



6 US panel wants India on religious freedom blacklist



7 Hillary Clinton endorses Biden's White House bid



16 Fuel truck bomb kills more than 40 in northern Syria



Ramadan KAREEM

Imsak	03:32
Fajr	03:42
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:23
Isha	19:47



Speaker blasts visa 'mafia', vows to end 'dark chapter'

MPs propose no eviction of tenants over delay in rent payment



KUWAIT: (From right) National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel are seen during a meeting to discuss the population structure. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday launched a scathing attack on visa traders, describing them as a "mafia" and calling for taking all necessary measures to end the illicit trade. Ghanem was speaking after a number of lawmakers met the foreign minister and the minister for social affairs to discuss issues related to expatriates and restructuring the population composition.

He said that MPs during the meeting demanded quick measures to repatriate thousands of illegal expat workers who have benefited from the one-month amnesty but are still living in camps because their governments have refused to take them back. Ghanem said Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel told the meeting that over 18,000 such expat workers are being housed in temporary camps until their countries agree to allow them to return. Under the amnesty, which expires today, illegal workers will not pay fines and the government will also pay their air tickets.

Ghanem said that the main cause of problems facing these expat workers are the visa traders who operate like a mafia and who live on accepting illegal money from these poor workers. He said the country

is determined to end this "dark chapter from our history" by punishing visa traders. The speaker also called on the interior minister, who has formed an investigation committee on visa trading, to release the findings as soon as the committee completes its work.

MP Abdulwahhab Al-Babtain said he has submitted a letter to the Assembly requiring the interior minister to prepare a report within one month on visa traders who are responsible for bringing many expat workers into the country against money without giving them jobs. He said the letter requires the minister to inform the Assembly about the ministry's mechanism in combating visa traders.

Meanwhile, five lawmakers yesterday submitted an amendment to the rents law stipulating that under these exceptional circumstances, tenants will not be forced to vacate leased houses for not paying the rent. Under the existing rents law, tenants who fail to pay the monthly rent by the 20th of the month can be evicted from the house by a court ruling. The amendment also stipulates that landlords will have the right to claim full rent from tenants following the exceptional period. Some landlords have already reduced rents as a way to help many people, especially expatriates, whose income has been greatly affected by the current circumstances.

Bollywood star, 'Slumdog' actor Irrfan Khan dies

MUMBAI: Acclaimed Indian actor Irrfan Khan, whose international movie career included hits such as "Slumdog Millionaire", "Life of Pi" and "The Amazing Spider-Man", has died aged 53, his publicist said yesterday. The Bollywood star, who was diagnosed with a neuroendocrine tumor in 2018, was admitted to a Mumbai hospital earlier this week with a colon infection. "Irrfan was a strong soul, someone who fought till the very end and always inspired everyone who came close to him," his publicist said in a statement.

Born in the Indian desert state of Rajasthan on Jan 7, 1967, Khan discovered an early



Irrfan Khan

Continued on Page 16

Million cases in US; economic toll mounting

BERLIN: European countries are working to find a balance in how far to ease coronavirus lockdowns, with Germany enforcing mandatory masks in all shops from yesterday, as the crushing global economic cost of the pandemic becomes clearer. Excitement over moves towards normality is being tempered by fear of fresh outbreaks of a disease that has already killed 214,000 people worldwide. Even a gradual return to everyday activity is "risky", warned French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, despite a downward trend in virus deaths in hard-hit European countries.

From yesterday in Germany, masks will be needed to enter shops, which began to open last week after the government declared the outbreak under control. Nose and mouth coverings are already compulsory on buses, trains and trams. "We all need to take care that we don't end up with more infections," said Lothar Wieler, president of Berlin's Robert Koch Institute. Forecasts warn of the worst global recession in a century, with demand for goods gutted, and travel and tourism hammered.

British Airways became the latest airline to sound the alarm, saying it may have to cut its workforce by a third, while big banks are reporting deep falls in quarterly profit. In Lebanon there were more immediate signs of economic crisis, with protesters confronting soldiers in defiance of

Continued on Page 16



NEW DELHI: A Muslim man in protective gear offers funeral prayers for a Central Reserve Police Force personnel who died from the coronavirus before the burial at a graveyard yesterday. — AFP

How poo can be silver bullet in tracking virus

PARIS: Since the beginning of the epidemic, researchers across the world have been tracing the spread of the coronavirus through waste water and sewage. From the first outbreak in China, several scientific studies have picked up the clear presence of COVID-19 in patients' stools. Testing human sewage could now become a key way of tracking the pandemic's spread - and a precious early warning system for a feared second wave.

Researchers have found genetic traces of Sars-Cov-2 - as the virus is officially known - in wastewater in toilets, sewers and sewage farms from Brisbane to Paris and Amsterdam. These discoveries pose "no risk" to public health, insisted Luca Lucentini, water quality director at the Italian Institute Superior of Health (ISS), after several tests

Continued on Page 16

With fever checks and masks, Dubai mega-mall reopens

DUBAI: Clutching bags from designer boutiques in their gloved hands, customers are back at Dubai Mall, one of the world's largest shopping havens that has reopened under strict safeguards against coronavirus. At a main entrance where customers hand over their sports cars and luxury SUVs for valet parking, employees greet them with black T-shirts reading "Welcome back".

Smiling as they point an infrared thermometer "temperature gun" at visitors' foreheads, they check for the fever that is a telltale symptom of COVID-19 infection. Dubai Mall is a key attraction of the city state that has built its wealth and world renown on mega-projects and a diversified economy to become a tourism and shopping hub, as well as for finance and real estate.

With more than 1,300 stores arrayed around a vast lake and overlooked by the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower, Dubai Mall attracts some 80 million visitors a year and its reopening on Tuesday was a symbolic step as the country emerges from lockdown. After a month-long closure, crowds have been far thinner, as expatriates in jeans and Emiratis



DUBAI: People wearing protective masks to combat the spread of coronavirus walk in the Mall of Dubai on Tuesday after it reopened. — AFP

in traditional white Gulf robes roam the bright alleys that showcase everything from chic to bling.

Among them was Jamal, a 21-year-old Emirati student who before the coronavirus crisis would

come every weekend with his friends. Holding two red bags from a famous French jewelry brand in his hands, he was delighted to be back and reassured

Continued on Page 16

In My View

Until when?

By Nawara Fattahova

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It's been two long months since the lockdown of Kuwait and the closure of almost all businesses, banning of gatherings, and over a month of curfew. During this period, my opinion on the strict measures taken by the government has changed. I realized the serious harm to the economy, locally and globally, is much bigger than the pandemic. Dying from hunger is more serious than risking the possibility of getting infected by a virus.

Almost everyone was hit by the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Hundreds of thousands of employees all over the world lost their jobs, or at least part of their salaries. Small businesses could not survive, big companies experienced massive losses, and even national budgets are under great pressure. Economic experts expect dramatic results of the impact of the pandemic on Kuwait's budget after oil prices dropped remarkably.

We are currently living in a nightmare; and what's worse is that we are anxious about the dark future after the end of the pandemic. The national budget was in deficit even before this crisis, and now the deficit is even bigger, and will definitely hit everybody in this country.

The fear of losing one's source of living is one of the most stressful situations, which may lead to dramatic decisions including death. An example is what took place a few days ago, when a Filipino visitor who got stuck in Kuwait due to the pandemic allegedly committed suicide after being informed that he was terminated by his employer in Abu Dhabi. This is just one of many cases around the world that happened or will happen due to the collapse of many businesses. The depression caused by this crisis and the thought of what's coming made tens of psychiatrists to volunteer in providing help through hotlines.

The Washington Post published an article in March on crisis hotlines that face a growing and urgent demand in the era of quarantines, showing the psychological effect of the pandemic on people. The Los Angeles Times also published an article on the LA suicide hotline seeing a rise in coronavirus-related calls. This is the situation around the world in general.

According to jamanetwork, secondary consequences of social distancing may increase the risk of suicide. It is important to consider changes in a variety of economic, psychosocial and health-associated risk factors. These include all of economic stress, social isolation, decreased access to community and religious support, barriers to mental health treatment, illness and medical problems.

Remarkable social distancing interventions have been implemented to fundamentally reduce human contact. While these steps are expected to reduce the rate of new infections, the potential for adverse outcomes on suicide risk is high. Actions could be taken to mitigate potential unintended consequences on suicide prevention efforts, which also represent a national public health priority.

In my opinion, it's time to reopen businesses and let social life resume. At least start with the most important businesses and small enterprises to avoid more critical financial losses. Our neighboring Gulf countries already took this step, although with different limits. Dubai reopened all businesses and reduced the curfew to be only at night from 10:00 pm to 6:00 am, while Saudi Arabia relaxed the curfew in all cities except Makkah. Bahrain reopened most businesses as well. Life there is returning to normal gradually, although COVID-19 cases in these countries are more than in Kuwait.

Kuwait's Health Minister receives visiting Chinese medical team



Kuwaiti and Chinese health officials in a group photo.— KUNA photo

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah received, Tuesday, the visiting Chinese medical team, discussing the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) developments and health cooperation. The Kuwaiti health ministry's delegation included, undersecretary Dr Musatfa Redha, Secretary General of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMZ) Dr Fawaz Al-Refai and other health officials from the two sides. Both sides exchanged experiences addressing the coronavirus pandemic. The visit, lasting for three days, will include many field visits and meetings with specialists in the

istry of health.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ambassador in Riyadh Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Sabah Tuesday thanked the Saudi Foreign and Health Ministries for facilitating departure of a Chinese medical team to the State of Kuwait. The facilitation of departure of the Chinese pandemic and communicable diseases team "is a clear evidence of the cooperation between the Kuwaiti and Saudi ministries of health," Sheikh Ali said. Saudi Arabia and China signed last Sunday a 995 million Riyal (\$265 million) agreement to carry out nine million coronavirus tests in the Kingdom.—KUNA

Education ministry mulls post-COVID preparations

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of Education Saud Al-Harbi met ministry undersecretaries to discuss a number of topics, on top of which was the use of around 360 school buildings by relevant authorities including ministries of health, interior and social affairs. In this regard, the ministry's official spokesperson and assistant undersecretary for educational development and activities Faisal Al-Maqseed said the meeting also discussed schools' readiness for post-coronavirus resumption and properly preparing these schools to receive students as healthy and safe educational facilities.

Maqseed also noted that the curricula and educational research sector is currently setting an interactive mechanism for the e-learning platform by providing interactive questions and databanks. "Material for the e-learning platform is currently being

recorded and is expected to finish by mid-May," he underlined. Maqseed added many other topics were discussed at the meeting, including instructing educational area directors to tend to some unfinished administrative work in their areas and to coordinate with the public education undersecretary to form a special workgroup to do so in each area.

Banks' precautions

Meanwhile, and responding to demands to open all bank branches to avoid crowding in some operational ones, Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) explained that since the beginning of this crisis, banks have been keen on balanced work to protect clients' interests, reduce their burdens, keep their businesses going, implement all precautionary measures set to fight COVID-19 and protect the staff working in bank branches. KBA's PR Manager Sheikh Al-Essa said since the crisis began, Kuwaiti banks were keen on opening some branches and kept increasing the number of these branches to reach up to 25 percent of the total, adding that all banks are also keen on providing easy, safe and 24/7 accessible e-banking services and responding to inquiries through their customer care centers. "Operational branches will be increased according to state instructions once they decide relaxing the precautionary measures," Essa underlined.

In My View

Benefits of volunteering

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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It was a pleasant scene when young men who found themselves at home due to lockdowns volunteered their time and effort to help authorities carry out their duties during the fight against COVID-19. Volunteers are found in hospitals, carrying out organizational duties, sterilizing equipment, and making sure patients coming in follow instructions put out by the health ministry. Volunteers are seen in co-ops as requested by the commerce ministry, even in some cases making sure that no violations are taking place. Some volunteers were taken by the civil defense and medical emergencies departments and trained by qualified instructors to help out when called upon.

Volunteering allows society members to be involved in activities, and more importantly, they add to the efforts of official authorities. It allows youth to learn how to be positive in the society as they carry out their social responsibilities. Volunteer work reins in youth and takes them away from bad behavior, making them spend their time in beneficial action, making them feel that they are wanted, while at the same time this voluntary participation will lead to having the society being able to help itself with the efforts of the volunteers.

It is known that voluntary work is a civilized social action that is in the form of physical effort or even financially to give time, experience or an idea to help people, without actually waiting for a reward. Islam as a religion encourages volunteer work, as the Holy Quran says: "And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, Allah is appreciative and knowing." (2:158). Islam is keen on directing man's ability towards good and constructive deeds and encourages forgiveness, and working for what brings happiness to people.

In fact, the volunteer must be an example to others, should feel for others and must be proactive, besides having goodwill and being ready to do any job no matter how small it is. But all work and efforts must be within the law of the land. Let us not forget the family's role in backing voluntary work in the society, as children should be raised in a way that instills social values and a culture of cooperation in them.

Voluntary work has many positive returns - it satisfies the psychological needs of the person, gives a sense of satisfaction and provides them with comfort and satisfaction. Indeed, volunteering gives the opportunity to individuals to learn firsthand and practically self-discipline and good deeds, while being patient and calm in dealing with others in different situations.

Final word: "The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size but by the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others." — DeAnn Hollis

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 3,440 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Tuesday, in addition to 23 deaths. With the exception of 67 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, 1,389 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 2,028 people receiving treatment and 2,095 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-Aslameya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.

Hotlines

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

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

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

Medicine delivery

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

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

- Razi Hospital: 97633487
 - Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
 - Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
 - Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
 - Maternity Hospital: 98559531
 - As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
 - Zain Hospital: 97552031
 - NBK Hospital: 96931761
 - Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
 - Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
 - Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
 - Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
 - KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363
- Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day.

The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-chealth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

Mental health assistance

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

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

Local

Embassy appeals to undocumented Filipinos to take advantage of amnesty

Telcos set up booths at the amnesty processing center for loan payment



KUWAIT: People from different nationalities queue up Tuesday outside a school in Farwaniya which was turned into a center to receive applications of violators wishing to avail the amnesty. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait has called on all its undocumented citizens in the country to head to processing centers to take advantage of the amnesty offered by the Kuwaiti government. The last day of filing is today, April 30, 2020. All the necessary assistance will be accorded by the embassy, as it promised to be of service and can be reached whenever needed.

The charge d'affaires of the Philippine Embassy continues to appeal to all undocumented Filipinos in Kuwait, ie those with visas that expired before March 1, 2020 and those who have absconding cases against them, to take advantage of the amnesty program. "Please refer to our official Facebook page, which indicates the guidelines," he stated.

