But they did first take a few precautions for the trip to South Dakota, one of the few US states not under virus-imposed lockdown. "We have a car full of masks, gloves and disinfecting wipes," said Linda Easterling. "We're probably safer being here in a place with very few people," she said, adding that she was also happy to cross another destination off her bucket list of places to visit.

Behind her, looming near the summit of this part of the Black Hills, were the massive stone heads of four US presidents — George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln — carved into the granite cliff in the first half of the last century by a sculptor using dynamite, jackhammers and chisels. At the park entrance, where gray-shirted rangers normally collect a \$10 per-car entry fee, the usual barriers have been removed, allowing easy access to nearly empty parking lots. The information center, cafeteria and gift shop are all closed, but tourists are free to visit from 5 am to 11 pm. "We saved \$10 and could park right by the entrance," said Dustin Cox, a tourist from Oklahoma, who swung by the monument on



Shop manager of Mt Rushmore T-Shirts, Todd Wicks, speaks during an interview with AFP next to a bottle of hand sanitizer and signs with information about COVID-19.

his way home from a work-related trip to Montana. His companion, Jatonna Miller, also found some silver linings to the situation. "It's not as busy, so you can get in and out of places a lot quicker," she said, before adding: "But it's kind of sad. The economy is hurting due to all of it."

### Ghost town

A few miles away, Keystone, a tourist village full of Old West touches, feels like a ghost town. Alone in his souvenir shop, Todd Wicks is trying to stay positive: high season around here doesn't really begin in earnest until mid-May. "Here in South Dakota, we're happy that our governor just said, 'Take precautions, be safe, but you don't have to shut down,'" Wicks said. "Everybody is aware, as long as you keep your hands clean, I think it's still safe to travel around." Still, the lockdown

orders affecting most Americans, and the absence of international flights, have clearly cut down visits to the area.

"Our visitation is definitely lower than it normally is this time of year... We usually have a lot of school groups," said Maureen McGee-Ballinger, a Mount Rushmore educator and spokeswoman. While most US national parks — including such hugely popular destinations as Yellowstone, Yosemite and the Grand Canyon — have been forced to close amid the pandemic, Mount Rushmore has stayed open, even if it expects nowhere near the two million visitors it receives annually. "We want to be able to give the people a little opportunity to get outside," said McGee-Ballinger, before obliging a group of visitors by posing with a birthday message for a 14-year-old aspiring ranger, Peyton, who is confined at home in Kentucky.

Stevie Easterling, trying to screw up the courage for the grueling drive back to Chicago, turned for one last look at the "spectacular" faces of the four presidents, carved between 1927 and 1941 by sculptor Gutzon Borglum. The four presidents were chosen to represent key phases in American history: George Washington (for the nation's birth), Thomas Jefferson (for its growth), Abraham Lincoln (for its preservation during the Civil War), and Theodore Roosevelt (for its development). Might Donald Trump eventually find a spot alongside those historic leaders? Stevie Easterling responds with a smile. "Let's keep it the way it is," he says.—AFP

## Lockdown inspires Italian boy to create coronavirus video game

While most nine-year-olds have been battling during lockdown with the vagaries of home schooling, Lupu Daturi has been waging war on COVID-19 itself. Virtually. The fourth-grade pupil from the outskirts of Milan, where inhabitants have been living in lockdown since March 8, has used his time to create a video game to play with his friends. "I had to stop all the sports I did because of COVID-19," he says. "I can't even go to the pond with my dog. Instead of playing sports — skiing, swimming and karate — I have to make do with an exercise bike."

That led Lupu to turn his attention to programming, a passion that he shares with his father Marco, a business manager. He took some online tutorials and set to work on building his game — Cerba-20. The aim of the game is a fairly typical 'seek and destroy' with lasers, except in this case, the player is in the captain's chair of the Cerba-20 spacecraft and the enemy is, that's right, COVID-19. Lupu explains that he plays with his friends and that he now intends to set up a project to teach them how to program. "He also receives requests from his teachers to program something useful, not just games,"

says his father.

Many parents with children who have been gorging themselves on video games during lockdown might be concerned by Lupu's new interest. But his mother, a lawyer, dismisses such anxieties. "I'm not worried because my son is not a 'nerd'," says 44-year-old Francesca Zamboni, who is just "happy because he is passionate about something that can help him." "The fact that he invented a game that has gone viral makes me happy because it motivates him to do even more."—AFP



Fourth grade pupil 9-year-old boy Lupu Daturi (center) poses with his mother Francesca Zamboni (left), father Marco Daturi and dog Mia at home in Binasco, south of Milan.—AFP photos



Fourth grade pupil 9-year-old boy Lupu Daturi displays "Cerba-20", the online video game to virtually combat COVID-19 that he built from scratch during lockdown.

## Joy! Tokyo deploys Marie Kondo in virus fight



Marie Kondo

Worried about getting bored while stuck at home during holidays amid the coronavirus pandemic? The Tokyo governor has a solution: Decluttering with Marie Kondo. Governor Yuriko Koike told reporters on Thursday the metropolitan government will share fun videos — including those of the decluttering guru — to keep Tokyo residents entertained at home during the forthcoming "Golden Week" holidays. "I think there are people who want to declutter during the holidays," Koike said. "With help of KonMari, we will upload videos in which she teaches us secrets of tidying up," she said, referring to the now world-famous decluttering guru.

A Tokyo official added that other entertainment videos would be available

for those who do not wish to spend their holidays clearing out their cupboards. Japan is under a nationwide state of emergency with people urged to refrain from travelling from the cities to their home regions during the Golden Week holidays starting later this month. The virus has so far infected nearly 12,000 and killed around 290 in Japan, with the capital seeing more than 100 new cases every day. Kondo, also known as KonMari, is best known for her book "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up," which was published in Japan in 2011 and translated into English in 2014. She also starred in the Netflix series "Tidying Up With Marie Kondo" released last year.—AFP



Children play with their father on the beach amid the Coronavirus pandemic in Tybee Island, Georgia.—AFP

## Self-isolation? Some in Georgia choose beach instead

After being locked down for weeks, many residents in Georgia are thumbing their noses at the deadly coronavirus and seeking sanctuary in the sun, sand and waves of the southern state's beaches. Under a cloudless blue sky with balmy temperatures and soft breezes rolling off the water, Tybee Island proved a powerful weekend lure Saturday for Georgians desperate for any return to normalcy — and an escape from self-imposed isolation. "How long are we supposed to imprison ourselves?" a bikini-clad Mackenzie Scharf, 30, said to AFP as her five-year-old son flew a Spider Man kite. "This is much safer than going grocery shopping."

One day after Georgia's governor allowed a limited reopening of thousands of businesses, several hundred people were enjoying Tybee Island's sprawling South Beach. "It feels great — like it's supposed to feel," said 39-year-old mother and housewife Rachel Lilly, barely lifting her head from a watermelon-themed towel as she enjoyed her first beach trip of the year. "I'm not concerned" about catching coronavirus, "as long as it's not packed," she said. "But if everyone does what we're doing, that's a problem." Locals said Saturday was the busiest beach day of the year so far for Tybee Island, a laid-back tourist destination on Georgia's Atlantic coast. Several hundred people were on the sand strolling, jogging, throwing footballs or wading in the mild waves. Social distancing was generally in effect. But masks or other protective

gear? Forget about it. "It's just nice to, you know, come up for a little air," silver-haired attorney Brian Monroe, 49, said after throwing a Frisbee with his daughter. "When the beach is sparsely populated like this it's not too hard to social distance."

Tybee Island authorities nevertheless were patrolling the sand on all-wheel drive vehicles, cautioning people about distancing. One block off the sand, sun-splashed youths wearing sandals and long swim trunks scanned their phones and held red plastic cups as they rode cruiser bikes through quiet streets. The smell of sunblock lingered. A motorcycle group rumbled down the main drag, Butler Avenue. Restaurants and smoothie shops were providing take-out for beachgoers.

### 'Get it on'

This was not the scene that Tybee Island's Mayor Shirley Sessions envisioned. She shut the community's beaches several weeks ago as a measure to contain viral spread. But this month Georgia Governor Brian Kemp overruled her with an order of his own. Georgia's neighbors South Carolina and Florida have both opened some of their beaches. But Georgia has gone further. On Friday, Kemp gave permission for some small businesses to reopen statewide, including barber shops, bowling alleys and nail salons, provided protective health measures were in place. Restaurants and social clubs can open come Monday.—AFP

## SYRIAN DANCER TAKES A SPOOKILY EMPTY PARIS AS HER CANVASS



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance on the empty Trocadero square in front of the Eiffel tower in Paris on April 22, 2020, on the 37th day of a strict lockdown in France to stop the spread of COVID-19.—AFP photos



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in front of the Louvre museum's pyramid.



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in front of Paris' Arc de Triomphe.

Dancer Yara Al-Hasbani is used to causing a stir everywhere she goes. The Syrian choreographer has drawn crowds across France for her performances in public squares and parks. But there wasn't a soul in sight as she performed a series of spectacular ballet moves in front of the deserted grand monuments of Paris for AFP. With the French capital in lockdown for nearly six weeks because of the coronavirus, the 26-year-old had some of the most visited sites in the world to herself.

Wearing a white mask, she danced an arabesque in front of the Louvre museum, an "attitude derriere" on the steps of Sacre Coeur and did a "six o'clock" with one leg right up to her head by the Arc du Triomphe. Trained as a ballet and contemporary dancer in Damascus,

Al-Hasbani left her war-torn homeland six years ago and is now a member of the Atelier of Artists in Exile in the French capital, where she has lived since 2016. "It is really strange to see these monuments deserted," said the choreographer.

She said it was wonderful "to admire the city without noise and tourists but at the same time it was sad, as if it was abandoned." Perhaps the most spectacular images come from Human Rights Square — a cause dear to Al-Hasbani's heart — at Trocadero looking out at the Eiffel Tower. She has previously danced at Place de la Republique, a traditional rallying point for protests in the French capital, where she created her first piece outside Syria in memory of the hundreds of children killed in a chemical attack near Damascus in August 2015.—AFP



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in front of the Sacre Coeur basilica in Paris.



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in Montmartre with Paris in the background.



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in front of the Moulin Rouge cabaret in Paris.



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in front of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance in front of Paris' Opera Garnier.



Syrian dancer and choreographer Yara Al-Hasbani performs a dance on the empty Trocadero square in Paris.

### Viral content: Tokyo governor's distancing call is online hit

Manga, music and even video games: calls from Tokyo's governor for residents to practice social distancing to stem the spread of coronavirus have inspired a slew of viral online tributes. On Twitter, a clip from a game in which players roam around town finding and breaking up gatherings was shared tens of thousands of times after being posted on Monday. A suit-clad female politician can be seen running — or flying — towards groups of people and bouncing them apart with a wave of her hand. Governor Yuriko Koike has spearheaded calls for Tokyo to take a rising number of infections more seriously, pushing for the state of emergency the government has now declared nationwide.

In near-daily messages to the capital's residents, she has warned people to avoid areas where they may come into close contact with others. Since then, the word "mitsu", which indicates confined, crowded and close in Japanese, has been trending online. The video of the game, posted by its creator, was retweeted more than 88,000 times and liked 204,000 times within just a few hours. Koike's

social distancing messages have also been remixed by another Twitter user, with "it's mitsu" in Japanese looped against a club beat as the governor's image floats in the background.

The governor has also become the star of manga art, with one cartoon depicting a mask-wearing Koike as having the magic power of being able to create two metres of distance between people, simply by whispering "mitsu". Japan's outbreak remains less severe than in hard-hit European countries, but its caseload is one of Asia's highest after China and India, and is roughly on par with South Korea. There have been 171 deaths recorded so far and more than 10,700 cases. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has urged residents to reduce contact with other people by 70 to 80 percent, and the number of people on Tokyo's normally packed transport system has dropped significantly. But the measures do not prevent people from going out, and many shops and even restaurants remain open.—AFP

### Safer to eat in restaurants than at home, claims top French chef

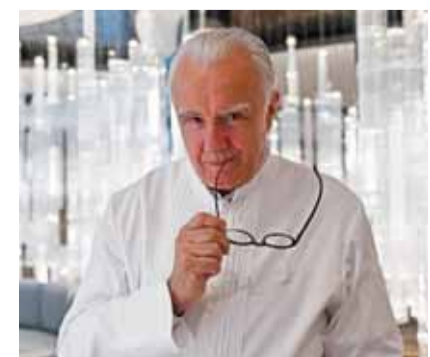
French superstar chef Alain Ducasse insists that it is safer to eat in restaurants than at home during the coronavirus epidemic. With restaurants shuttered by lockdowns across the world, Ducasse claimed that it was riskier to shop and cook at home. "It's better to eat in a restaurant that takes all the precautions than at home where you have to go to your little local supermarket where people are bumping into each other, touching the fruit and not everybody is wearing masks," he told AFP. Ducasse, whose restaurants have 17 Michelin stars — the most of any chef in the world — claimed it made more sanitary sense to eat out.

Restaurants were closed on scientific advice to halt the spread of the virus and to enforce social distancing. However, thousands of takeaways in France and elsewhere have remained open, with several top French chefs including Ducasse providing haute cuisine to go. Ducasse made the safety comments after making the case for a "gradual and responsible" reopening of

restaurants in France to President Emmanuel Macron Friday. Ducasse said that Macron had taken his arguments on board, adding that cafes and restaurants could start reopening "between June 2 and 20" if the death toll from the virus continues to fall.

The chef represented the country's hard-hit hospitality sector in a video meeting with the French leader. The French government said that it would decide when cafes, restaurants and hotels could open at the end of May.

France is the most visited country in the world, with some one million people employed in its hospitality sector. Cafes and restaurants are at the heart of French culture and identity, but have been shuttered since the country went into lockdown nearly six weeks ago. As well as a partial reopening, the hospitality industry are demanding tax and rent breaks to help the hard-pressed sector. The government instead promised to extend an aid scheme to establishments that employed up to 20 people. "We are going in the right direction," Ducasse told AFP. He described the lockdown as "catastrophic" for the sector, which is dominated by small family businesses, and said "this can only last for a few more weeks".—AFP



In this file photo French chef Alain Ducasse poses during an interview with AFP at his restaurant Alain Ducasse at The Morpheus Hotel in Macau.—AFP



Two women stand in front of a mural by artist @Dister picturing first responders with masks on and a thank you message during the novel coronavirus pandemic on April 24, 2020 in the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan in New York City. — AFP

## Indian agricultural workers broke, uncertain as rural lockdown eased

**MUMBAI:** As India eased its tough coronavirus lockdown for farmers, some agricultural workers said they were unaware they could return to the fields after weeks without income during the peak harvest season. India's 1.3 billion people will continue to live under strict curbs until May 3, but the government said farms and factories could resume activity today in the hinterland, which has been less hard-hit by COVID-19.

"We didn't know the restrictions were lifted," farm worker Mukesh Sahani told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from his village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, saying weeks without earnings had left his family with "just about enough to eat and live". "We have incurred the biggest loss ever this year. My parents and I managed to get two days of work this month for 400 Indian rupees (\$5), as against the 15-20 days of work we get on various farms every year," he added.

April is normally a month of strong demand for farm workers but the lockdown, which is now in its fourth week, has brought the countryside to a virtual standstill and harvest festivals have been muted this year. It was unclear exactly how many of the country's millions of agricultural workers were

unaware that the controls had been partially lifted, as farming unions sought to spread the word in the countryside.

Seema Kulkarni of the Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch, a network of civil society groups and women farmers which has been sending out messages to its members this week, said there was "eagerness" among farm workers to get back to their jobs. Nearly 70 percent of India's population live in rural areas, where more than half of men and nearly 70 percent women are engaged in agricultural work, government data shows.