Meanwhile, the embassy also informed Filipinos slapped with travel bans due to unpaid telecom bills to go to the amnesty processing centers, as the three major telecom providers have set up booths at the venue to pay the bills. "Those who wish to pay in full their unpaid telecom bills may proceed to the processing centers from 9 am to 2 pm, and only cash payments will be accepted," the embassy advisory reads. "Filipinos whose

amnesty applications were rejected on April 1-5 but have already paid the telecom loans may also proceed to the booths to continue the process of removing their travel bans," the advisory adds.

The government of Kuwait has granted an amnesty from April 1-30 to all undocumented expatriates, scheduling processing of their applications by nationality from April 1 at a school in Farwaniya. The process began with Filipinos, followed by Egyptians, Bangladeshis, Indians and Sri Lankans. The last five days are for applicants of all nationalities. The government has waived their fines and is shouldering their airfare home, with a chance to return.

Violators are received from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm at the following locations: Male violators are received at Al-Muthanna primary school for boys, Farwaniya, block 1, street 122, while female violators are received at Farwaniya primary school for girls in Farwaniya, block 1, street 76. Residency violators from all nationalities are also received in two different locations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh as follows: Female violators are received at Roufayda Al-Aslameya School - Block 4 - Street 200, while male violators are received at Naem bin Masod School - Block 4 - Street 250.



Kuwait Airways denies opening booking for June

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways on Tuesday denied social media claims that it is now allowing reservations for commercial flights in June. These reports are "incorrect," the state carrier said, adding scheduled flights in that period were reserved before the emergence of the coronavirus pre-

cautions. Commercial flights are currently at a halt until further notice in accordance with government decisions, it added. An official announcement would be made upon the reopening of reservations and the launch of commercial operations, said the airline. — KUNA

Masks for Kuwaitis in 'Tamween'

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce will distribute medical masks to Kuwaiti citizens through the Tamween (supply) cards temporarily until it is available in local markets with a larger quantity. The distribution will start in May 2020. Meanwhile, the ministry announced that 114,009 citizens and expatriates have booked through the co-ops shopping website (www.moci.shop) from April 14 to 27.

In the meantime, Al-Shaab co-op society announced that one of its employees showed symptoms of coronavirus infection, and he was transferred to the hospital. All branches were closed yesterday, it said, noting the delivery option is still on. Also, an employee at Saad Al-Abdullah co-op society tested positive for coronavirus, prompting the co-op to close for two days starting yesterday.

Meanwhile, Al-Ferdous co-op society confirmed that one cashier was infected with coronavirus, prompting the co-op to close for two days starting yesterday. Shamieh co-op will also be closed for seven days starting yesterday, after a worker tested positive. Last week, the same co-op discovered several cases infected among volunteers.

Firemen deliver 20,000 medicines in 23 days

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said Tuesday it delivered over 20,000 prescribed medications to citizens' homes in 23 days. KFSD joined hands with the Ministry of Health to deliver prescribed medicine to citizens at their homes in a bid to encourage people to stay at their houses to reduce the possibility of coronavirus infections. KFSD's Director General Lt Gen



Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad

Khaled Al-Mekrad said deliveries of medicines to houses, quarantine facilities and clinics nationwide aimed at alleviating burden on MoH's medical staff. This operation, he added in a statement, contributed to physical distancing too. Mekrad said firemen started delivery of medicine from Dasman Diabetes Institute and would start delivering medicine from Jaber Al-Ahmad Armed Forces Hospital next week.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Local

Kuwait National Guard able to operate Al-Shuaiba LNG plant

KOTC takes delivery of Shegardiah oil tanker



KUWAIT: Top Kuwait National Guard (KNG) staff meet with Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) officials during the visit. —KNG photos

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Lt Gen Staff Hashem Al-Refaie yesterday affirmed the ability of the KNG personnel to operate the liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Al-Shuaiba area and help Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) ensure sufficient supplies to the local market. The KNG has invoked the protocol of cooperation with KOTC and combined forces with the company at this time of emergency, he said in a statement.

The KNG has hand-picked a cadre of highly trained professionals, technicians and administrative staff who are qualified to run the various units of the LNG plant as per the operating and safety standards, he pointed out. The statement followed a visit by Lt Gen Refaie to the LNG plant; he was accompanied by Maj Gen Staff Faleh Shujaa, Brig Eng Esam Nayef, Col Edris Isa, Captain Ali Shihab and director of the plant Ahmad Al-Baddah. During the visit, they inspected the KNG backup

force tasked with enhancing the LNG production and distribution. Lt Gen Refaie urged the team to do their utmost in helping KOTC implement its plan for ensuring natural gas supplies to the citizens and residents.

Meanwhile, KOTC on Tuesday got delivery of the Shegardiah oil tanker from the South Korean Hyundai Mipo Dockyard ship builder. The new ship is one of eight tankers, of various sizes and for different purposes, ordered from the Korean company in a contract signed on April 24, 2018, Acting CEO of the KOTC Ali Al-Shehab said. He pointed out that the building of the new ship, the 30th member of KOTC fleet, comes within the framework of the fourth phase of KOTC's fleet revamp and modernization. The new tanker is eco-friendly and fuel efficient as it was built according to highest international standards for protecting the environment and reducing emission, Shehab clarified. —KUNA



Highly trained cadre handpicked



Kuwait National Guard and Kuwait Oil Tanker Company officials in a group photo.

Institute's efforts emboldening diabetes research in Kuwait

KUWAIT: When Dr Qais Saleh Al-Duwairi joined Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI) as its Director-General - a premier diabetes research center located in Kuwait - he brought the much-needed perspective to diabetes management through his multifaceted approach. In 2016, Kuwait was struggling with the ever-increasing cases of diabetes, with minimal research being conducted on improving diabetes prevention and management. This is where the former Assistant Under-Secretary of Technical Affairs at the Ministry of Health, Dr Qais Al-Duwairi took charge and introduced strategies that prioritized diabetes research. Owing to his relentless efforts, novel methodologies could be brought to life in the field of diabetes research.



Dr Qais Al-Duwairi

Dr Qais Saleh Al-Duwairi, born in April 4, 1957, holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery degree from Cairo University and a Master's in Hospital Management from Leeds University. His extensive medical experience brought a different approach to diabetes treatment, one that utilized medical, scientific and operational disciplines to prevent and treat diabetes and its related conditions. With this multi-dimensional approach to diabetes management, he has been successfully leading a team of top-class medical researchers at DDI; thus, enhancing diabetes care at the institute.

Commenting on DDI's strategic partnerships, Dr Qais said, "We collaborate with national and international institutions to implement projects and programs in Kuwait. With a total of 75 ongoing research projects and 77 publications in 2019, we continue to focus on improving diabetes prevention and management. We strive to encourage scientists and healthcare professionals to be more innovative and achieve research excellence. Our Patent Office has filed six patents in 2019, where we aim to protect and encourage more innovation in diabetes research."

Dr Qais brought an up to date perspective to diabetes research by shedding light upon the role of 'genes' in the development of diabetes and helped in eradicating numerous misconceptions related to it. He continued by detailing one of their latest research findings, stating that "We recently found a stretch of genes, specific to the Kuwaiti population, that makes them susceptible to metabolic disorders like obesity and diabetes. Our researchers analyzed 662,750 genetic variations in 583 Kuwaitis and were able to identify a haplotype, TNKS, in the Kuwaiti population that was linked to metabolic disorders and high blood pressure. Of course, further studies will be conducted to understand how we can use this information in disease diagnosis, management and prevention in the region."

He further added, "In collaboration with the Ministry of Health in Kuwait, we have established a National Diabetes Registry. This database includes type 1, type 2 and other forms of diabetes from different age groups. Our GeoHealth Lab started its project in collaboration with George Institute of Global Health. Their team visited Adaliyah Cooperative Society to try the FoodSwitch App that helps consumers to make better food choices." If not for Dr Qais, the technological advancements and timely access to updated information and standards in Kuwait, would not have been possible. Under his headship, DDI has been able to establish and continue various skills-oriented programs including Kuwait Obesity Academy (in collaboration with World Obesity Federation), DAFNE program - an interactive educational course specifically for Type-1 diabetes patients, and Remission study program with Glasgow University to aid patients diagnosed with Type-2 diabetes.

Through DDI, he ensures that the latest information is shared amongst medical practitioners, researchers and the general public. As per Dr Qais, "DDI also hosts internal lectures, guest lectures and Post-Doc presentations to promote knowledge transfer. With a total of 40 lectures and workshops from national and international guests, our healthcare and science professionals can share thought processes and other contextual methods."

Dasman Diabetes Institute's (DDI) has recently collaborated with Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) to sequence the genome of coronavirus under the headship of Dr Duwairi, further reinforcing the global fight against COVID-19 by the means of mindful research. Dr Duwairi's achievements have helped combat the diabetes menace in Kuwait to a greater extent. Under his leadership, DDI is taking numerous ingenious initiatives for early detection of diabetes and its prevention; thus, encouraging a healthy and safe society that is ready to defeat diabetes in the coming times.

LOYAC interviews supreme planning council member

KUWAIT: The 'Echo' program, presented by LOYAC's chairperson Dr Farea Al-Saqqaf on Instagram, recently hosted member of the supreme council of planning Dr Saad Al-Barrak. Presenting her guest, Al-Saqqaf referred to him as a 'brand' and 'trademark' noting that he was the founder of Zain and is currently deputy chairman of the SME Fund and a member of LOYAC's board of trustees.



Saad Al-Barrak

Speaking during the interview, Barrak said that he is currently the CEO of ILA Group that invests in IT and 90 percent of its business in industrial intelligence and cyber security is in the US. "This is my basic job for which I am paid, but I have other voluntary positions which I do to serve our beloved country," he underlined. At this point, Saqqaf highly commended Barrak's call to his colleagues in the supreme planning council to give up their annual rewards and donate them to the fund to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Barrak said that he used to adore travelling and that his real fortune lies in how much he managed to make people happy. He expressed hopes that he would be able to make history and help Kuwaiti youth realize their dreams.

Speaking about his hobbies, Barrak said that they shift from time to time but stressed that the basic ones are swimming and reading, and that the latest book he read was titled 'Start With Why', which focuses on teaching people seeking success in any field to first decide why they want to do so. "The slogan that sums up my philosophy is the one I launched as Zain president: Humanity is My Tribe and The Universe is My Home," he added. Responding to a question about his daily activities in view of the current partial curfew, Barrak stressed that he spends most of his time in his home office doing his online job duties and rarely goes out.

Commenting on MoH performance in facing COVID-19, Barrak highly commended Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and his leadership, but expressed concern about the economic impact and suspending subsidies of small and medium enterprises (SME). "Solving a problem should be comprehensive," he stressed, expressing regret that he was not included in the committee economically administering the crisis. "It can be me or any other SME member," he remarked. However, Barrak expressed some conservation concerning the role played by the media, namely the television, during this crisis, noting that its programs should be more hopeful rather than intimidating.

Further, Barrak criticized Arabs crisis management, noting that they only act after the crisis takes place, but remarked that the current COVID-19 crisis helped reduce pollution rates. "My industrial intelligence company in Los Angeles managed to develop models that can predict how far COVID-19 can spread and do special statistical operations and won many patent rights in terms of data analysis," he said.

Politically speaking, Barrak revealed that he might run for parliamentary elections, noting that he had managed to gain some popularity throughout his career and that he would never hesitate to serve his country. Concluding the interview, Barrak referred to his membership in LOYAC's board of trustees noting that LOYAC is a role model of NGOs activities focusing on youth potentials and creativity going so far compared to peers despite its limited resources.

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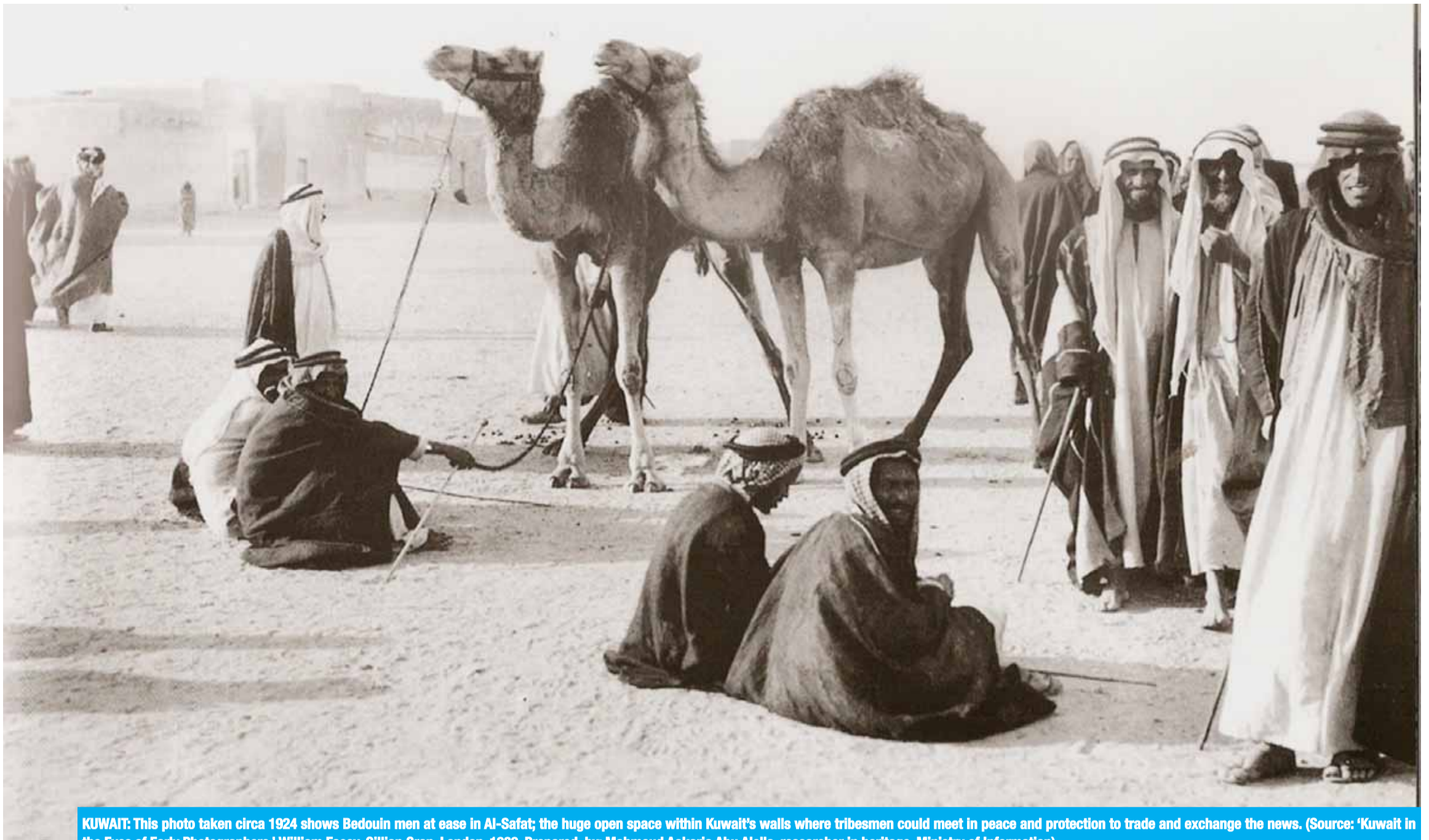
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Local

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: This photo taken circa 1924 shows Bedouin men at ease in Al-Safat; the huge open space within Kuwait's walls where tribesmen could meet in peace and protection to trade and exchange the news. (Source: 'Kuwait in the Eyes of Early Photographers,' William Facey, Gillian Gran, London, 1989. Prepared by: Mahmoud Aakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)

Three stages of self

By Nejoud Al-Yagout

In the Quran, there are three stages of the self: *al nafs al ammara bil su* (the self-commanded/inclined toward evil), *al nafs al lawwama* (the self-blaming self), and *al nafs al mutmaana* (the reassured self). If we ponder the state of the world, it is apparent that many of us, on this planet, are inclined towards evil. This is manifested in human trafficking, our erroneous system of distribution of wealth, imperialism, capitalism, greed, self-obsession, dictatorship, the use of intoxicants, gambling, slavery, objectification of men and women, materialism, consumerism, and evil distractions and perversions which, though once considered illicit and shameful, are now permeating the mainstream. When we no longer flinch at what is going on around us, when we do not stand up for justice, when we forget acts of worship, we become engulfed in darkness. Only the straight path (*al sirat al mustaqeem*) designed for us by our Creator can transform the status quo: and in a world where hedonism is *du jour*, addressing the evil that lurks within us is essential in order to adhere to God's commandments and uphold our covenant with Him.

Imagine a world where we follow the path toward God: imagine a world without casinos, nightclubs, bars, usury, adultery, crime, and pornography. Imagine a world where dutiful worshippers eradicate poverty by spending in voluntary charity (*sadaqa*) and the annual requirement of almsgiving (*zakat*). Imagine a world without greed, without transgression, without injustice. This is all possible when we are God-conscious and when we take our roles as divine ambassadors seriously. Each of us is invited to strive against evil by completely surrendering our desires, our ambitions, our actions, our thoughts—everything—to God. The more we humble ourselves in His presence, the more God exalts us. And, paradoxically, the more we ascend on the spiritual ladder, the more people will consider us regressive, even backward. But what is more important: God's pleasure or society's? And why are we afraid of being considered backward? In a world as upside-down as ours, where vice is considered a right, being called backward is awe-inspiring; it reflects our modesty, piety and inner strength. If being backward means praying to God, shunning sins, and inviting one another to self-purification, then being backward is actually the way forward for us. When people argue that Islam is not compatible with the modern world, we should be elated, not ashamed. The modern world is a mess. The only thing compatible with our world today is evil.

Why would we ever want to adjust our religion to the sickness we witness today or fit our religion into a wayward system? Islam is not compatible with modernity, but it is compatible with God's ways, which are eternal and good. God was, is, and will always be the cure for humanity. We have manifested a filthy playground in which we equate liberalism with freedom and capitalism with dignity. Our desires are our priority. And what does our beloved God say about those who are slaves to their desires in the Quran? Have you seen he who has taken for his God his desire, and God has led him astray upon knowledge and has sealed upon his hearing and his heart and placed over his sight a veil? So who will guide him after God? Will you not remember? (Surah Al-Jathiyah 45:23). Are we going to follow our desires or follow God? When we begin to feel an ounce of guilt at following our desires, when we begin to cringe in shame that

we are not following the ways of God, the stage has been set for *al nafs al lawwama*.

For many, this is a very painful inner struggle. Set in our ways, the devil will put up a fight along with our self. But, we are not to worry about the devil. God says that "...the devil has no authority over those who believe in God and who put their trust in Him" (Surah An Nahl 16:99). And, as for ourselves, God Himself informs us that He has full knowledge of "what [the] self-whispers to [us], and is "...closer to us than the jugular vein" (in Surah Qaf 50:16). Thus, there is no need to fear. The One who knows us better than we know our very own selves is close, very close. We are not alone in this battle both against the devil and against our inner self. With God as our guide, we can take on the challenge of self-purification in patience and perseverance. One of the ways to transcend the second stage is to think about God constantly. Or in God's words, to "remember Your Lord within yourselves..." (Surah Al-Araf 7:205).

Each time we find ourselves daydreaming or thinking evil thoughts, let us return our focus back to The Merciful One. Thinking about death and the afterlife is also essential. It places us in a frame of mind where we are steadfast in acts of worship. Many people erroneously think that because they avoid major sins and are dutiful worshippers that they do not need purification. But mockery and insulting others (see Surah Al-Hujurat 49:11), spying on others and backbiting (see Surah Al-Hujurat 49:12) and arrogance (see Surah An Nahl 16:23) all fall into the category of evil. We have to give up negativity altogether, within us and externally, in order to ascend and so as not to slip back into evil ways. God has informed us in the Quran that He "...does not change the condition of a people, until they change what is in themselves." (Surah Al-Raad 13:11).

So it is up to us to transform ourselves. We are also promised: As for those who strive in Us, we guide them to Our paths, and God is with the righteous. (Surah Al Ankaabut 29:69). So the path of guidance and grace opens up to the righteous ones who strive toward God. The last stage of the self is the one we aspire to the most: *al nafs al mutmaana*. Imagine God Himself addressing our self, saying: "Oh reassured self, return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing and enter among my servants and enter my Paradise." (Al-Fajr 27-30). The reassured self is at peace in God's paradise, untouched by evil, and free of self-incrimination. It would be such a pity to miss this opportunity to enter such a noble station. Our Creator gave us a roadmap in the Quran. Each word, each verse, each page, each chapter invites us to Paradise. The Quran reminds us that "What happens to us that is good is from God, what happens to us that is evil is from ourselves..." (Surah Al Nisa 4:79). This reminds us that before we complain of our circumstances and surroundings, let us ask how we contribute to evil. It takes courage to face the evil that lurks within us, but it is worth it. God is beyond worth it. Beyond. Beyond. Beyond.

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

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Afghan peace process risks collapse as violence flares

Sun worshippers: Indonesians soak up the rays to battle virus



QUITO: Refrigeration trucks that will serve as a temporary morgue are parked at the Centro de Convenciones Bicentenario - a convention centre- where a 370-bed field hospital for COVID-19 coronavirus patients is being build in Quito. The number of coronavirus cases in Ecuador almost doubled to 22,000 following the processing of a testing backlog. — AFP

Dead bodies piled up in bathrooms

Torment in Ecuador: Death toll mounts

GUAYAQUIL: Front line medics in one of Latin America's coronavirus epicenters are lifting the lid on the daily horrors they face in an Ecuadorian city whose health system has collapsed. In one hospital in Guayaquil overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, staff have had to pile up bodies in bathrooms because the morgues are full, health workers say. In another, a medic told AFP that doctors have been forced to wrap up and store corpses to be able to reuse the beds they died on.

Ecuador has recorded close to 23,000 coronavirus cases and nearly 600 deaths, with Guayaquil by far its worst affected city. But the real toll is thought to be far higher. A 35-year-old nurse at the first hospital who spoke on condition of anonymity said that the trauma of what he saw had affected him professionally and personally. When the health emergency broke out in March, every nurse went from caring for 15 patients to 30 in the space of just 24 hours, he added. "So many people arrived that... they were practically dying in our hands," said the nurse.

Patients were discharged or referred to other facilities "to free up all these beds" for coronavirus patients, he said. "They took out anesthesia machines from operating rooms to replace them with ventilators. "People are alone, sad, the treatment wreaks havoc on the gastrointestinal tract,

some defecate; they feel bad and think they will always feel that way, and they see that the person next to them starts to suffocate and scream that they need oxygen."

It isn't just hospitals that have been overwhelmed, but morgues too. "The morgue staff wouldn't take any more, so many times we had to wrap up bodies and store them in



Health system collapsed; hospital overwhelmed

the bathrooms," the nurse said. Only when the bodies were "stacked up six or seven high did they come to collect them." A 26-year-old colleague, also a nurse, confirmed the chaotic scenes. "There were many dead in the bathrooms, many lying on the floors, many dead in armchairs," she told AFP.

'Sanitary disaster'

Guayaquil's health system has collapsed under the pressure of the coronavirus, and it seems to be having catastrophic knock-on effects. In the first half of April, the

province of Guayas, whose capital is Guayaquil, recorded 6,700 deaths, more than three times the monthly average. The disparity suggests that the real COVID-19 death toll is far greater than the official nationwide tally of fewer than 600. President Lenin Moreno has acknowledged that Ecuador's official coronavirus tallies "are short" of the true figures. A 28-year-old doctor at a second Guayaquil hospital, who also insisted on anonymity, conjured a similarly grim picture of health services in crisis.

"Bodies were in the corridors of the emergency ward because the morgue was full," the medic told AFP, describing "20 to 25 corpses" waiting to be taken away. "It was up to us to collect and wrap the corpse and store it so we could disinfect the bed for the next patient," he added. At the first hospital, refrigerated containers were brought in to store bodies, some of which remained for up to 10 days. Some family members "break the covers... so the fluids come out. It's a sanitary disaster," said the 35-year-old male nurse.

'It kills you psychologically'

The number of daily deaths fell last week but that was scant consolation for this nurse, who says he is tormented by what he has experienced. When he goes home, after a 24-hour shift, his feet hurting, he tries to



GUAYAQUIL: Coffins are displayed for sale outside Abel Gilbert Ponton Hospital in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Authorities in the port city of Guayaquil have recorded more than 22,000 cases of coronavirus, including 576 deaths. —AFP

rest but then the "nightmare" strikes. He dreams of running until he falls and knocks "open the bathroom door with the number of bodies... and you can't go back to sleep."

His home life has also changed. He is following strict isolation so cannot see his parents or brother. When he goes home he begins his ritual of disinfecting his car and shoes, hosing himself down on the patio before washing his clothes in hot water. "I eat on a plastic table away from everyone. I leave my home with a mask, I can't hug any-

one, not even the pets," he said.

Every now and then he thinks about the psychological mark left on him every time he has to make do with hooking them up to cannula tubes when what they really need is a ventilator. "They tell you, 'It's okay - give them oxygen and a slow drip serum and leave them,'" he told AFP. "But what if that was my mom? What if it was my dad? That kills you. It kills you psychologically." AFP sought comment from health authorities in Guayaquil but did not get a reply. — AFP

Calls for censored social media after arrests in Egypt

AMMAN: Egyptian lawmakers have called for stricter surveillance of women on video sharing apps after the arrests of a popular social media influencer and a well-known belly dancer on charges of debauchery and inciting immorality. Instagram and TikTok influencer Haneen Hossam, 20, is under 15 days detention for a post encouraging women to broadcast videos in exchange for money, while dancer Sama El-Masry faces 15 days detention for posting "indecent" photos and videos.

MP John Talaat was among several politicians to complain, and has submitted a request to Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly to increase monitoring and censorship of apps that young people use to post "unethical" and "inappropriate" videos. "Because of a lack of surveillance some people are exploiting these apps in a manner that violates public morals and Egypt's customs and traditions," Talaat said on Facebook. He did not respond to requests for additional comments about the video sharing apps that have become increasingly popular with younger people during the coronavirus lockdowns.

In 2018 Egypt adopted a cyber crime law that grants the government full authority to censor the internet and exercise communication surveillance. A media regulation law also allows authorities to block individual social media accounts. The Egyptian government was not immediately available to comment

on the cases of el-Masry and Hossam - a student with about one million followers on TikTok and Instagram - who are being held in detention separately while under investigation.

Several women in Egypt have previously been accused of "inciting debauchery" by challenging the country's conservative social norms, including actress Rania Youssef after critics took against her choice of dress for the Cairo Film Festival in 2018. Hossam was arrested after posting a now-expired video on Instagram explaining how women could earn up to US\$3,000 by broadcasting videos in exchange for money using the Singapore-based video creation platform Likee owned by China's Joyy Inc.. "All you need is good lighting and a good internet connection," Hossam posted.

But her message was interpreted by Egyptian authorities as a promotion for young women to sell sex online, with the public prosecutor saying her actions took advantage of the poor financial state of young women and minors. Hossam denied any wrongdoing but Cairo University - where she is studying archaeology - said it would enforce maximum penalties against her which could include expulsion. "Celebrities use live video apps for work too. Does that mean they work as prostitutes?" Hossam retorted on Instagram.

El-Masry is being investigated for videos and photos that the public prosecution described as sexually suggestive. The dancer denied the accusations, saying the content had been stolen and shared from her phone without consent. Egyptian women's rights campaigner Ghadeer Ahmed blamed the arrests on rising social pressures on women and "corrupt laws". "[These laws] condemn people for their behavior that may not conform to imagined social standards for how to be a 'good citizen' and a respectful woman," she wrote in a Tweet. — Reuters

US panel wants India on religious freedom blacklist

WASHINGTON: A US government panel on Tuesday called for India to be put on a religious freedom blacklist over a "drastic" downturn under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, triggering a sharp rebuttal from New Delhi. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom recommends but does not set policy, and there is virtually no chance the State Department will follow its lead on India, an increasingly close US ally.

In an annual report, the bipartisan panel narrowly agreed that India should join the ranks of "countries of particular concern" that would be subject to sanctions if they do not improve their records. "In 2019, religious freedom conditions in India experienced a drastic turn downward, with religious minorities under increasing assault," the report said. It called on the United States to impose punitive measures, including visa bans, on Indian officials believed responsible and grant funding to civil society groups that monitor hate speech.

The commission said that Modi's Hindu nationalist government, which won a convincing election victory last year, "allowed violence against minorities and their houses of worship to continue with impunity, and also engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence." It pointed to comments by Home Minister Amit Shah, who notoriously referred to mostly Muslim migrants as "termites," and to a cit-

izenship law that has triggered nationwide protests.

It also highlighted the revocation of the autonomy of Kashmir, which was India's only Muslim-majority state, and allegations that Delhi police turned a blind eye to mobs who attacked Muslim neighborhoods in February this year. The Indian government, long irritated by the commission's comments, quickly rejected the report. "Its biased and tendentious comments against India are not new. But on this occasion, its misrepresentation has reached new levels," foreign ministry spokesman Anurag Srivastava said.