Due to circumstances a government spokesperson said daily wages under a rural employment scheme had been increased to 202 rupees (\$2.65) from about 180 Indian rupees (\$2) and nearly 55 billion rupees (\$655 million) disbursed among 16 million people. These were among the many steps - including allowing agricultural activities and setting up call centres to coordinate transportation of farm produce - undertaken by the government to mitigate hardship in rural India, he said.

K S Dhatwalia, principal director general of the Press Information Bureau of the Indian government, said in an email that both sowing and harvesting activities were on course, with the sowing area cov-

erage better than last year.

Recent videos shared by farmers on social media show fields bursting with crops including cabbages, peppers, tomatoes and grapes waiting to be harvested, or being dumped by farmers unable to sell their produce. "Farm produce traders, who would harvest crops from my land to sell it at the wholesale market, couldn't make it this year," said farmer Kannaiyam Subramaniam, whose video of his bumper cabbage crop went viral on Twitter. "There are many farmers who haven't got workers to har-

vest. Vegetables won't wait for the lockdown to be over before they perish," he said.

For some farm workers, however, the easing of the controls brought a little relief. Pawan Laluram, 20, went to visit his employer to pick up wages he was due to be paid: two sacks of wheat. "I couldn't bring the wheat sacks last month when the lockdown was announced as I had to walk nearly 40 miles (65 km) to reach home," he said. "There's no work in the village and there was no food at home. The wheat may last us a few months," he said. — Reuters

## Minister: Kuwait could ease...

Continued from Page 1

A number of lawmakers yesterday called for making it even stricter for expats to obtain a driving license in a bid to reduce the number of vehicles on roads to avoid congestions. The calls came as the National Assembly's interior and defense committee is preparing to study a new traffic law as part of efforts to reduce traffic jams on roads.

MP Safa Al-Hashem said in statements that the new law should include provisions that make it even more difficult for expats to obtain a driving license. The traffic department is already applying strict rules for expats to get a driving license. Hashem said that a number of expatriate present fake contracts stipulating high salaries as a means to obtain a driving license, saying authorities should stop this. The new traffic law is expected to be ready by the time the Assembly resumes holding sessions suspended because of the coronavirus.

MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said yesterday he will submit a proposal calling to toughen penalties against those who cheat in the foodstuff trade by either selling food not fit for human consumption or whose validity date has expired, proposing a jail term of up to two years for the two violations. If the violation leads to death or disability, the penalty will be a death sentence, according to the proposal.

The global death toll in the novel coronavirus pandemic soared past the grim 200,000 milestone yesterday, as the World Health Organization warned against "immunity passports" for recovered patients, seen as a possible tool for countries preparing to re-open their economies. The WHO opposes such "passports" because recovery from the virus might not protect a person from reinfection. "There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from #COVID19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," the UN health body said in a statement.

Meanwhile hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world spent the second day of the Ramadan holy month out of mosques and avoiding large family meals to break the fast because of sequestration and social distancing policies. And Australians and New Zealanders marked Anzac Day without the normal parades and public ceremonies to commemorate fallen soldiers. Instead, under social distancing policies, people held dawn vigils in

front of their homes.

Even as governments from Sri Lanka to Belgium to the United States began moving in the direction of partial reopening, the COVID-19 pandemic still had nearly half of humanity under some form of lockdown or confinement. Total cases around the world rose to 2.86 million and deaths mounted past the 200,000 mark, doubling since April 10, according to an AFP tally. Europe, the hardest-hit region, has recorded 122,171 coronavirus deaths.

The US toll rose by 2,494 over the past 24 hours to hit 53,511 deaths. The number of coronavirus cases in the United States jumped by nearly 46,000 to 936,293 since Friday. In Italy, the number of COVID-19 fatalities rose to 26,384; Spain 22,902; France 22,614 and the United Kingdom 20,319.

The world remained in wait as companies and governments raced to develop treatments and, eventually, a vaccine for the virus, which first surfaced in China in late 2019. The WHO warned on Saturday that people who test positive and survive infection cannot be certain they will not be hit again by the coronavirus. The warning came as some governments study measures such as "immunity passports" for those who have recovered as one way to get people back to work after weeks of economic shutdown.

People holding such a "passport" may tend to ignore public health advice, such as continuing to wear facemasks, assuming they are not a danger to themselves or others, the WHO said. That is a particular worry as testing becomes more widespread, especially testing for coronavirus antibodies, whose presence indicate a person had previously contracted the virus and recovered.

Despite Saturday's grim milestone in virus fatalities, the daily toll in Western countries appeared to be levelling off and even falling, a sign hopeful epidemiologists had been looking for. Likewise, new reported cases appear to have plateaued at about 80,000 a day. But in many countries there were worries of a second surge after lockdown restrictions are eased, possibly also coinciding with a new flu season.

In hard-hit Iran, health officials Saturday raised fears of a "fresh outbreak" with another 76 fatalities declared, bringing the country's official death toll to 5,650. Iran has steadily allowed the restarting of businesses that were closed to stop the virus spread. But Alireza Zali, a health coordinator for the capital, criticized "hasty reopenings" that could "create new waves of sickness in Tehran". Even so, the pressure from broken economies and citizens frustrated by stay-at-home orders had areas pushing to open up.



DAREWADI, India: Anil Salunkhe, a farmer, feeds strawberries to his cow during a 21-day nationwide lockdown to slow the spread of COVID-19 in this village in Satara district in the western state of Maharashtra on April 1, 2020. — Reuters

## Crisis deepens as Yemen separatists...

Continued from Page 1

cause, and said self-governance had begun at midnight.

The government condemned the move and said the separatists - who have long agitated for independence in the south - would be responsible for the "catastrophic and dangerous" outcome. The breakdown between the one-time allies comes as a Saudi-led coalition, which backs the internationally recognized government in a battle against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, has extended a unilateral ceasefire aimed at fending off the coronavirus pandemic - a move rejected by the Houthis.

Yemen's separatists signed a power-sharing deal in Riyadh last November that quelled a battle - dubbed a "civil war within a civil war" - for the south that had in August seen them seize control of the second city of Aden. The Riyadh pact quickly became defunct, failing to meet deadlines for key measures including the formation of a new cabinet with equal representation for southerners, and the reorganization of military forces.

The STC announced in its statement that it was declaring "self-governance in the south starting midnight on Saturday April 25th, 2020. "A self-governing committee will start its work according to a list of tasks assigned by the council's presidency," it said. Aden residents reported heavy deployments of STC forces in the city and a separatist source told AFP they had set up checkpoints "at all government facilities, including the central bank and port of Aden".

Military vehicles drove through the city with STC flags flying aloft. The political landscape in the south is complex, and despite the STC's declaration some southern cities said they did not recognize the call to self-rule and would remain aligned with the

central government. Yemen's Foreign Minister Mohammad Al-Hadhrami said the STC move was "a continuation of the armed rebellion last August and a declaration of rejection" of the Riyadh agreement.

Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed over the past five years in the war between the government and the Houthi rebels. Earlier this month, Yemen reported its first case of coronavirus in Hadramawt, a southern government-controlled province, raising fears of an outbreak. Compounding the country's troubles, at least 21 people were killed in flash flooding this month, with Aden's streets submerged and homes destroyed.

The UAE, like the STC, has a zero tolerance policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood and Yemen's Brotherhood-influenced Al-Islah party, which has representatives in the internationally-recognized government. Last August, deadly clashes broke out between the government and STC forces who seized control of Aden, ousting unionist forces who had set up base there when President Abdrabbho Mansour Hadi fled the Houthi-held capital Sanaa in Feb 2015.

The tussle for control of the south exposed divisions between the coalition partners - Saudi Arabia, which backs the government, and the United Arab Emirates, a backer and funder of the STC. The Riyadh agreement had been welcomed as preventing the complete break-up of Yemen, and hailed as a possible stepping stone towards ending the wider conflict in Yemen. But the cracks soon emerged, with complaints over food shortages in the south, a sharp depreciation of the currency, and a lack of funds to pay public sector employees.