"We regard it as an organization of particular concern and will treat it accordingly," he said in a statement. The State Department designates nine "countries of particular concern" on religious freedom-China, Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The commission asked that all nine countries remain on the list. In addition to India, it sought the inclusion of four more-Nigeria, Russia, Syria and Vietnam.

Pakistan, India's historic rival, was added by the State Department in 2018 after years of appeals by the commission. In its latest report, the commission said that Pakistan "continued to trend negatively," voicing alarm at forced conversions of Hindus and other minorities, abuse of blasphemy prosecutions and a ban on the Ahmadi sect calling itself Muslim.

India's citizenship law fast-tracks naturalization for minorities from neighboring countries-but not if they are Muslim. Modi's government says it is not targeting Muslims but rather providing refuge to persecuted people and should be commended. But critics consider it a watershed move by Modi to define the world's largest democracy as a Hindu nation and chip away at independent India's founding principle of secularism. — AFP

International

New York doctor who treated COVID-19 patients kills herself

New Yorkers pin hopes on virus antibodies

NEW YORK: A New York emergency doctor who treated coronavirus patients has killed herself, with family, police and physicians linking her death to trauma faced by health care workers battling the outbreak. Lorna Breen, 49, died on Sunday from self-inflicted injuries in Charlottesville, Virginia, where she had been staying with her family, police said in a statement.

Breen ran the emergency department of New York-Presbyterian Allen Hospital in Manhattan, a facility that has seen a huge influx of COVID-19 patients. While it is not clear why she took her own life, her family, police and doctors suggested stress caused by the outbreak had contributed to her death. "She tried to do her job and it killed her," her father Philip Breen told The New York Times.

He said she had no history of mental illness and had contracted coronavirus herself before returning to work and then being sent home. "Frontline health-care professionals and first responders are not immune to the mental or physical effects of the current pandemic," said Charlottesville police chief RaShall Brackney. The president of the American College of Emergency Physicians, of which Breen was a member, said her death was a tragic reminder of the suffering that many health care workers are going through.

"The impossibility of the situation in many of our hospitals leaves us deeply wounded. I can only imagine for Dr. Breen it was more than she could bear-not out of weakness, but out of the strength of her compassion," William Jaquis said in a statement on the group's website. The hospital where she worked described her as "a hero who brought the highest ideals of medicine to the challenging front lines of the emergency department." More than 17,300 people have died from COVID-



Family, physicians link her death to trauma

19 across New York state, the epicenter of America's outbreak.

Virus antibodies

For the first time Tuesday, hundreds of New Yorkers were able to get tested for COVID-19 without having serious symptoms or underlying health issues-hopeful they had already contracted and beaten the potentially deadly disease. Dozens of people wearing masks-many young and seemingly healthy-waited their turns at branches of the New York medical chain CityMD to find out if they had had the novel coronavirus.

For weeks, tests have been reserved for the most ill or for those most at risk of serious complications. But now CityMD-which specializes in walk-in consultations-is one of the first organizations to announce that virus and antibody testing would be available to anyone, starting Tuesday. In New York-one of the worst-hit areas in the world with 17,000 confirmed or probable COVID-19 deaths out of 157,000 confirmed cases-the question on everyone's mind is:

Have I already had the virus? Now-unemployed hairdresser Ariel Krupnik, 32, was among those willing to wait two hours for a \$300 blood test that could reveal within three to five days whether he has developed antibodies against the coronavirus. He never had any symptoms. But he thinks his health insurance will cover the test, and finding out he has already had the virus would be "like a nice little, like, spring gift," Krupnik said.

Even if the results are not 100 percent reliable, and even if it is not proven that antibodies confer total immunity, Krupnik said a positive result would mean feeling less compelled to stay inside constantly, only looking forward to his weekly supermarket trip. And it would mean he might be able to donate blood

no vaccine or proven treatment yet available. At the same time, France cannot afford an "indefinite" lockdown, Philippe said.

Non-essential businesses have been closed since March 17, with people confined to their homes except for essential business. "We must protect the French without immobilizing France to the point that it collapses," Philippe told the National Assembly, which must vote on his proposed measures. It is necessary, the premier said, to "gradually, cautiously, but also resolutely proceed with lifting the lockdown, as long-awaited as it is risky."

Fine line

Philippe said the government is treading a fine line. "A little too much carelessness, and the epidemic restarts. A little too much caution, and the entire country sinks." Only 75 of the assembly's 577 lawmakers were present for the premier's address, with several empty seats between them, in line with virus-busting social-distancing measures.

told Biden during a live video linkup from their respective homes. "I wish you were president right now," said Clinton, who headed the Democratic ticket in 2016 but lost to Republican Donald Trump.

"Joe Biden has been preparing for this moment his entire life," the former First Lady said. "I've had the privilege to work with him," said Clinton, who served in the US Senate with Biden and was Secretary of State for four years when he was former president Barack Obama's vice president. Clinton said the coronavirus crisis gripping the United States-which has by far the world's highest death toll and caseload-"is a moment that we need a leader, a president, like Joe Biden.

crowded prison system has risen to 15, following the deaths of two inmates over the weekend, while more than 600 inmates are infected. The riot at Castro Castro was the latest in a spate of prison unrest linked to growing fears among inmates over the spread of the virus. On Tuesday, inmates at Lurigancho-the country's largest prison located north of Lima-staged a two-hour protest demanding protection against COVID-19. "We're dying. Don't let us die infected. We need medicine," read a banner held up by some of the prisoners.

The protest ended when the Lurigancho warden signed an agreement with the prisoners concerning their medical attention, a prison systems spokesperson told AFP. A relative of one of the inmates outside the prison pleaded for an early release. "They are condemned to a prison sentence, but not to death here. Please, we are asking for mercy for them," the woman, who identified herself by her first name, Vilma, told AFP. The notoriously overcrowded

independent lawmaker from Michigan said in announcing he had launched an exploratory committee, a strong sign he will make a longshot bid for the White House. Amash, an independent since quitting the GOP last summer, seeks the nomination of the Libertarian Party, which promotes civil liberties and limited government. "We're ready for a presidency that will restore respect for our Constitution and bring people together," he said on Twitter.

"I'm excited and honored to be taking these first steps toward serving Americans of every background as president." Amash, 40, would jump into a race that already features its main protagonists: the incumbent



NEW YORK: A body is moved from a refrigeration truck serving as a temporary morgue to a vehicle at the Brooklyn Hospital Center, in the Borough of Brooklyn in New York. —AFP

for the plasma therapies that many hospitals are testing for coronavirus patients. "I can go help out other people that are having it, you know," Krupnik said.

'Curious'

The motivation is similar for 26-year-old Pauline Guardenti, a French woman who has lived in New York for eight years. "I saw that we could donate our blood-that's why I'm doing it," she said. "Truthfully, I don't really care if I had it or not. There aren't really enough studies to know if we are immune or not." Ariela Rubin, 37, usually works as a waitress in a vegetarian restaurant that is now closed due to the pandemic. —Agencies



MULHOUSE: French Desirée Wagner, 31, mortuary service agent, poses for a picture by refrigeration units at the Emile Muller Hospital morgue in Mulhouse, France during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

The National Assembly approved the government plan late Tuesday with a vote of 368 to 100, with 103 abstentions. —AFP

"Think of what it would mean if we had a real president not just somebody who plays one on TV," she said in a job at Trump, Biden's expected opponent in November. "Just think of what a difference it would make right now if we had a president who not only listened to the science with facts over fiction but brought us together," Clinton said. Biden thanked Clinton for the endorsement, calling her "the woman who should be president of the United States right now." Biden said that rather than accepting Clinton's endorsement "I wish this was... my supporting your re-election as president of the United States." "We'd have the pandemic but you would have already been prepared for it," he said. —AFP



LIMA: Video grab at Lima's Lurigancho prison, where relatives of inmates demanded authorities for medicine, after a deadly riot took place in another prison in the city, over fear of contagion of the COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

Lurigancho was built to house 2,500 prisoners but is currently believed to have more than 10,000. —AFP

Trump and presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden. A third-party victory would be highly unlikely, but Amash has the potential for reshaping the race should he be on the ballot in November. It remains unclear whether he would have a greater impact on Trump or Biden.

He could draw support from Republicans or independents frustrated with Trump. Likewise, he could earn votes from Democrats who are unhappy about Biden's candidacy. In 2016, Green Party nominee Jill Stein drew thousands of votes from Democrat Hillary Clinton, and Libertarian nominee Gary Johnson earned about three percent of the national vote. —AFP

News in brief

COVID hits Moroccan jails

RABAT: More than 300 cases of novel coronavirus have been detected at three Moroccan prisons after a campaign of testing of inmates and guards in the country's 73 jails, the prisons service said Tuesday. After more than 1,700 tests across the country, it said 303 infections were recorded at a jail in the southern town of Ouarzazate, 62 of them prison employees. Ten others were found in the central city of Marrakesh and in Ksar Kebir in the north. Further tests were being carried to confirm five possible cases at Tangiers prison. The prison service has said the virus in Morocco's jails, which hold nearly 80,000 inmates, are under control thanks to "preventive measures" such as quarantines and remotely held court hearings. In early April, more than 5,650 detainees were released under royal pardons in an effort to reduce the risk of the virus spreading in the country's notoriously overcrowded penitentiaries. —AFP

Brazil death toll hits 5,000

BRASILIA: Brazil, the South American country worst-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, has registered more than 5,000 deaths from COVID-19, the health ministry announced Tuesday, pushing the toll above that of China. A record 474 deaths were recorded in the last 24 hours, with the number of infections rising to 71,886, the ministry said. China, where the virus first emerged before spreading across the world, has recorded about 4,600 deaths. The ministry said Brazil's toll could be higher than Tuesday's official figure of 5,107, as the cause of 1,156 further deaths are under investigation. Experts believe the overall number of COVID-19 cases could be 12 to 15 times higher, due to a large number of undetected cases given the lack of testing availability across the country's 210 million population. —AFP

Chad abolishes 'death penalty'

N'DJAMENA: Chad on Tuesday abolished the death penalty for terrorist acts, quashing an exception that was on the books for four years, Justice Minister Djimet Arabi said. The Sahel country passed legislation in 2016 to abolish capital punishment, but made an exception for perpetrators of terrorism. Arabi, who proposed the amendment, said the vote was unanimous and the law would come into force once it is approved by President Idriss Deby Itno, whose party enjoys a huge majority in parliament. The change is "aimed at harmonizing our laws in line with all the countries of the G5 Sahel Group," the minister said. Chad's military is a key part of the 5,000-strong G5 force alongside Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Mauritania that cooperates with French troops to combat a growing Islamist insurgency. The last execution carried out in Chad was in August 2015 when 10 suspected members of the Islamist group Boko Haram based in neighboring Nigeria were shot dead. —AFP

China legislature to meet

BEIJING: China's top legislature will hold its annual session next month after postponing the meeting for the first time in decades due to the coronavirus outbreak, official news agency Xinhua said Wednesday. The Communist Party leadership announced in February that it would put off the annual National People's Congress (NPC) for the first time since the Cultural Revolution as the country battled the coronavirus outbreak, which has since become a pandemic. The rescheduled session on May 22 will be seen as a sign of confidence by the leadership that the country has largely brought its outbreak under control. Top Communist Party leaders including President Xi Jinping attend each year's gathering with delegates from across the country, to rubber-stamp bills, budgets and personnel moves already decided by the party. —AFP

France charts 'risky' return to life after virus lockdown

PARIS: France will begin a gradual but "risky" return to normality on May 11, with shops, markets and some schools reopening after an eight-week coronavirus lockdown credited with saving more than 60,000 lives. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said Tuesday. But life will not be as before, with face masks compulsory on public transport, working from home strongly encouraged for several more weeks, and restaurants and cafes - quintessential to the French way of life - remaining shuttered.

The French people "will have to learn to live with the virus", said Philippe, urging strict, ongoing respect of social distancing and personal hygiene measures to limit new infections to a minimum, with

Hillary Clinton endorses Biden's White House bid

WASHINGTON: Hillary Clinton endorsed Joe Biden's White House bid on Tuesday, saying the United States needs a "real president" and not just "somebody who plays one on TV." "I want to add my voice to the many who have endorsed you to be our president," Clinton

Peru's prison riot over coronavirus fears kills nine

LIMA: Nine inmates were killed and scores of guards wounded when rioting broke out at a prison in Lima after two inmates died from COVID-19, authorities in Peru said Tuesday. The riot broke out Monday at the city's Castro Castro prison. By nightfall, authorities said the situation had been brought under control, giving an initial toll of three dead before gradually revising the figure upwards to nine. Aside from the nine killed, 60 prison guards, five police officers and two inmates were wounded in the unrest, the National Penitentiary Institute (INPE) said in a statement.

The death toll from COVID-19 in the Peru's over-

Independent Amash takes key step to seek US presidency

WASHINGTON: US congressman Justin Amash, who left the Republican Party amid frustrations over Donald Trump and then voted for his impeachment, announced Tuesday he was preparing a run for president as a third-party candidate. "Let's do this," the

International

Afghan peace process risks collapse as violence flares

Dozens of troops and Taliban fighters die almost daily

KABUL: Two months after the US and the Taliban signed a deal Washington heralded as the way to end Afghanistan's war, violence is spiraling out of control and experts say a fragile peace process risks collapse. Dozens of Afghan security forces and Taliban fighters have been dying almost daily with civilian casualties rising across the country as both sides ramp up operations. The insurgents have been emboldened by a deal that gave them many concessions in exchange for few commitments, fuelling their surge of attacks in recent weeks, analysts say.

The timing could hardly be worse, as Afghanistan also grapples with a coronavirus epidemic. The peace "process isn't dead yet, but it is on life support", said Ashley Jackson, a researcher at the Overseas Development Institute. "It's anyone's guess how much time we have before it does begin to irrevocably fall apart." An Afghan official said that on average, the Taliban have launched 55 attacks each day since the deal signing in Doha on February 29, while a UN agency reported that Afghan forces are causing more child deaths than the insurgents—mainly from air strikes and shelling.

Analysts say the bloodshed was predictable or inevitable—given the wording of the deal and the sweeping concessions the US granted its foe of more than 18 years. Titled the "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan", the accord promises a full withdrawal of US and foreign forces without the Taliban committing to a ceasefire or even any reduction in violence. President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he wants American troops home quickly, and the Taliban realize that as long as they don't hit American or foreign troops, there are few consequences for continued attacks.



Afghanistan grapples with coronavirus

The insurgents see the agreement as "an end-of-occupation deal", said Bill Roggio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies think tank. "The US wants out of Afghanistan and it has ceded to all the Taliban demands," Nishank Motwani, a Kabul-based strategy and security expert, said the Doha agreement had emboldened and legitimized the Taliban, who think they have won the war so have little incentive to stop fighting. "The Taliban fundamentally believe that victory is theirs," Motwani said.

Withdrawal timeline

The deal means that in return for vague Taliban security commitments and a loose pledge they won't let Al-Qaeda and other jihadists threaten the US or its allies, the American military and all foreign forces will quit Afghanistan by July 2021 – a process already under way. Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said Trump is determined to leave Afghanistan "come hell or high water", so the Taliban face few consequences for continued violence.

"This isn't a deal to win peace, this is simply a deal to give the Americans cover (to leave Afghanistan)," Rubin said. "And if it means throwing the Afghans under the bus, so be it." The agreement also detailed several commitments from President Ashraf Ghani—including a very lopsided prisoner swap—even though US and Taliban negotiators systematically sidelined his government.

The prisoner exchange would see Ghani release 5,000 Taliban prisoners, including many hardened fighters likely to return to the battlefield. In exchange, the Taliban would release 1,000 Afghan security forces. The swap was supposed to be concluded by March 10, paving the



KABUL: A man wearing a facemask as a precautionary measure against the COVID-19 novel coronavirus walks past a wall painted with images of US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad (left) and Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Kabul. —AFP

way for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. A Taliban source said the insurgents had no intention of slowing violence until the prisoners are released, and reiterated there will be no talks unless that happened.

"Ghani's government is trying to test our nerves but we want to tell them that we are not tired, we are still fresh and ready to fight," the Taliban member said. The insurgents have also rejected as "illogical" recent ceasefire calls from Kabul and the West, pointing to the fact the deal did not mandate one. Fawzia Koofi, a member of the Afghan team selected for eventual negotiations, said another hurdle is the political crisis that has seen

Ghani's legitimacy challenged by his rival Abdullah Abdullah, who also claimed the presidency after an election marred by fraud allegations.

"We are waiting for the political dispute to come to a possible consensus and end inside Afghanistan so that... we have a united position during the talks," she said. Ghani's administration has at least held some discussions with the Taliban on the prisoner issue and that gave grounds for hope, International Crisis Group analyst Andrew Watkins said. "The most important thing for peace talks to succeed is for both sides to keep talking, constantly, even while fighting wages." —AFP

India counts as migrant workers struggle for aid

MUMBAI: A veteran of organizing elections and pilgrimages in stifling dust and heat, Indian bureaucrat Pranabiyoti Nath sees a precious opportunity in the coronavirus crisis - documenting the country's legions of migrant workers to help boost their rights. Millions of India's migrant labourers say they are in limbo, struggling to access aid to survive the six-week lockdown in the states where they work and appealing for help from officials back home.

In the southern state of Kerala, Nath has tasked a team of volunteers with finding the names and bank details of 400,000 migrant labourers living in temporary shelters to make sure they get assistance. "They've collected the information of about 300,000 workers already," Nath, Kerala's labor commissioner, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone. "The lockdown may be lifted, but this (data) is relevant for coming months. Policy-making is not possible without the numbers," he added.

Elsewhere across the nation of 1.3 billion people, local officials are collating migrant worker data from phone calls to welfare helplines and social media messages, as well as counting them by visiting makeshift camps where many of the workers live. India's strict lockdown measures, such as severing transport links, have taken a toll on the nation's estimated 100 million migrant workers, triggering an exodus from cities where they worked in garment factories, building sites and brick kilns.

The government announced a \$23 billion aid package to help the poor, including migrant workers, but relief has been patchy across the vast country. Power-loom operator Arun Gouda, who is stranded in the textile hub of Surat, said he was about to run out of food. "We couldn't get through to any helpline number and nobody came looking for us," he said from the city, where protests broke out for the third time in a month on Tuesday as migrant workers demanded to be allowed to return to their villages. "We're in bad shape."

On the move

India has no central registry of migrant workers despite passing legislation 40 years ago to establish such a database, the labor ministry told parliament last month. The law aimed to formalize employment contracts and protect migrant laborers' rights, but it was rarely enforced. Labor officials say the fact that workers are constantly on the move makes documenting them difficult.

Appeals for help by migrant workers have provided a new tool for local officials, but campaigners fear the latest counting efforts will also fall short. "To do any sensible enumeration at this point is difficult," said Rajiv Khandelwal, co-founder of migrant rights non-profit Aajevika Bureau. "Who will count - village councils or urban municipalities?" With migrant workers scattered across factories where they work and live, or living on the outskirts of cities or sleeping rough, counting them would be a challenge. —Reuters

Sun worshippers: Indonesians soak up the rays

JAKARTA: From shirtless soldiers to teens sunbathing on their parents' driveways, Indonesians are soaking up rays like never before in the hope that plentiful sunshine will ward off coronavirus. The rush to take up a practice usually associated with Bali-bound foreigners has been driven by unfounded claims on social media that sunlight—and the vitamin D it supplies—can slow or kill the virus.

That hope got a boost last week when a senior US official said new research showed sunlight quickly destroys the virus. The study has yet to be evaluated independently, but US President Donald Trump spoke about it enthusiastically during a press conference. "I always avoided the sun before because I didn't want to get tanned," said Theresia Rikke Astria, a

27-year-old housewife in Indonesia's cultural capital Yogyakarta. "But I'm hoping this will strengthen my immune system," she added.

Medics have their doubts, but say a 15-minute burst of morning sunshine can be good for you. "Exposing the body to direct sunlight is good to get vitamin D, not to directly prevent the disease," said Dr Dirga Sakti Rambe at Jakarta's OMNI Pulomas Hospital. Vitamin D, which comes from fish, eggs, milk and sunlight exposure, is important in maintaining a healthy immune system, he said, but added: "Sunbathing does not kill the virus that causes COVID-19."

Whatever the science, one thing is for sure: there is no shortage of sunshine in the tropical 5,000-kilometre- (3,100-mile-) long Southeast Asian archipelago. The rush outdoors has led to an Indonesian government warning about the dangers of skin cancer, and calls for novice sun-seekers to slap on protection. It was a rare caution in a place where sunbathing is



BEKASI Indonesians sit out in the sun in Bekasi, West Java, with the belief that the sun can boost their body immunity amid concerns over the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

not practiced widely and beauty product commercials extol the virtues of fair skin. Across Asia, pale skin has long been associated with a higher social class and skin-lightening prod-

ucts are big sellers. Muslim majority Indonesia's relatively conservative dress codes—especially for women—mean skimpy swimwear isn't a feature of the new craze. —Reuters

Official alleges Russian plot to 'liquidate' him

PRAGUE: A Prague official has alleged that there was a Russian plot to "liquidate" him and two other Czech politicians, all of whom have clashed with the Kremlin over controversial Soviet memorials in the city. Prague district 6 mayor Ondrej Kolar told Czech media late Tuesday that he was being kept at an undisclosed location after being granted police protection. "All I can tell you is

that I've been granted police protection. It was assigned to me because there's a Russian here who has been given the task of liquidating me," Kolar told the Czech Prima TV station. "Not only me, but also Zdenek Hrib and Pavel Novotny," he added, referring respectively to Prague's mayor and another city official.

Prague mayor Zdenek Hrib said on Monday that he was under police protection, but stopped short of confirming Czech media reports that he had been targeted by Russia for removing a statue of a Soviet war hero. Hrib and Kolar clashed with Moscow earlier this month after they spearheaded the removal of a controversial Cold War-era statue dedicated to Soviet general Ivan Konev, a move Russian diplomats called an "unfriendly" act of

"vandalism by unheing municipal representatives." Many Czechs view Konev - a hero for Russians - as a symbol of Soviet-era oppression.

The Czech weekly news magazine Respekt claimed that a Russian national using a diplomatic passport had recently arrived in Prague carrying ricin, a toxic poison that can be used as a biological weapon. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, speaking to reporters in Moscow on Monday, said the claims made in the Respekt report were "misinformation". Reacting to the developments, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said Tuesday that his country, an EU and NATO member of 10.7 million people would not allow "any world power to influence our political affairs in any manner". —AFP

Coronavirus mutes Pakistan's TV game shows on Ramadan

ISLAMABAD: In normal times, Pakistanis hungry for entertainment during the fasting month of Ramadan would avidly watch television game shows as contestants, urged on by rowdy studio audiences, compete for lavish prizes. But this is not a normal time. Measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus have meant there are no studio audiences, and contestants appear by video-link on some shows, while on others they phone in their answers, or send a text message.

"But it is not as if we won't be entertained, or stop smiling," Fahad Mustafa, the host of "Jeeto, Pakistan", which translates as "Win, Pakistan", explained apologetically at the start of the first show during the holy month. "It is not as

if we're going to stop the Ramadan ritual of entertaining you," said Mustafa. The cooking shows and religious programs that vie with the game shows for audience share are also having to adjust to the restrictions, as authorities try to head off a full-blown epidemic, as the number of cases in Pakistan topped 13,000 this week, including 281 deaths.

Mustafa's show on ARY Entertainment channel had become one of the most popular in the country thanks partly to its large, boisterous studio audience - but now Mustafa just talks to the camera. Prizes offered by game shows have been downsized too, partly due to lack of money and partly out of respect for the more sombre national mood. Television advertising and sponsorship typically spikes higher during Ramadan, but this year they have nosedived along with the economy that entered a partial lockdown around a month ago.

"Each channel was competing over whose set was going to be bigger, and

who was bringing in celebrities," said Agha Zohaib, managing director at Mindshare, one of Pakistan's top marketing agencies. "But now we're seeing 30%-45% cuts in expenditure on the TV advertising side." According to a nationwide poll conducted by Gallup Pakistan, 49% of Pakistanis said they had stopped working because of the pandemic, and 84% said they had lost a significant portion of their income.

And Pakistan's media watchdog issued a notice warning the shows' makers to avoid ostentatious displays during Ramadan, as the "world is suffering from hunger, scarcity of resources, and joblessness." Last year the prizes included gold bars and cars, and in earlier years offered a private jet, while another surprised two childless couples with orphaned babies. Cars are still among the featured prizes, but the giveaways are mostly more modest this year. "You just won't see the kind of rambunctious shows you saw before," said Nadeem Raza, a producer at Such Television. —Reuters



KARACHI: A woman walks through a 'sanitizing gate' at a market during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in Karachi. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020

10 As a 'green stimulus' Pakistan sets virus-idled to work planting trees



11 Ooredoo Kuwait gifts free SIM cards to repatriated citizens



11 Samsung profit slips on virus, more falls seen



RIYADH: A man watching the exchange board at the Stock Exchange Market (Tadawul) bourse in the Saudi capital Riyadh. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is facing an unprecedented challenge this year as oil prices have plummeted historic lows. — AFP

Saudi slips into \$9bn budget deficit in Q1

Kingdom's foreign reserves fall as oil revenues collapse

RIYADH/DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's central bank foreign reserves fell in March at their fastest rate in at least 20 years and to their lowest since 2011, while the kingdom slipped into a \$9 billion budget deficit in the first quarter as oil revenues collapsed. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is facing an unprecedented challenge this year as oil prices have plummeted historic lows.

At the same time, measures to contain the spread of the new coronavirus are likely to curb the pace and the scale of sweeping economic reforms launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority said on Tuesday its net foreign assets, which include securities such as US Treasuries and foreign deposits, fell in March to \$464 billion, their lowest since 2011.

The nearly \$27 billion decline - the biggest monthly drawdown in at least 20 years - signals the kingdom's urgent need to tap into its vast reserves to offset the economic damage following lower oil prices and a severe coronavirus-driven slowdown of entire sectors of its non-oil economy. Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said last week the kingdom would not draw

down more than \$32 billion from its reserves this year and would instead increase its borrowing to nearly \$60 billion to contain a widening deficit.

Early yesterday the finance ministry reported a first quarter budget deficit of \$9 billion, mostly because of a drop in oil revenues, that reversed a first quarter surplus

plus of around \$7.4 billion in 2019. Oil revenues in the first three months of the year posted a 24 percent annual decline to \$34 billion and pushed total revenues down 22 percent year on year, the ministry said. Saudi Arabia, which had registered more than 20,000 coronavirus

cases as of Tuesday with 152 deaths, had projected a deficit of \$50 billion this year, or 6.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), widening from around \$35 billion last year.

But that was before the coronavirus and the plunge in oil prices. Jadaan has said the deficit could widen to up to 9 percent of GDP this year, but some analysts have predicted a deficit of 22 percent with oil prices at \$30 a barrel. International oil prices have shed around two thirds of their value since the start of this year and are trading around \$21.

"If Finance Minister Al-Jadaan's plans are for merely \$32 billion of reserves drawdown then, following a \$27 billion reduction in March alone, that means almost all the remainder will be covered by new sovereign debt issuance, assuming there are no further privatizations, because of market conditions," Hasnain Malik, head of equity strategy at Tellimer, said.

Slowdown

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other large oil producers, including Russia, have agreed to cut output by almost 10 million

barrels per day (bpd), or 10 percent of global oil production, in May-June, in an attempt to balance the market. While the size of the output cuts is unprecedented, demand has fallen even more and storage for all unused oil is filling fast as global measures to combat the pandemic have brought many economies to a virtual standstill.

Jadaan said last week he expects the pandemic to cause a slump in activity in the non-oil private sector too this year and that the government could launch measures to prop up its economy on top of \$32 billion in emergency stimulus measures announced last month. Non-oil revenues in the first quarter fell 17 percent when compared to the same period one year earlier, with revenues from taxes on goods and services plunging, in a sign of overall economic slowdown in the kingdom. Saudi Arabia has already cut its 2020 budget by nearly 5 percent and further spending curbs are likely. In Q1, however, capex spending declined only 4 percent, the finance ministry said. Riyadh last month raised its debt ceiling to 50 percent of GDP from 30 percent. It has already borrowed \$12 billion in international bonds this year. — Reuters



Virus fighting slows reform programs

Airbus Q1 profit plunges as virus crisis starts to bite

PARIS: Airbus yesterday posted a 49 percent slump in first-quarter core profit and called for an industry-wide campaign to restore confidence in flying after the coronavirus pandemic triggered the "gravest crisis the aerospace industry has ever known". Europe's largest aerospace group also highlighted plans to save cash after gushing 8 billion euros in the first quarter, including a record 3.6-billion-euro fine to settle corruption investigations in Britain, France and the United States.

"All nature of costs are now being reviewed," CEO Guillaume Faury told analysts. Airbus has been unable to deliver more than a handful of aircraft since Europe-wide lockdowns began in mid-March and Faury said he expected similar difficulties in the second quarter before a clearer picture emerges in around June.

Chief Financial Officer Dominik Asam told a telephone news conference he expected some recovery in the third quarter before returning "basically to a neutral situation where we don't use cash anymore" in the fourth.