The STC's statement yesterday said there had been a marked deterioration of public services, which "was clearly reflected in the latest torrential rains that caused the people in Aden deep suffering". The government was using its powers as "a weapon to bring the southerners to kneel," it said. While the government and the STC are technically allies in the long war against the Houthis, the secessionists believe the south should be an independent state - as it was before unification in 1990. — AFP



Stars

Daily SuDoku

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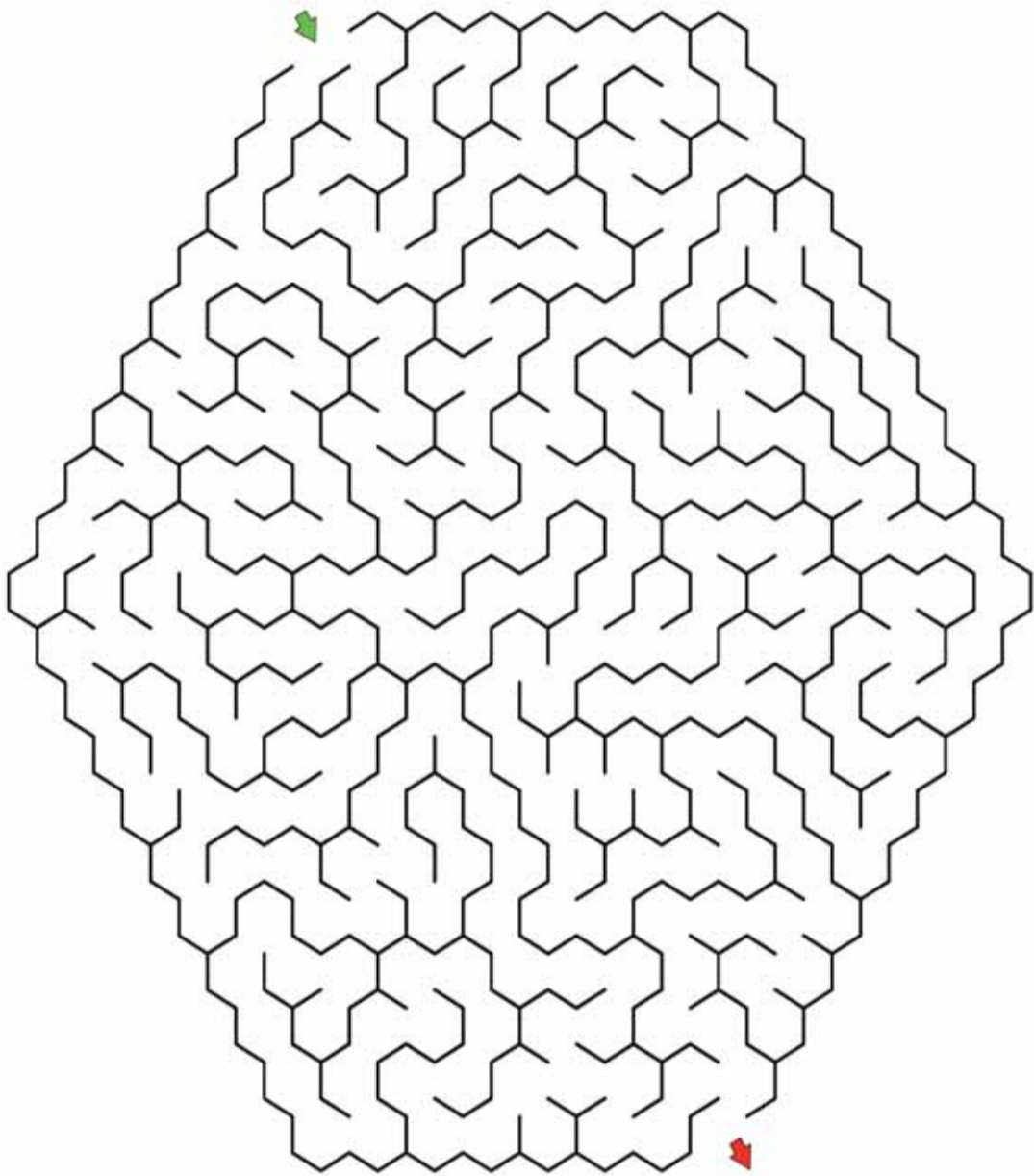
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Yesterday's Solution

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

medium

Find the way



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Some blatantly untrue gossip could reach you today, Aries. When you think about it, you'll see that what you heard defies all logic and is actually rather ludicrous. However, the person who reports it to you could be so dynamic and persuasive that you believe it for a little while. Remember to check the facts in such situations. You'll stay grounded in reality rather than get caught up in fantasy.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today doubts may crop up for you concerning certain spiritual concepts that you've embraced for a long time, Libra. Don't let this cause a crisis. It could just be a normal part of your inner growth. Instead, go back and read the old books that got you started, and then read some new ones and try to view the ideas from your current perspective. You could find they aren't so doubtful after all.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, today you could feel the need to work on your finances - pay bills, make deposits, and plan a budget for next month - but your heart won't be in it. Your mind is probably on more interesting projects. If you try to force it, you'll be unable to concentrate, so it could be a waste of time. It won't hurt if you wait a few days. You should be in a more practical space by then.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Some disturbing dreams could bring up doubts you may have about the motives of someone you consider a friend, Scorpio. This person might have been acting strangely, and you could be wondering about the future of your friendship. It's important to look at the symbols in the dreams and try to analyze what they're telling you. They might be indicating your friend, you, or both. Think about it!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Usually, Gemini, you have pretty good powers of focus and concentration. However, today you might find that these powers are flagging. Working could be difficult, and you could even find yourself dwelling on disappointments from your past. You might want to stop and try to figure out why these memories are coming up now. Releasing them could reset your concentration back to normal.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Some underhanded and not altogether honest machinations could be happening at the workplace, Sagittarius. You could be offended by it, and you could also worry if it threatens your job. Then you might also consider what you're doing there, if it's that sort of organization. These inner conflicts could signify the need to focus on the realities and discern exactly what you want to do. Then go for it.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A strange person promoting him- or herself as a mind-reader of sorts could come onto the scene today, Cancer. This person, however, is more mixed up than mindful. Therefore, take any predictions with a grain of salt, if not the whole shaker. Chances are good that none of them have any basis in reality. Trust your intuition. Your insights should be far more dependable than those of the so-called psychic.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Today you might feel a little out of sorts, Capricorn, and your concentration could be diminished. You might even have a little trouble focusing on your work. Don't worry about it. It's more mental than anything else, and it will pass. You might feel the need to drink coffee all day to stay alert. Try to exercise some restraint on this, since it could be counterproductive. Hang in there.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Your financial goals could seem vague and uncertain at this time, Leo. Perhaps you face a crossroads in your life as far as income goes, and you might not be sure which way to go. Or else you could be planning to make some purchases and have a hard time deciding which are most important. This probably isn't the day to try to make any kind of decision. Wait a day or two.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Today doubts, uncertainties, and insecurities could plague a love relationship, Aquarius. Does your beloved share your passion? Is your friend being honest and open with you? Does this relationship have a future? The only way to get past this inner turmoil is to take one step at a time and take a good long look at the results of each step. Only in this way will your doubts be resolved one way or the other.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

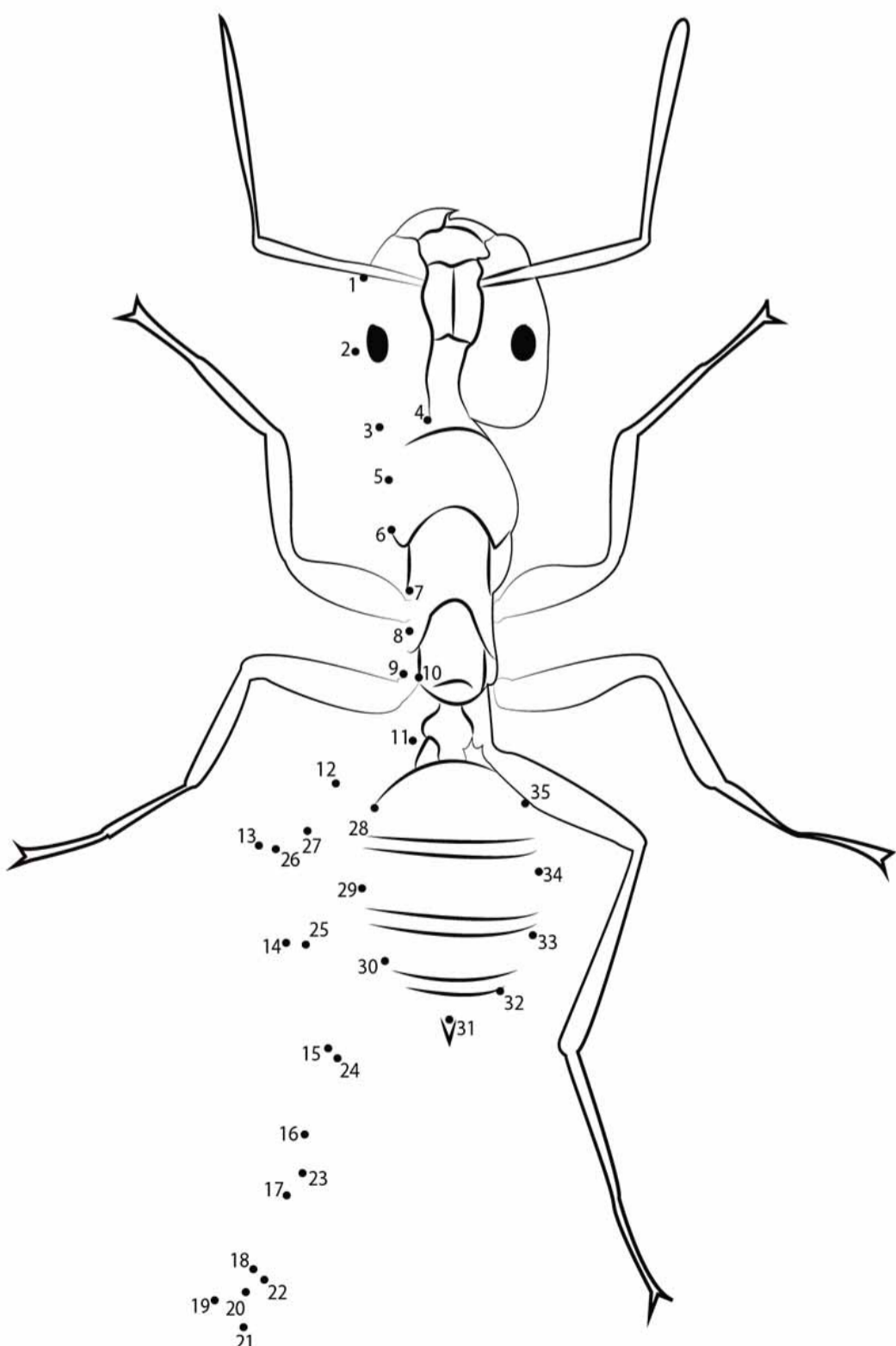
A colleague's motives could seem rather sinister today, Virgo. This person has a definite agenda of his or her own that may not take into account the needs or feelings of anyone who could conceivably stand in the way. This person isn't to be trusted. Don't excuse his or her behavior. The best course of action now is to stay out of the way and protect yourself on all levels.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

A member of your household could be going through some rough times, Pisces, and as a result might become overly dependent on your moral and emotional support. This is flattering, but it could also be a drain on your energy. Carefully consider what you really need to say to your friend. Sometimes you have to hit a person over the head with the truth (figuratively speaking) in order to wake them up.

Join the dots



Crossword

Word Search: Colors

B	X	H	P	B	L	A	C	K
B	G	O	I	E	F	W	F	I
N	Y	Q	N	P	D	H	A	Q
Q	G	T	K	G	R	E	E	N
W	H	I	T	E	B	L	U	E
O	R	A	N	G	E	G	U	X
U	B	L	Y	E	L	L	O	W
K	X	M	G	Z	P	D	R	R
B	R	O	W	N	T	R	E	D

BLACK  
BLUE  
BROWN  
GREEN  
ORANGE

PINK  
RED  
WHITE  
YELLOW



## Sports

## Photo of the day



Braden Currie, Triathlon athlete, performs summiting Advance Peak in New Zealand. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## UFC books May 9 return in Florida with no spectators

**MIAMI:** Ultimate Fighting Championship matches will return May 9 with the first of three cards in Jacksonville, Florida to be staged without spectators, UFC president Dana White announced Friday.

Restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic had prevented UFC 249 from being staged last Saturday, reportedly at a Native American tribal reservation in California.

But an executive order from Florida governor Ron DeSantis two weeks ago opened the door to hosting UFC events by declaring essential services status for "employees at a professional sports and media production with a national audience... if the location is closed to the general public."

As a result, UFC 249 will be staged at Veterans Memorial Arena in Jacksonville, headlined by an interim lightweight title bout between Tony Ferguson and Justin Gaethje.

"I can't wait to deliver some great fights for the fans," White said. "My team is ready to go and the fighters are excited to get back in there with these back-to-back events."

Other events will be staged at the same venue May 13 and 16, all closed to the public with only essential production personnel at the arena.

"As we move step-by-step on the path toward economic recovery, we are proud to host these UFC events," said Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry, calling the UFC event plan "safe and sensible." —AFP

# Transgender players kick down doors in Argentina football

## Argentina led Latin America by passing a gender identity law in 2012

**LA PLATA:** Out on the pitch, they finally can feel like themselves. In addition to the sheer joy that football brings them, Mara Gomez and Marcos Rojo have the extra satisfaction of knowing that after a long and difficult journey, they are blazing a trail for transgender players in Argentina.

Tall, slim and with her hair tied back in a ponytail, Gomez plays for the team of Villa San Carlos in La Plata, 60 kilometers (40 miles) south of Buenos Aires. At 23, she aims to become the first transgender player in the new women's professional league in her native country.

"I suffered a lot from discrimination, exclusion, verbal abuse in the street and in school. Football was like therapy for me," Gomez told AFP. She started playing at 15, encouraged by neighbors.

In the women's league in La Plata, Gomez distinguished herself as a leading goal scorer in the past two seasons. That prompted Villa San Carlos, in last place in the women's professional league, to seek to recruit her.

"She's quick and is very good at kicking on target," said trainer Juan Cruz Vitale. "Unlike what people and the media were thinking, she isn't that strong. I have a number of girls who are stronger and even though she's fast, I have girls who are faster," he noted.

But Vitale added: "She's smart and learns quickly. And she gets goals, which is what we were lacking." The club is in the process of submitting its application to the Argentine Football Association to sign Gomez up, once the current coronavirus lockdown ends.

"There is a law on gender identity that they can't get around. We are convinced she is going to be a star," the coach said.

Argentina led Latin America by passing a gender identity law in 2012, which allowed Gomez to officially

change her gender on her national identity card when she turned 18. "I am very happy to know that as a society we are doing a little more, we are opening up minds," she said as she contemplated the prospect of becoming a professional player in a country that has produced some of the world's best footballers, including Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi.

### 'PLAYING WITH THE MEN'

Rojo, 20, started playing this year as a center forward with the club Union del Suburbio in Gualaguaychu in the northeast of the country, the first time he has played on a men's team.

Two years ago, he changed his name and gender on his national identity card, and the team had no qualms about signing him. The league in the province of Entre Rios will issue his membership as soon as footballing activities restart.

In Rojo's living room hangs a picture of him at his 15th birthday party, when he still officially identified as a girl. His family has given him its full support during his

transition.

"I wanted to make the change in my official papers because I had always wanted to play with the men. Since I was little, I felt like I was one of them," Rojo said. "Football was a big step for me because it was the thing I was always looking for, what I wanted," he said. "The support of a team for this change means a lot."