Airbus expanded furlough schemes on Tuesday by sending home 3,200 workers in Britain after putting 3,000 workers on gov-



BLAGNAC: This file photo shows a view of the Airbus A380 assembly site in Blagnac, southern France. European aviation giant Airbus yesterday reported a first quarter net loss of 481 million euros (\$521,800,000) under the impact of the coronavirus crisis. —AFP

ernment-backed partial unemployment schemes in France, and Faury said thousands of German staff could also be affected. He did not say whether Airbus would carry out forced redundancies but told staff last week to prepare for "more far-reaching measures" to balance the group's costs to the reduced outlook for aviation in coming years. "We are doing everything we can to be in the best shape for competing again later," Faury said yesterday.

Airbus said first-quarter adjusted operating profit fell 49 percent to 281 million euros (\$304.7 million) as revenue dropped 15 percent to 10.631 billion euros, mainly

due to clouds that were already gathering over jetliner demand before the coronavirus outbreak.

Planemakers, airlines and suppliers have been left reeling by the pandemic, which has crippled passenger travel and catapulted major economies into recession. Airbus suspended its outlook and dividend and negotiated new credit lines last month. It said yesterday it does not immediately see a need for further government support. Airbus this month cut jet production by between one third and 42 percent depending on the model, compared with previously announced rates. — Reuters

Oil rebounds above \$14 after massive sell-off

SINGAPORE: US oil prices rebounded above \$14 a barrel yesterday, a day after a sell-off sparked by a major fund selling its short-term holdings of the commodity amid virus-triggered storage concerns.

West Texas Intermediate, the US benchmark, for June delivery jumped 14.5 percent to \$14.13 a barrel in Asian morning trade. It had plunged by more than 21 percent at one point Tuesday after the United States Oil Fund-a major US exchange-traded fund (ETF) — started selling its short-term contracts of the commodity. Brent crude, the international benchmark, was trading 3.27 percent higher at \$21.13 a barrel.

Meanwhile, the price of Kuwaiti oil dropped by \$1.91 to \$11.72 per barrel on Tuesday as against the \$13.63 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of the West Texas Intermediate went down by \$1.64 pb to \$11.14 pb, the same case with the Brent crude, which went down by 85 cents to \$19.14 pb.

Traders "are bargain hunting after a couple of days of massive sell-offs",

OANDA senior market analyst Jeffrey Halley told AFP. ANZ Bank said in a note that the market was hit by volatility Tuesday "as ETFs and index funds moved contract positions amid renewed concerns of negative prices" in short-term holdings. The Oil Fund had sold its contracts due to expire in June to move into longer-dated holdings amid fears about storage space running out in the short term.

Following the US ETF's move, Standard & Poor's also told clients to sell their stakes in the June contracts and move them into July, ANZ said. S&P operates the GSCI commodity index, which is tracked by pension funds and other big investors. Other indices, including the Bloomberg Commodity Index, took similar steps.

Oil prices have fallen to historic lows this month, with WTI crashing deep below zero for the first time as governments worldwide shut down businesses and air travel grinds to a halt due to the virus. An agreement by top crude-producing nations to cut output by 10 million barrels a day from May 1 has done little to calm the market. The production cuts "will probably take weeks to show up in the physical market, hence we are still stuck with the inventories issues that will continue to curb any semblance of bullish appetite", said AxiCorp global market strategist Stephen Innes. — AFP

Business

As a 'green stimulus' Pakistan sets virus-idled to work planting trees

Unemployed day laborers given new jobs as 'jungle workers'

ISLAMABAD: When construction worker Abdul Rahman lost his job to Pakistan's coronavirus lockdown, his choices looked stark: resort to begging on the streets or let his family go hungry. But the government has now given him a better option: Join tens of thousands of other out-of-work laborers in planting billions of trees across the country to deal with climate change threats.

Since Pakistan locked down starting March 23 to try to stem the spread of COVID-19, unemployed day laborers have been given new jobs as "jungle workers", planting saplings as part of the country's 10 Billion Tree Tsunami program.

Such "green stimulus" efforts are an example of how funds that aim to help families and keep the economy running during pandemic shutdowns could also help nations prepare for the next big threat: climate change. "Due to coronavirus, all the cities have shut down and there is no work. Most of us daily wagers couldn't earn a living," Rahman, a resident of Rawalpindi district in Punjab province, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

He now makes 500 rupees (\$3) per day planting trees - about half of what he might have made on a good day, but enough to get by. "All of us now have a way of earning daily wages again to feed our families," he said.

The ambitious five-year tree-planting program, which Prime Minister Imran Khan launched in 2018, aims to counter the rising temperatures, flooding, droughts and other extreme weather in the country that scientists link to climate change.



10bn tree tsunami program

social distancing orders put in place to slow the spread of the virus, which has infected over 13,900 people in Pakistan, according to a Reuters tally. But earlier this month, the prime minister granted an exemption to allow the forestry agency to restart the program and create more than 63,600 jobs, according to government officials.

While much of the country is still observing stay-at-home orders, local police and district authorities have been told trucks carrying trees should be allowed to travel and villagers permitted to leave their homes to work with the project. A recent assessment by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics found that, due to the lockdown, up to 19 million people could be laid off, almost 70 percent of them in the Punjab province.

Abdul Muqet Khan, chief conservator of forests for Rawalpindi district, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that the planting project is in "full swing". Much of the work is happening on 15,000 acres (6,000 hectares) of land near the capital Islamabad, he said, as well as on other tracts of state-owned forest land around the country.

This year the program is employing triple the number of workers it did in its first year, said Malik Amin Aslam, climate change advisor to the prime minister. Many of the new jobs are being created in rural areas, he said, with a focus on hiring women and unemployed daily workers - mainly young people - who were migrating home from locked-down cities. The work, which pays between 500 rupees and 800 rupees per day, includes setting up nurseries, planting saplings, and serving as forest protection guards or forest firefighters, he said. All the workers have been told to wear masks and maintain the mandated two metres (six feet) of social distance between them, he added.

"This tragic crisis provided an opportunity and we grabbed it," Aslam told the Thomson Reuters Foundation



ISLAMABAD: Since Pakistan's lockdown started on March 23 in a bid to stem the spread of COVID-19, unemployed day laborers have been given new jobs as "jungle workers", planting saplings as part of the country's 10 billion tree tsunami program. —Reuters

in a phone interview. "Nurturing nature has come to the economic rescue of thousands of people."

Extended help

According to Germanwatch, Pakistan reported more than 150 extreme weather events between 1999 and 2018 - from floods to heat waves - with total losses of \$3.8 billion. Environmentalists have long pushed reforestation as a way to help, saying forests help prevent flooding, stabilize rainfall, provide cool spaces, absorb heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions and protect biodiversity.

According to green group WWF, Pakistan is a "forest poor" country where trees cover less than 6% of the

total area. Every year thousands of hectares of forest are destroyed, mainly as a result of unsustainable logging and clearing land for small-scale farming, the group said on its website.

With 7.5 billion rupees (\$46 million) in funding, the 10 Billion Trees project aims to scale up the success of an earlier Billion Tree Tsunami in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where the government has been planting trees since 2014. About 30 million indigenous saplings have been planted in Punjab since the start of the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami - including mulberry, acacia and moringa - said Shahid Rashid Awan, project director for Punjab province. This year, the project hopes to hit 50 million trees, he said. —Reuters

IMF okays \$3.4bn for Nigeria to address COVID-19

WASHINGTON: The IMF board on Tuesday approved \$3.4 billion in emergency financing for Nigeria to help deal with the economic damage inflicted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The loan aims "to support the authorities' efforts in addressing the severe economic impact of the COVID-19 shock and the sharp fall in oil prices," the IMF said in a statement.

The funds come from the IMF's Rapid Financing Instrument, which has been ramped up to get aid quickly to developing nations most vulnerable to the economic effects of shutdowns to contain the outbreak. IMF Managing Director Kristina Georgieva said the fund has received over 100 requests for aid from its members, and developing countries will need about \$2.5 trillion to deal with the impacts of the pandemic.

Africa's most-populous country has been hit by both the virus's arrival in its borders and plunging global demand for oil, Nigeria's top export. A price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia exacerbated the fall in crude prices, and a deal earlier this month between OPEC and other top oil producers hasn't yet undone the damage. "The COVID-19 outbreak-magnified by the sharp fall in international oil prices and reduced global demand for oil products-is severely impacting economic activity in Nigeria," Deputy Managing Director Mitsuhiro Furusawa said.

"These shocks have created large external and financing needs for 2020." He praised the Nigerian government's efforts to respond to the crisis, through higher health spending and support for households and businesses. —AFP

Virus pushes iconic American dept stores to the brink

NEW YORK: The Macy's department store located two blocks from the Empire State Building in New York City is a stop on many tourists' itineraries, but visitors may need to find another shopping temple once the coronavirus pandemic is over. Iconic American department store chains like Macy's, Nordstrom and JCPenney are in a fight for survival as the coronavirus pandemic forces them to close and lay off their employees, worsening their already precarious financial situation.

Sales of clothing and accessories dropped by more than half in March, according to the

APICORP offers \$500m to member countries in recovery support

KUWAIT: The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP), a multilateral development financial institution, announced yesterday that it has launched a \$500 million countercyclical support package aimed at supporting its clients in Member Countries and the region in the energy sector mitigate the impact resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as oil price fluctuations.

The \$500 million package will be deployed to support sustainable impact-driven projects by extending funding for projects and working capital within the areas of utilities, renewables, petrochemi-

Genoa bridge offers ray of hope for Italy

GENOA: A final section of a new bridge in Genoa, built after a deadly 2018 motorway collapse, was to be slotted into place today, providing a much-needed symbol of renewal for coronavirus-hit Italy. Construction of the gleaming structure in northern Italy's coastal Liguria region has continued night and day throughout a national lockdown as the country has battled a virus that has officially killed nearly 27,000 people.

Sirens will sound as the last vast section of deck is put in place and one side of the Polcevera valley is finally reconnected with the other, in a rare success story during Italy's worst crisis since World War II. "Updates on the construction - piece by piece, deck by deck, pillars and so on - have become almost essential for many Italians," the Corriere della Sera wrote last Monday.

"They've allowed them to imagine a

fresh start, allowed them to be proud." Genoa's Morandi highway collapsed during heavy rain on August 14, 2018, hurling dozens of cars and several trucks onto railway tracks below and killing 43 people. The bridge had been riddled with structural problems for decades, leading to expensive maintenance, and its collapse threw the spotlight on Italy's creaking infrastructure.

'How to go on'

Famed Italian architect Renzo Piano designed the replacement, giving it a curved, gleaming underbelly evoking the hull of a ship in tribute to Genoa's maritime history. The high-tech structure will have maintenance robots running along its length to spot weathering or erosion, as well as a special dehumidification system to limit corrosion. "In building the bridge we've been up against time, against the elements, against bad weather, against all the difficulties we've faced," Pietro Salini, CEO of Italy's biggest builder Salini Impregilo, told journalists last week.

"While the rest of the country was wondering how to shut down (as Italy went into lockdown in early March), here the question was how to go on," said Salini, whose company is rebuilding the

store closures," said the company, which also owns the Bloomingdale's and Bluemercury brands. Ratings agency S&P Global downgraded Macy's this month, saying it expected lower sales demand and fewer in-store customers even when social distancing policies are relaxed. JCPenney and Nordstrom are in similar trouble. Analysts at investment bank Cowen think their finances can only last them another eight months.

Kohl's can only survive another five months, Cowen said, while Lord & Taylor is already exploring restructuring. The first to fall could be luxury department store Neiman Marcus.

It was recently unable to meet a debt maturity, prompting S&P to warn they "do not expect the company to make future interest payments and believe (Neiman Marcus) will pursue a comprehensive out-of-court or in-court restructuring."

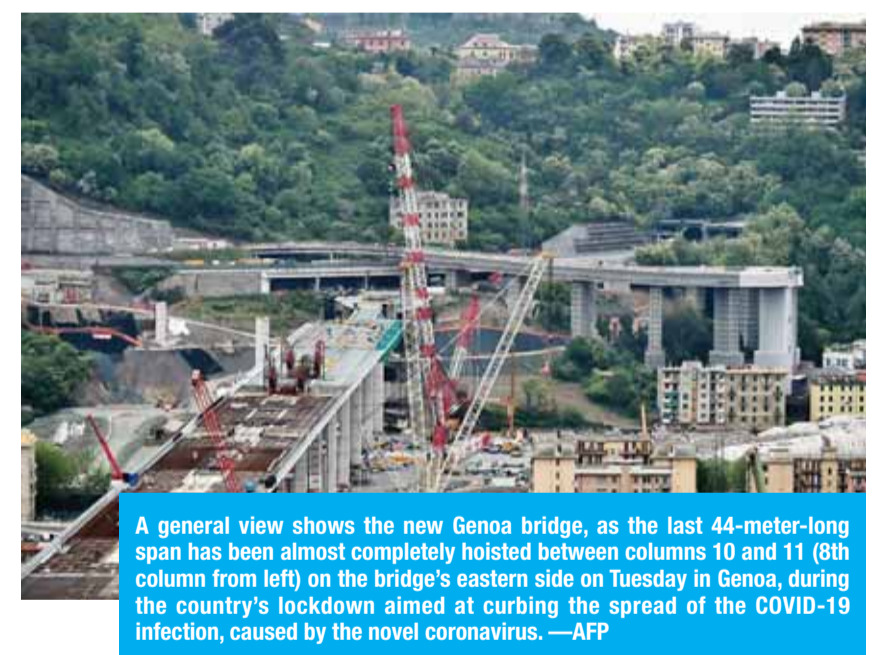
That would mean declaring Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which under US law allows a company to

sectors, in our member countries and beyond, helps to guarantee energy security and access to finance in these times of crisis. We will be working with other multilateral development banks and financial partners to mobilize funding and mitigate the impact on these countries."

APICORP, rated Aa2 with stable outlook by Moody's, recently announced a landmark increase in callable capital to \$8.5 billion, as well as a significant increase in authorized and subscribed capital. This increase further bolsters APICORP's financial sustainability and resiliency.



Dr. Ahmed Ali Attiga



A general view shows the new Genoa bridge, as the last 44-meter-long span has been almost completely hoisted between columns 10 and 11 (8th column from left) on the bridge's eastern side on Tuesday in Genoa, during the country's lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 infection, caused by the novel coronavirus. —AFP

bridge with shipbuilder Fincantieri. Completion work for the new structure measuring about a kilometer will include tarmacking and the installation of transparent wind barriers and solar panels. Stringent road tests will follow. "We hope to have the first traffic cross the

bridge by the end of July," Salini said. Architect Piano, a Genoa native whose building designs include the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and The Shard in London, said the celebrations would be muted out of respect for the victims and their families. —AFP

Time to merge

Department stores' ill fortune can be traced to the rise of e-commerce and shifts in consumer tastes. The success of Amazon and other online stores, along with "fast fashion" brands like H&M and Zara, challenged department stores and forced them to reinvent. They tried launching their own e-commerce sites and creating experiences like yoga classes and pop-up bars, but were sabotaged by their dependence on physical sales.

Sears is now owned by a hedge fund, and New York-based Barneys—a historical name in American men's fashion—went bankrupt last year. L Brands, owner of Victoria's Secret, is heading for a court fight with a private equity firm that said it would buy the emblematic lingerie line in February but then backed out. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait gifts free SIM cards to repatriated citizens

Company supports government's efforts to combat COVID-19

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, affirmed its full support of the government in cooperation with Al-Rahma International Charity by gifting SIM cards which include free internet and free calls to citizens returning to Kuwait on repatriation flights to use during the medical quarantine period.

This initiative stems from the company's corporate social responsibility and a commitment of its efforts during the COVID-19 situation and its commitment to supporting the government and its entities. The free SIM cards were distributed at Kuwait International Airport by members of Ooredoo Kuwait's team which included Chief Business Officer, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil



Initiative in cooperation with Al-Rahma

Al-Ayoub, CSR and Sponsorships Manager, Mohammad Mirza, and Head of the Volunteer Unit at Al-Rahma International Charity, Abdulla Waleed Al-Muthin.

Commenting on this initiative, Chief Business Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain stressed Ooredoo Kuwait's commitment and full support of the government during these times. Al-Babtain recognized the great efforts made by the Kuwaiti Government and its entities in Kuwait's largest repatriation operation in the country's history. Al-Babtain further added, "We are proud to utilize our resources and support the Government in their battle against COVID-19 as this is our way of giving back to our beloved Kuwait".

Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil Al-Ayoub noted that this initiative is in align-



ment with the Company's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy to support the society at all times throughout the year, and across all sectors. This has been Ooredoo Kuwait's strategy since day one, and the company is committed to provide society and the nation with all the support needed under any circumstances. It is worth mentioning that Ooredoo Kuwait has reaffirmed its full support of the Government and its entities in light of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country through an array of initiative while ensuring that customers are staying home as per Government directives. The company reaffirmed its support by collaborating with the Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) by providing customers with free 5GB internet and free calls for one month. At the beginning of the outbreak, the company gifted its customers in Ministries and Governmental Organizations which include the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, Civil Defense, Kuwait Police, Kuwait Airways and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation free internet valid through-

out the month of March in appreciation for their great efforts during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation in the country. Ooredoo Kuwait also provided its services to the Kuwait Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies and to the General Directorate of Civil Defense. And under the umbrella of Corporate Social Responsibility, Ooredoo Kuwait gifted all mothers under health quarantine and the medical staff treating them at Sheikh Jaber Hospital on the occasion of Mother's Day; in addition to gifting all patients under health quarantine and the staff treating them at Aqua Marine Resort, Sea Shell Resort, and Khalifa Resort. This included staff from the Ministry of Health, Council of Ministers, and the Red Crescent Society.

Ooredoo Kuwait has recently launched the ProPing Online Gaming Tournament, in which gaming enthusiasts compete in the online game 'Call of Duty: Modern Warfare' from their homes in a purely digital environment. The tournament is aligned with the company's 'Be Safe. Be Home. Be Online' campaign. The campaign features an array of digital offers and serv-

ices 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.



Bondholders the world over fret about what happens when a company can't repay them, those in China say they have few established precedents or procedures to guide them. —Reuters

Worried China bondholders call for protection

SHANGHAI: China's bondholders are increasingly worried that there is little to protect them from being railroaded into bad deals by troubled borrowers amid a wave of virus-related extensions and restructurings. The country's 25 trillion yuan (\$3.53 trillion) corporate bond market has become an increasingly important funding channel for Chinese companies and government-backed vehicles, but it has limited experience with distress or default.

While bondholders the world over fret about what happens when a company can't repay them, those in China say they have few established precedents or procedures to guide them.

China's first public bond default happened just six years ago. "Onshore investors used to pay less attention to the covenants and provisions," said Ivan Chung, head of Greater China Credit Research & Analysis at Moody's. "Credit incidents and defaults in the past two years have alerted investors about these weaknesses. Yet there are still lots of outstanding bonds in the market with weak protection for investors."

Risks for bondholders are rising even faster now as Chinese officials seek to avert an avalanche of defaults caused by the country's coronavirus-ravaged economy. They are encouraging struggling companies to extend repayment dates or exchange debt coming due for new bonds - both of which need bondholder agreement.

Rising financial costs

Goldman Sachs analysts count at least 10 Chinese borrowers that have avoided defaults this year by extending principal repayments worth a combined 6 billion yuan (\$846.80 million). But not all such agreements have been reached smoothly, and disagreements can carry risk. Inadequate investor protection threatens to "push up companies' financing costs ... and reduce foreigners' willingness to participate in China's bond market," said Xin Chen, finance professor at Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance (SAIF).

China has been courting foreign investors for its local markets to help bolster its currency and fund domestic growth. One of the latest causes of investor outrage was conglomerate HNA, which gave holders of one \$55 million bond just 30 minutes' official notice of a meeting that would extend by a year its imminent

repayment, even though its own rules required 30 days' notice and exchange rules require 10 days. HNA subsequently apologized and explained it had discussed the deferral with major bondholders ahead of the meeting. Three big investors accounting for more than 98 percent of the bonds represented at the meeting voted for the plan, while 29 voted against.

"If authorities give the nod to such a practice, it shows deficiency in our legal protection for bondholders," Chen said of the move. HNA declined to comment.

Bondholders in other companies have complained about the way they have been treated. One angry investor found his line cut off mid-question during a call in February to discuss an offer to pay about 40 cents on the dollar for \$850 million in Qinghai Provincial Investment Group (QPIG) bonds. QPIG didn't reply to requests for comment.

Grabbing attention

Unlike mom-and-pop retail investors, who dominate China's stock market, bondholders fear they can't get officials' attention because they are mostly institutions, and less likely to protest in the streets. For example, while mechanisms for shareholder decisions have long been enshrined in national law, a requirement that companies should have bondholder meetings and disclose relevant rules and procedures in bond prospectuses was only added this March.

"Before it was a bit theoretical what would actually happen in a bankruptcy because you never had one. You can do all the preparation you want but you won't really know what works and what doesn't. Clearly there have been practical issues," said Samuel Fischer, head of China onshore debt capital markets at Deutsche Bank in Beijing. In July, the National Association of Financial Market Institutional Investors (NAFMII), China's interbank market regulator, will introduce new guidelines for bond trustees - third parties who ensure bond conditions are upheld.

Internationally, these have been independent. But in China, they have typically been the banks and brokers underwriting the deal, who may have conflicts of interest, Moody's Chung said. The new guidelines strengthen rules around conflicts of interest and disclosure requirements to bring China more in line with offshore markets. Another thorny issue is courts' unfamiliarity with bondholder issues. Even if meetings and votes do not follow the rules, investors may struggle to contest those because of a lack of legal precedents, according to Lei Jiping, partner at King & Wood Mallesons.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) and NAFMII didn't respond to requests for comment. — Reuters

Trump to order US meat plants to stay open

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump will sign an executive order compelling meat packing plants to stay open, despite a string of coronavirus deaths, in a bid to secure US food supplies, the White House said Tuesday. "President Trump is signing an Executive Order providing the authority to ensure the continued supply of beef, pork, and poultry to the American people," the White House said in a statement.

"Under the order, the Department of Agriculture is directed to ensure America's meat and poultry processors continue operations uninterrupted to the maximum extent possible."

The statement added that the processing plants will be fully compliant with the CDC guidelines on health and safety during the pandemic. Trump had said earlier in the White House that the details of an order were being drawn up for signing but gave no specifics.

The facilities, where animals are slaughtered and processed into food sold in shops, have long struggled with safety and sanitary issues. Facing alarming rates of the novel coronavirus among workers in the often tightly packed work spaces, some suppliers have closed down. —AFP

Samsung profit slips on virus, more falls seen

SEOUL: The world's biggest smartphone maker, Samsung Electronics, reported first-quarter net profits down just three percent yesterday, as the coronavirus pandemic dampened consumer demand, but warned of further falls to come. Net profits in the January-to-March period were 4.88 trillion won (\$4 billion), down 3.1 percent from a year earlier, the company said in a statement.

The first-quarter performance was "partially due to effects of COVID-19", Samsung said in a statement.

And it expects weaker results in the April-June period, it said, adding that "uncertainties driven by COVID-19 will persist" into the second half. The firm is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung Group, by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates known as "chaebols" that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy.

The figures come as the coronavirus pandemic wreaks havoc across the world economy—earlier this month Samsung had operations suspended at 11 overseas assembly lines—with expectations rife of a looming global recession. In Q2, it warned: "Overall earnings are likely to decline from the previous quarter because COVID-19 will significantly impact demand for several of its core products".

Memory demand "is expected to remain robust for servers and PCs as more people work from home", it said. But "sales and profits of set products business, including smartphones and TVs, are expected to decline significantly as COVID-19 affects demand and leads to store and plant closures globally".

3M earnings rise on demand for medical masks

NEW YORK: Industrial giant 3M reported rising quarterly profits Tuesday as it ramps up production of N95 masks while combatting price-gouging and fraud during the coronavirus outbreak.

The company manufactures a wide range of products used in myriad industries, but has become prominent during the COVID-19 outbreak as one of the only producers of N95 "respirator" masks which can protect against the virus.

The masks have been an essential item to hospitals on the front line of the outbreak and have emerged as the object of illicit practices, price gouging and fraud, with new cases announced by federal officials in the last day. 3M experienced a 21 percent surge in sales in its health care business during the first quarter, a key driver of a 45 percent jump in first-quarter profits to \$1.3 billion. Revenues climbed 2.7 percent to \$8.1 billion.

"Even with 3M's accelerated production, the stark reality is that global demand for respirators far outpaces the ability of the entire industry to deliver," chief executive Mike Roman said on a conference call. "That is why we are urgently expand capacity, we are also prioritizing and triaging our supplies to the most critical needs."

Executives described the overall impact of COVID-19 as "mixed" for 3M, with sales in several product lines declining due to shutdowns, including oral care, automotive, aerospace and general industrial. —AFP



SEOUL: Samsung Electronics reported first-quarter net profits down just three percent yesterday as the coronavirus pandemic dampened consumer demand, but warned of further falls to come. —AFP

Woody Oh, a researcher at Strategy Analytics, said the first-quarter results showed only "a slight impact" from the virus outbreak, which emerged in China and spread to the US, Europe and India—Samsung's key markets. "But the real impact will show in the second quarter," he said, adding almost all companies will report their worst results in April-June as the effects of the pandemic become clear. Samsung Electronics shares were down 0.3 percent in morning trade in Seoul.

Samsung had pinned its hopes for 2020 on a rollout of its new 5G and premium smartphones including its latest folding Galaxy Z flip phone. "While a contraction of the global smartphone market is expected as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, demand for 5G smartphones is forecast to grow," DJ Koh, president of Samsung's mobile division told the firm's shareholder meeting last month. —AFP

Debate over use of virus 'immunity passports'

WASHINGTON: Governments and organizations around the world are mulling the use of hotly-debated "immunity passports" aimed at easing pandemic-related lockdowns and restrictions on movements.

The certificates could identify people with antibodies that reduce the risk they will spread the deadly coronavirus, helping them to resume activities and return to work. But global health authorities and experts are urging caution, pointing to concerns over the accuracy of antibody tests as well as privacy fears and the potential for abuse.

Backers of the idea say the people who qualify could receive digital certificates displayed like smartphone boarding passes, or on paper. "If this situation lasts six months or nine months, or if there is a second wave, you can assume people will want to leave their homes," said Husayn Kassai, chief executive of the digital identity startup Onfido.

"There needs to be some mechanism to verify a person's immunity. The immunity passport, if it works effectively, is more likely to help people comply with staying at home."

Onfido, which has been in talks with the British government and other authorities, said immunity would be determined by a home testing kit similar to those used for pregnancy tests and validated by health authorities. These could flash as green for fully immune, amber for partly immune or red for risky. The results could be modified in a database if needed, according to Kassai.

British-based startup Bizagi has a "CoronaPass" developed for businesses to screen employees, but CEO Gustavo Gomez says "it could help a lot more people" return to activity.

French tech startup Socios is developing an immunity pass for sporting events so that "only fans who are at low or zero health risk are initially able to attend matches," according to its website.

Chile this month began issuing certificates to people who have recovered from COVID-19; talks on similar efforts are ongoing in Germany



WASHINGTON: Governments and organizations around the world are mulling the use of hotly-debated "immunity passports" aimed at easing pandemic-related lockdowns and restrictions on movements. — Reuters

and elsewhere.

Accuracy unclear

The World Health Organization recently issued a warning that there was "not enough evidence" to give people "risk-free certificates," but hours later appeared to backpedal with a modified statement. In the follow-up, WHO said it expected that people who are infected with COVID-19 "will develop an antibody response that will provide some level of protection" but added that "what we don't yet know is the level of protection or how long it will last."

Claire Standley, a research professor specializing in public health at the Georgetown University Center for Global Health Science and

Security, said she was skeptical of the certificates in part due to the "lack of certainty over the extent to which antibodies offer protection against reinfection."

University of California-San Francisco pathologist Alan Wu also sounded a note of caution. "Everybody wants to be believe that if I have antibodies, I'm immune," said Wu. "Well, we can't be certain of that. The antibody test for this virus hasn't been around long enough to show that nobody can get infected again if they have antibodies."

Privacy concerns

The idea of immunity certificates is not new. Children who get vaccinations for measles, polio

and other diseases often must show certificates to attend schools. The adult film industry used a system for several years called SxCheck that provided certificates to show performers were free of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Some fear a stigma against those who are not immune, from systems developed in China where a person's status is displayed on a device.

But firms specializing in digital identity maintain that it is feasible to create immunity certificates without sacrificing privacy. Kassai said that privacy could be maintained by using QR codes, read by a scanner and associated with a person's photo.

"Immunity passports prove that you are who you claim to be and the test results belong to you. You don't need to share any more information," said Kassai.

Dakota Greuner, executive director of ID2020, a consortium of digital identity organizations and focused on privacy, said any certification program should be done "using identity technology that places control of private data in the hands of the individual." But the passports could create other issues—such as, according to Standley, a perverse incentive for people to deliberately infect themselves to obtain a certificate, allowing them to return to work or normal activity.