Rojo said men's football is "much more demanding." "The boys are all good kickers. For me, it will be a huge achievement if I manage to play in the premier division at some point."

### 'RIGHT TO PLAY'

Sebastian Rajoy, Union del Suburbio's president, said that "everyone has the right to play sports."

## Kicking on target



LA PLATA: Argentine football player Mara Gomez (C) and teammates Emilia Braga (L) and Leonela Miranda vie for the ball during a training session with her first division women's football team, Villa San Carlos, in La Plata, Argentina. —AFP

"Clubs on the margins are the ones offering the opportunity. Someone has to take the first step, and in this case it is us," he said.

In this early stage of incorporating transgender players, Gomez and Rojo are aware they could be

asked to submit to a hormone test before they are fully accepted into the leagues.

"The discussion is linked to the dilemma between biology and respect for people's rights," said Avelen Pujol, a specialist in gender identity in sports. —AFP

## Some NBA practice facilities could be opened by Friday

**NEW YORK:** Some NBA practice facilities could reopen as early as Friday, ESPN reports, but that does not mean any resumption of the suspended season is imminent. The NBA was the first major professional American sports league to halt its season due to the coronavirus, doing so abruptly on March 11 after Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz tested positive.

But as a handful of American states, notably Georgia, are starting to loosen stay-at-home restrictions, the league could be moving to allow players to return to practice facilities in those areas. The workouts would be voluntary, and individual in nature, ESPN said on its website.

It also reported that the league is working with teams based in locales with stricter stay-at-home orders to find alternative arrangements for their players. The NBA did not immediately respond to a request by Reuters for comment.

Some American states have been much harder hit by the coronavirus than others. The NBA was about one-quarter of the way through its regular season of 82 games for each team when the season was halted. The playoffs had been scheduled to start last week and conclude in mid-June.

Meanwhile, Nigerian power forward Precious

Achiuwa announced he is entering the 2020 NBA Draft, where analysts expect he could be a top-15 selection after a superb US college campaign.

Achiuwa, a 20-year-old freshman at the University of Memphis, averaged 15.8 points, 10.8 rebounds, 1.9 blocked shots and 1.1 steals a game this past season, the nation's only college newcomer to average a double double.

"I've always dreamt of playing in the NBA since I picked up the game," Achiuwa said in a statement posted on Twitter. The Tigers, coached by former NBA star Penny Hardaway, went 21-10 in a season halted before the national championship tournament by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I want to thank coach Penny Hardaway and the entire coaching staff for pushing me every day to become better and helping me understand what it will take to become a successful professional," Achiuwa said.

Achiuwa, the only player to start every game for Memphis this season, was named the American Athletic Conference Player of the Year and Freshman of the Year, the first man since 1982 to sweep both awards.

Achiuwa, who stands 6-foot-9 (2.06m) and weighs 225 pounds (102kg), was born in Nigeria and played football for much of his youth until turning to basketball as a teen when his family moved to New York.

"Looking back at my journey and how far I've come, I must say it has been a blessing and a very humbling experience," Achiuwa said. The NBA Draft is scheduled for June 25 but could be delayed due to the deadly virus outbreak. —Agencies

## Deroft wins Madden Bowl qualifier

**SEATTLE:** With a defensive-minded victory on Saturday, Daniel "Deroft" Mycroft advanced to Madden NFL 20 Bowl by taking the Xbox One Grand Finals.

Playing as the Seattle Seahawks, Deroft earned a 7-0 victory over Jacob "JWall" Wallack, who was playing as the Detroit Lions. It was the first ever shutout in a Madden Bowl last-chance qualifier, as well as the lowest combined score.

It was the only matchup of the day for Deroft, who was waiting as JWall earned a 14-7 victory in the losers' bracket final over Jacob "Fancy" Worthington, who was playing as the Dallas Cowboys. It was JWall's second victory of the day in the losers' bracket.

The final in the PlayStation 4 last-chance qualifier takes place Sunday. Mycroft will face the winner of the PS4 final on Sunday.

A total of five hours of Madden Bowl programming will air on ESPN2 on Sunday, including the PS4 final. Coverage begins at noon EST with the Madden NFL 20 Celebrity Tournament Championship.

The \$200,000 Madden NFL 20 Bowl runs

May 6-16. The early rounds will be streamed on the ESPN app and will be available on Twitch and YouTube. The semifinals and finals will be broadcast live on ESPN on May 16, as well as on Twitch and YouTube. The Madden Bowl is the final event in the Madden NFL 20 Championship Series.

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Vikings set an NFL record on Saturday by selecting 15 players over the course of a seven-round draft.

The Vikings capped their busy three-day stretch with a four-player seventh round to set the record for one draft class. The previous record of a 14-player draft class was shared by the Miami Dolphins (1997) and Cleveland Browns (2016). Michigan State defensive end Kenny Willekes was the Vikings' first seventh-round pick at No. 225 overall. The team then tabbed Iowa quarterback Nate Stanley at No. 244.

Minnesota followed that up by selecting Mississippi State hybrid safety/linebacker Brian Cole II with the 249th overall pick. Washburn offensive guard Kyle Hinton came four slots later to set the record.

Nine of the Vikings' 15 selections were used on defensive players.

The Vikings also added to their plate for the 2021 NFL Draft. They traded down on two occasions Saturday to add a fourth- and fifth-round pick in 2021 and also have an additional fourth-round selection next year from the Stefan Diggs trade with Buffalo. —Reuters

## Sports

# 'Tricky' for Barty to maintain training intensity in shutdown

## Ash golf game improve during the lockdown in Brisbane

MUMBAI: Ash Barty is finding it tricky to maintain high intensity in training during the shutdown but the women's world number one is hoping she will be back to her usual self with the flick of a switch when tennis resumes after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like other sports around the world, professional tennis screeched to a halt in early March as the virus spread quickly around the world. It will not restart until at least mid-July.

While Australian Barty, whose partner Gary Kissick is a golfer, has seen her golf game improve during the lockdown in Brisbane, her tennis training is in "a little bit of a holding pattern."

"It's kind of tricky to train with the same intensity as always," Barty, who turned 24 on Friday, told the Sunday Herald Sun. "Obviously, we're still not sure when we'll go back."

"Now, it's about maintaining for if and when we get an opportunity to play again this year, you can kinda flick that switch and go from there."

The shutdown did not allow Barty to return to the United States to defend her title at the Miami Open, which catapulted her into the top 10 in the

rankings before she finally sealed the top spot a few months later.

Barty is also the defending champion at Roland Garros, where she won her maiden Grand Slam title in Paris last June, but that has been postponed too.

This year's French Open was moved to Sept. 20-Oct. 4 from its May start while the Wimbledon championships, which were set to begin in late June, were cancelled.

"Just kind of sitting back, this is really bizarre," she said. "You're preparing for that (hardcourt) swing and then you're on a plane back to Australia."

"It's different for everyone. For tennis players, there's that uncertainty. We need for pretty much the whole world to be clear before we can start our tour again. "Domestic competitions have the chance to get up running again, but for a global sport it's a bit unique to be in that holding pattern."

Barty said she was in regular touch with some of her fellow players as she deals with the lockdown.

"All these girls I've had really good relationships with and am good friends with on a personal level.



Ash Barty

We're also chatting about what could be next for us and everyone is trying to get that new information," she said. "Overall, it's been a bit of an adjustment but

also lucky that it's a time where you get to appreciate the little things in life, which is your health and your family." — Reuters

## 49ers trade receiver Goodwin to Eagles

LOS ANGELES: The Philadelphia Eagles acquired wide receiver Marquise Goodwin and a sixth-round pick from the San Francisco 49ers on Saturday, the final day of the NFL entry draft.

The Eagles used their sixth round draft pick from the 49ers to take Nigerian offensive tackle Prince Tega Wanogho, who played last season at Auburn University.

In return, the 49ers received the 190th pick in the draft which they used to take tight end Charlie Woerner of University of Georgia. This was the NFL's first-ever virtual draft as the league's 32 GMs were forced to make their selections from locations across the United States. A planned Las Vegas gala event had to be scrapped due to the

COVID-19 pandemic.

The 29-year-old Goodwin spent the past three seasons with the 49ers, catching 91 passes for 1,543 yards and seven touchdowns in 36 games. The Texan's best season came in his first in San Francisco in 2017, with career bests of 56 catches for 962 yards. He is due to earn almost \$4 million in salary next season.

The 1.96 metre Wanogho started 32 games for Auburn after winning the starting left tackle role in 2017. Wanogho was born in Delta State, Nigeria and moved to the United States to pursue a basketball career. Wanogho switched to American football and won a scholarship despite having played just one year of the sport.

The 49ers also traded running back Matt Breida to the Miami Dolphins for a fifth-round draft pick. The 49ers used the pick to select West Virginia tackle Colton McKivitz.

Earlier, seven-time NFL Pro Bowl offensive tackle Trent Williams was traded to the San Francisco 49ers from the Washington Redskins on Saturday, ending a holdout drama that lasted nearly a year.

The 31-year-old Texan, who vowed never to play for the Redskins again after disagreements over a medical diagnosis, went to the 49ers for a fifth-round pick Saturday in the NFL Draft and a third-round selection in next year's draft.

The 49ers, who confirmed the deal on their website, lost the Super Bowl two months ago to the Kansas City Chiefs while the Redskins had the NFL's second-worst record last season at 3-13 in Williams's absence.

Williams will be reunited in San Francisco with 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan, who served as Washington's offensive coordinator from 2010, when the Redskins made him the fourth overall pick in the NFL Draft, through 2013.

The Redskins selected collegiate offensive tackle Saahdiq Charles on Saturday with the second selection in the fourth round of this year's draft.

Williams serves as a replacement for 49ers tackle Joe Staley, who retired Saturday a few hours after the trade was announced. Williams told the Redskins he wanted out last June after what he considered inadequate medical treatment for a cancerous scalp growth. — AFP

## Former Pakistan women's cricket captain retires

KARACHI: Former Pakistan women's captain Sana Mir announced her retirement from international cricket Saturday after a glittering career that saw her become the most successful female spinner in one-day international history.

The 34-year-old took the top spot in women's ODI rankings in 2018 and helmed the team that took home gold from the 2010 and 2014 Asian Games.

Her rise dovetailed with the growth in sporting opportunities for Pakistani women,

who were not allowed to play in open fields in the conservative Islamic country until the early 2000s.

"It gives me great satisfaction that I have been part of the great success stories for women's cricket," she said, according to a statement from the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Sana played 226 international matches since her 2005 debut. She is one of only nine women cricketers to have taken 100 wickets and scored 1,000 runs in ODI matches.

She also led Pakistan to two World Cups and five T20 World Cups. But early this year selectors dropped her from the squad for the T20 World Cup in Australia, hinting that her career was nearing an end.

"It is the right time for me to move on," Sana said. "I believe I have contributed to the best of my ability for my country and the sport." —AFP



Sana Mir

## Arsenal to re-open training ground

LONDON: Arsenal will re-open their London Colney training ground to their players next week for individual training but the Premier League club will continue to observe social distancing rules amid the coronavirus outbreak, they said on Saturday.

Soccer in England was suspended indefinitely last month due to the virus and no clubs have been in training. "Players will be permitted access to the Colney grounds next week," Arsenal said in a statement.

"Access will be limited, carefully managed and social distancing will be maintained at all times. All Colney buildings remain closed. "Players will travel alone, do their individual workout and return home," the club added.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was diagnosed with the novel coronavirus on March 12, which led to the Premier League postponing the next round of matches and none have been played since.

Arsenal spoke to all their players after Alexandre Lacazette, David Luiz, Nicolas Pepe and Granit Xhaka were pictured allegedly breaking social distancing guidelines.

Premier League clubs have been working on the basis that the earliest they may be allowed to resume training would be in early May. The British government is expected to review current lockdown restrictions on May 7.

Should teams be allowed to train, it is expected they would need two to three weeks to get prepared to play competitive matches, making the earliest possible return in June.

But with the ban on mass public gatherings likely to be one of the last restrictions to be lifted, rescheduled games will almost certainly be held behind closed doors.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has been liaising with a number of sports bodies, led by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on how things might work should the green light be given by the medical experts for sport to resume safely.

The Football League (EFL) which organises the three divisions below the Premier League, on Saturday highlighted testing of players and others involved in games as the key issue. "Clearly, before any return to football can take place, suitable testing arrangements for participants must be in place and this is core to our current planning, as is ensuring there is absolutely no negative impact on the country's front-line workers, the Emergency services, League and Club staff members," the league said in a statement. — Reuters

## Ari Vatanen, swashbuckling rally champion

LONDON: Ari Vatanen's father died in a car crash while driving his family to a funeral when the future world rally champion was eight years old. The vehicle was new and although seatbelts were optional he had fitted them only the day before but was not using one. He had, it transpired, also got the day wrong and the funeral had already happened. "Just before we got to that village we had a head-on collision and I didn't have a father any more," the Finn, a four times Dakar winner, told Reuters ahead of his 68th birthday.

"I apparently said afterwards that I've got to tame motor cars in my life. "But what I think I have learned is that you can't tame life. Life will always tame us."

The rally bug bit four years later when a stage came to their village near the Russian border and Vatanen waited into the early hours in the soft summer light to catch a glimpse of the action. "The first car came at two o'clock in the morning and time stopped there in my life," said Vatanen, speaking from his farmhouse in the south of France.

"The first car was a white Volvo 544 and it came with the drum brakes red hot and it was kicking up the dust...that stuff absolutely took my breath away and my body stayed on that bank in that luminous

summer night but my mind went with the car." For Vatanen, a religious man, driving is an art form and the gravel roads, forest tracks and sand dunes provided the canvas for his talent.

Sometimes he tested the boundaries with a little too much enthusiasm.

"When you enter a corner you are maybe not quite 100% sure if you will survive and you cannot have anything else in your mind," he explained.

"(It's like) a violin player if he or she has a Stradivarius violin once, I'm sure he or she will play with the eyes closed. That's how I felt, literally driving with the eyes closed because you are all with the car, in that corner. "The car is sideways and you are fighting it and that's it."

### LIKE HANDWRITING

His autobiography was titled 'Every Second Counts' but it might equally have been 'I could have braked a little sooner'. But then he would have been a different person.

"You can't change your nature, your character. Your driving style is like your handwriting. It tells a lot about your personality," said Vatanen, whose wild and exuberant approach thrilled an army of fans. He once said there were not many ditches in Finland he had not ended up in.

"That was my driving style. In terms of results it was definitely not the best but I just couldn't wait." The Finn, who won his 1981 title in a Ford Escort with David Richards as co-driver, nearly died in a 1985 accident in Argentina when his Peugeot hit a hollow at speed and he was flung from his broken seat. — Reuters

## EFL says virus testing key to resuming season

LONDON: The English Football League (EFL) insisted on Saturday that matches cannot resume without "suitable" testing measures for the coronavirus, adding such measures must not jeopardise the safety of front-line workers.

Professional football in England has been suspended since March because of the pandemic. "Clearly, before any return to football can take place, suitable testing arrangements for participants must be in place and this is core to our current planning, as is ensuring there is absolutely no negative impact on the country's front-line workers, the emergency services, league and club staff members," the EFL said, responding to reports the Premier League has devised plans for a return to action behind closed doors in June.

The EFL governs the three divisions immediately below English football's top flight. The statement echoed comments made by the England and Wales Cricket Board about the need for a "significant testing regime" before the English cricket season, whose start has been delayed until July, could get underway. All major sport in Britain is currently at a standstill, with the UK under a nationwide lockdown.

Meanwhile, Declan Rice has said one of the "nicer" consequences of the coronavirus outbreak is that it has temporarily removed the "stress" of West Ham's fight against Premier League relegation.

The Hammers were above the bottom three on goal difference with nine games to play when the English top flight was suspended last month as a result of the pandemic.

England midfielder Rice said while he was missing being around his team-mates at the east London club there were some benefits from the unexpected break.

"It's tough because I am used to seeing my team-mates and going out every day, to have that taken away from you is really tough," he told Sky Sports.

"On a nicer scale of it, it is nice with the position we are in at West Ham, not to feel the pressure of having to go out and play for three points every week.

"It's nice from that perspective not to have that stress, but we just want to get back to it now," added the 21-year-old. Friday saw the Netherlands' Eredivisie become the first top European league to call an end to its 2019/20 season because of the coronavirus.

As a result, there will be no Dutch champions this term after Ajax and AZ Alkmaar were left level on points at the top of the table and no teams will be relegated.

But a similar move in England would likely lead to an outcry given Premier League leaders Liverpool, seeking their first domestic championship in 30 years, lead second-placed Manchester City by the huge margin of 25 points. Meanwhile the likes of Leeds and Fulham are pushing for promotion to the top flight. — AFP

**18** Transgender players kick down doors in Argentina football



**19** 'Tricky' for Barty to maintain training intensity in shutdown



**19** Former Pakistan women's cricket captain retires



## Belarusian football wins fans abroad



MINSK: Belarusian football team in action. The Belarusian Liga is the only division in Europe defying coronavirus pandemic.

**MINSK:** As Belarus resists imposing a lockdown to combat the coronavirus, its football league has stumbled into the international limelight as Europe's only remaining top-flight competition.

But players are worried about the health risks and only diehard fans are braving matches. FC Slutsk fan Yavor Khavanski, 26, is "a bit afraid" but could not imagine quitting his weekend football fix. For this match he intends to don a surgical mask and an FC Slutsk scarf and "try not to touch anything" at a clash against rivals Belshina Bobruisk.

"The stadium holds 2,000 people, but only 300 came to the last match. You can sit anywhere you want and keep your distance," he told AFP by phone. Khavanski says he will keep attending matches, regardless of the risk. In his view, he faces "the same odds of being infected on public transport or in shops". Life has continued as normal in Belarus, whose authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko has dismissed World Health Organisation recommendations to impose a virus lockdown. With a population of nearly 10 million, Belarus has registered 9,590

coronavirus cases. Neighbouring Ukraine, with four times the population, has registered fewer cases.

The Belarusian Football Federation (BFF) has followed the government's lead, saying it will not stop matches under the current guidelines. The BFF even announced this week its women's league will kick off on April 30 following a two-week delay over fears players had come into contact with people infected with the virus.

On paper, the decision to allow matches is a huge boon to a struggling league. Russia's largest sports network bought the rights to air matches in March, a move followed by 11 other countries including India and Israel.

Clubs have started Twitter accounts in English to cater to the new influx of international spectators. Fans and management at FC Slutsk wonder whether the new interest could save the club.

FC Slutsk's main sponsor is a local, state-run sugar company. "But the sugar industry is in decline," club president Vitaly Bunas told AFP. With the factory director in prison over a corruption conviction, Bunas says "the club's finances are catastrophic".

Yet fans in Australia have crowd-funded nearly \$4000 and launched a Facebook group for FC Slutsk's new followers abroad, an initiative Bunas said was "surprising but welcome".

The boost of attracting new fans abroad has come against the backdrop of dwindling spectators, with a total of just 2,383 fans across the eight league matches last weekend. Dinamo Minsk's match against Neman Grodno, held in the country's largest stadium last weekend, was played in front of only 317 people.

At the end of March, fans in Grodno criticised the official response to the pandemic and virus "lies",

calling on the BFF to "finally have the courage to stop the championship". Fans groups at all of the league's top clubs have announced they will not attend matches.

Several players, mainly foreign based, have weighed in, saying the league should be suspended. "It's a little scary," said Dinamo Brest striker Artem Milevsky on Instagram last week after a match in Vitebsk, the town which has the second highest number of infections in Belarus.

Dinamo Minsk midfielder, Danilo, told Brazilian media: "If the major championships have stopped, why haven't we? We should do the same." But with the league gaining more attention than ever, other players see this as their moment.

French-Armenian footballer Hayk Mosakhanian said it was a "plus" the league was continuing, welcoming publicity "if we play well". The Energetik-BGU midfielder added that young players "want to show off". For up and coming stars, he said, the pandemic has offered a chance to stand out. "It's an opportunity," he told. — AFP

## Toomua calls for 'outdated' Super Rugby

**SYDNEY:** Wallabies flyhalf Matt Toomua has joined calls for a rethink of the Super Rugby competition once the sport re-starts after the coronavirus shutdown.

The Melbourne Rebels back believes the competition, which features 15 teams across Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Argentina and Japan, needs to be replaced by a more local product.

"Maybe the model that we've got is a little bit aged and outdated and maybe we need to have a rethink," the 30-year-old told rugby.com.au.

"I guess this is almost forcing us to do it, whether it be in the short term until those borders open or whether it be long-term into something else that's a bit more sustainable, bit more domestically focused.

"I think there's a lot of people who are wanting to have a domestic model for quite a while now, whether it be Australia-focused or Australia-New Zealand focused or something along those lines."

The Super Rugby season was suspended after round seven because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the competition is set to shrink to 14 teams next year with the loss of the Tokyo-based Sunwolves.

Increased airfare costs are expected even after the crisis has passed, however, which will hang heavy on national unions already hard-hit financially by the sporting shutdown.

Echoing the recent comments of his former ACT Brumbies and Australia captain Stephen Moore, Toomua said he felt the competition was simply no longer engaging fans.

"If I'm a Rebels member, what do I get? I get seven home games, maybe five against teams that I know, two or three against teams that I don't know or don't care about, and then three games that are in time zones that aren't suitable," he said.

"It's just not, for me personally if I'm a supporter, I don't think that's an attractive product, I really don't." — Reuters



## Locals boycott matches

Dinamo Minsk's match against Neman Grodno, held in the country's largest stadium last weekend, was played in front of only 317 people.

At the end of March, fans in Grodno criticised the official response to the pandemic and virus "lies",

## Archer reveals he's lost his WCup medal

**LONDON:** England fast bowler Jofra Archer said Saturday he'd "gone mad" looking for his World Cup winner's medal after losing the prized piece of silverware while moving house. Last year saw the Sussex quick establish himself on the global stage as he helped England win their first men's 50-over global title, with Archer's 20 wickets at 23.05 the most taken by any member of the champions' squad. The 25-year-old, who only made his international debut in 2019, was also given the daunting responsibility of bowling the Super Over in the final at Lord's. Archer, however, held his nerve brilliantly as England edged out New Zealand in a thrilling finish decided on boundary countback after the teams' scores were level after both regulation play and cricket's answer to 'extra time'.

But the Barbados-born quick, asked Saturday about

where his medal was now, told BBC Radio: "I had it hanging off a portrait someone did for me and sent to me, I had my medal hanging on that."

"I moved flat and the picture is on the new wall but there's no medal. I turned the house upside down for about a week but I still haven't managed to find it. "I know it should be in the house so I will keep eyes out for it but I've gone mad looking for it already."

Archer, who returned to the United Kingdom from Barbados last month, said the fact all major cricket worldwide, including the start of the English season, was suspended because of the pandemic at least gave him time to continue searching for the medal.

"There's nothing else to do in isolation. It's all hands on deck." Although Archer may have seemed the 'go-to' option for England captain Eoin Morgan when it came to picking a bowler for the Super Over, the paceman himself was reluctant to press his own claims given he'd not long been in the side. Archer, asked when he knew he'd been chosen for the Super Over, replied: "Pretty late. I wasn't sure until I had to go down there and warm up. "That doesn't mean I didn't want it, I just didn't think I was in a position to volunteer. I was just coming into the team, I'd played the least amount of games in the squad. I didn't think it was my time to volunteer." — AFP