"There are people who are legitimately struggling, economically and socially," she said. "The longer the restrictions continue, the more likely it is, I would think, that people may consider risking their own health if they see a potential way out of lockdowns." The deployment of immunity certifications would be "a spectacularly unsuitable path that is unlikely to be useful and is likely to be harmful," said Jules Polonetsky, chief executive of the Future of Privacy Forum, a Washington advocacy group.

"If people want to go back to work there are huge incentives for cheating or figuring out how to share a code or get one of these certificates so they can work," he said. — AFP

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Surfers and swimmers head to the ocean after Bondi Beach reopened following a five week closure in Sydney on Tuesday, amid the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic.—AFP photos



Surfers are seen in the ocean after Bondi Beach reopened.

SURF'S UP: SYDNEY REOPENS ITS FAMOUS BONDI BEACH



A man poses with a message on his back before enjoying his first swim after Bondi Beach reopened.

Hundreds of Sydney-siders rushed into the waves at the city's famous Bondi Beach yesterday as Australia took the first steps in easing coronavirus restrictions. Dozens of eager surfers jumped railings and hit the water even before the beach officially opened at 7:00 am, five weeks after police sealed the area off because of large crowds ignoring social distancing orders. More ruly swimmers and boarders lined up patiently and cheered as council workers moved fences aside to allow them through. Although there were large numbers in the sea, the sand remained largely empty as people are still barred from sunbathing or gathering on the shore. "Surf and go" signs urged people to move on when they had finished in the water.

The reopening of Bondi and a couple of neighboring beaches came as several of Australia's states began slowly easing restrictions on public

gatherings, spurred by a slowing of confirmed coronavirus cases around the country. New South Wales signaled yesterday that it would follow other moves in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory in easing social distancing measures by allowing two visitors into people's homes in the state. "Please, please do that responsibly; we trust everybody to do it responsibly; don't take risks," NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said about the easing — which comes into effect on Friday. "We don't want to see the numbers suddenly spike up."

She also cautioned that increased activity, including the return of schools and the reopening of some shops, would cause infections to rise but the health system was ready to cope. Despite the early fence-hoppers, most people at Bondi Beach appeared to be embracing the added freedoms while sticking to distancing guidelines. "I've been

excited for like a week, I was like: 7:30 right here, definitely super exciting," Diane Delaurens told AFP, still dripping from the surf. John Minto, standing with a board under his arm next to his son, said it was great to be back in the water. "The surf's not great but, hey, no one's complaining today," Minto said.

Western Australia now allows gatherings of up to 10 people while Queenslanders will be given slightly more freedom to travel in the state from Saturday as the country eyes a way out of virus shutdowns. Australia has confirmed some 6,700 cases of COVID-19, with 84 deaths for a population of about 25 million. There have been fewer than 20 new cases of the disease per day over the past week.—AFP

New research reveals more of the 'Girl with a Pearl Earring'

Scientific investigation of Vermeer's world-famous painting "Girl with a Pearl Earring" has revealed elements that make her more "personal", even if her identity remains a mystery. The Mauritshuis art museum, where the painting is housed, announced on Tuesday that an examination — the first of its kind — had revealed the presence of tiny eyelashes around the girl's eyes, invisible to the naked eye. Research also established the existence of a green curtain in the seemingly empty background of the painting dating from 1665, a sort of "folded fabric" that has faded to black over the centuries.



In this file photo shows Johannes Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring" painting inside a XRF macro-scanner during a research at The Mauritshuis in The Hague. —AFP

Art lovers and researchers around the world have long been fascinated by the Dutch master's painting of the young woman with an enigmatic look, wearing a blue and yellow turban, a heavy pearl hanging from her ear. It has inspired further artworks, notably Tracy Chevalier's 1999 novel "The Girl with the Pearl Earring"

which gave rise to an Oscar-nominated film starring Scarlett Johansson and Colin Firth. "The results of The Girl in the Spotlight research project... offers a glimpse of a much more 'personal' painting than previously thought," The Hague's Mauritshuis said.

The museum said the examination used non-invasive imaging and scanning techniques, digital microscopy and paint sample analysis. Conducted by an international team of scientists from February 2018, the review shed new light on the use of pigments and how Vermeer developed his work using different layers. The grand master, for example, modified the composition of the painting, shifting the position of the ear, the top of the scarf and the nape of the neck.

He also used raw materials from around the world, including the semi-precious lapis lazuli stone from Afghanistan to make ultramarine which was "more precious than gold" in the 17th century. The pearl itself is an "illusion", says the Mauritshuis, made up of "translucent and opaque touches of white paint", while the hook is missing. The examination did not, however, identify the girl, or establish whether she really existed or if she is the product of Vermeer's imagination. "The girl hasn't revealed the secret of her identity yet but we got to know her a little better," said museum director Martine Gosselink. "This is not the end point of our research." Chevalier tweeted that the new research was "interesting", adding that "all details are important". Her fictional tale chronicling a young maid who is taken into the Vermeer household and becomes his muse and model for the painting has sold over five million copies worldwide. The author joked that she did not want the museum to discover the girl's true identity. "If that happens, my book is toast!" she tweeted. —AFP

Free content during pandemic threatens cultural industries: UN

Books, films, concerts: free content has been spreading almost as fast as the coronavirus, making life easier for those sheltering from the pandemic, but also threatening already fragile cultural industries, the UN warned Tuesday. As countries around the world have imposed strict physical distancing measures to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus — cancelling events, banning public gatherings, and asking billions of people to stay home — access to free cultural content online has become omnipresent.

While some content creators have themselves opted to make their artistic products available, Francis Gurry, the head of the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization, voiced concern that numerous requests are coming in for IP "exceptions... for the cultural sector to disregard copyright". WIPO's IP rules do permit exceptions to cultural copyright to facilitate access to books, publications and other creative content in certain specific circumstance and under certain conditions. But in an interview with AFP, Gurry questioned whether it was justified to use the ongoing pandemic, which has killed more than

210,000 people worldwide, as an excuse to make entire museum exhibits, operas, ballets, concerts and publications available to the public at no cost.

'Deep distress'

"We should be much more measured," he said, pointing out that such moves were dramatically slashing the income of many professionals in an already fragile sector. "To cast off a copyright, you have to prove that there is a special need," he said. "I do not really see evidence of a problem accessing content" in the current situation, he said, pointing out that it was still possible to purchase cultural goods online, like books and music. At the same time, he said, content creators have been hard-hit by the crisis. Many in the field had completely lost their revenue streams, Gurry warned, pointing for instance to film production, which has all but ground to a halt, where hundreds of people are usually involved in making a single movie. "It is hard to quantify the consequences as this is happening, but the sector is in deep distress," he said.—AFP



Face covers are on display outside a clothing store in Berlin on Tuesday amid the new coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Masks are mandatory in shops across Germany from yesterday, as medical experts warned the public to stay disciplined after official data offered a mixed picture on the battle against the novel coronavirus since Europe's biggest economy began a cautious easing of lockdown measures.—AFP

Bye bye tutus, hello masks: French Opera houses join COVID battle

Normally they make tutus and elaborate costumes for some of the greatest opera and ballet stars in the world. But the costume makers from opera houses across France are now turning their considerable talents to making masks. Since the beginning of April, Christine Neumeister, the costume director of the Paris Opera, has been driving around collecting masks 30 of her couturiers have made while locked down at home.

The first week they made 1,000 for the Red Cross and a Paris maternity hospital, and the following week they made a similar number for the Salvation Army. Packed into "tutu bags" marked "Opera de Paris", they have to be among the chicest personal protection accessories around — although staff from the French couture houses Dior and Louis Vuitton have also been volunteering to turn their hands to mask making.

Useful in a crisis

"We have the material and the know-how," said German-born Neumeister. "It's also rewarding for us too to know that our work, which is an art in itself, can be useful in this moment of crisis," she added. "My German grandmother used to say that during the war people who could make something with their hands were the heroes, the kings and the queens."

With chronic shortages of masks for the general public and even medical and nursing home staff in France, there is no shortage of takers. The country is likely to make wearing mask obligatory in some public spaces when its strict lockdown begins to be relaxed from May 11. Mask-making in the costume departments of opera houses across France only began in earnest after the official norms were posted online at the end of March. Neumeister "opted for a mask with three folds which resembles a surgical one and which allows you to breathe better than the duck-beak model."

She said it was made with lightweight poplin with a cotton fleece in the middle. "It has to be washable to 60 degrees Celsius (140F)," Neumeister said it takes about 20 minutes to make, slower than if her staff were working in their studio.

Fabric shortages

Isabelle Daumas and 20 of her colleagues from the Toulouse Opera in southwest France will also start turning out masks to the same high standards from Monday. And like several staff and artists from the Capitole de Toulouse, which houses the opera, a ballet and orchestra, every day she has been helping to disinfect centers set up to receive people who may have COVID-19. At the Marseille Opera, they have gone even further, asking for their masks to get the official imprimatur of the local authorities for use by their staff.

Rather than working from home, "five or six people work each day in the studio", sticking rigidly to social distancing rules, said Aude Eisinger, who set up the drive for the local council. With 1,000 masks a week to turn out, "we are drawing on the opera's stock of fabrics because getting fresh supplies is difficult," she added.

It's a similar situation at the Bordeaux Opera where technical director Yves Jouen said "our usual suppliers of fabric are pretty much out of stock." There a small group of costume makers cut the fabric in the opera's workshops before delivering them to the homes of their colleagues who do the sewing. "We even have musicians from the orchestra who are sewers lending a hand," Jouen said.—AFP



One of the colorful masks being turned out from the workshops of the Marseille Opera in southern France.

Lifestyle | Features



Owner James Tallon poses with bags of flour at Martry Mill in Kells, County Meath, Ireland.—AFP photos



Owner James Tallon poses with a shovel of grain for making flour at Martry Mill.



A picture shows grain for making flour at Martry Mill in Kells.

Irish flour mill ramps up daily grind to feed virus baking surge

In the countryside outside Dublin, the river Blackwater turns the colossal water wheel of Martry Mill, spinning rumbling cogs and grinding stones that produce flour to feed coronavirus crisis demand. “We could work 24 hours a day,” said owner James Tallon, 64, the fourth generation in his family to operate the traditional wholemeal mill outside Kells in County Meath, eastern Ireland. “Even our local supermarkets that maybe sold five cases of flour in a week could now sell 50 cases of flour if we could supply it.”

Ireland has been in lockdown since March 28 and 1,102 people have died after testing positive for COVID-19, according to the latest statistics. Pent up in their homes, many Irish people have turned to baking to pass the time. Supermarkets have been regularly stripped of flour, with some enforcing limits on purchases per customer, and producers have been forced to ramp up output.

Rising to the occasion

At the Martry Mill, which dates back to 1641, Tallon and his son are now grinding flour at full capacity for bakeries, supermarkets and shops around County Meath. The water wheel powers a puzzle of cogs inside the mill, which is filled with the sound of production, the odor of seasoned wood — and a fine white dust. On the first floor, a steady ribbon of grain is fed between lumbering millstones.

The rough flour falls down a level where it is sifted and then scooped into paper parcels by Tallon’s son, who stands ready in white overalls and a cap. In this way, the Martry Mill is now producing between 1.0 to 1.5 tonnes of flour each day — more than 500 two-kilogram (4.4-pound) bags. “Pre the COVID thing, we’d be lucky to do that amount in maybe two weeks,” Tallon told AFP. He said the situation was reminiscent of stories his father had told him about

the mill working continuously during the world wars — tales he had taken with “a pinch of salt” until now.

Larger scale Irish operations like the firm Odlums, which produces a range of 120 baking products from its industrial mill southwest of Dublin are also seeing “unprecedented demand”. “The dedicated team in our Portllington mill are working around the clock,” the firm said in a notice to customers. Meanwhile, social media is awash with users sharing triumphant images of their lockdown baking creations.

‘Life goes in circles’

Tallon has a theory about the popularity of baking in times of crisis. “Time has become a commodity that people now have that they didn’t have before,” he said. “They were so busy running, chasing, going. “When they actually stand back and look at life now they realize that home baking, home food, quality

food at home, it’s actually much cheaper and it’s actually much better for you.

“There’s much more pleasure to be got from actually making your own bread, and kneading your bread, and baking it in the oven, and the smell that that creates in the house.” Ireland’s lockdown is due to last until May 5, although many measures are likely to be extended further. Those sheltering at home can find succour in the small comforts, and perhaps the wisdom of Tallon’s own father, who told him how the good times will always come again. “He described life as like the water wheel itself,” said Tallon. “He said life goes in full circles.”—AFP

Top US theater chain pulls Universal films over streaming row

The leading US movie theater chain said Tuesday it will no longer play any Universal Pictures movies on its screens as a row over the record-breaking release of “Trolls World Tour” on streaming platforms sharply escalated. The children’s film sequel from Universal Pictures — one of Hollywood’s largest and oldest studios — was released directly to on-demand platforms last month after its theatrical release was hit by the coronavirus. At the time the studio indicated the move was an exceptional response to the pandemic. But a report Tuesday quoted a Universal boss saying the studio’s movies would now be released “on both formats” even once theaters reopen, due to the film’s record \$95 million streaming haul.

Before the pandemic, studios typically waited 90 days to release films digitally after their theatrical opening. The row comes at a time of dire warnings over the future of the theater industry, as streaming soared in popularity even before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Theaters around the world took in an all-time record \$42.5 billion last year — boosted by a string of Disney mega-hits — but most of the growth came outside North America.

‘Winning strategy’

The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday reported “Trolls” earned a huge \$95 million from nearly five million domestic customers, citing “a person familiar with the matter.” According to the report, “its performance has convinced Universal executives that digital releases can be a winning strategy, and may diminish the role of theaters even after the pandemic passes.” “As soon as theaters reopen, we expect to release movies on both formats,” NBCUniversal head Jeff Shell told the newspaper, adding the film had “exceeded our expectations and demonstrated the viability” of streaming.

Theater owners quickly downplayed the report. “Universal does not have reason to use unusual circumstances in an unprecedented environment as a springboard to bypass true theatrical releases,” said National Association of Theatre Owners head John Fithian. Neither Universal Pictures nor AMC responded to request for comment. “Trolls World Tour” is one of many studio titles — in particular, family films — to recently skip the traditional “theatrical window” due to coronavirus. Warner Bros will release “Scoob!” direct to streaming next month, Disney has earmarked “Artemis Fowl” for Disney+, and Paramount title “Lovebirds” is headed straight to Netflix, in another industry first. Major US movie theaters do not plan on reopening until the summer, despite some states authorizing cinemas to resume business.—AFP



This file photo a view of the entrance of Universal Studios Hollywood, closed during the novel coronavirus pandemic, in North Hollywood, California.—AFP

AMC, the largest theater chain with 8,000 screens across North America, responded with a letter to Universal stating that “effectively immediately AMC will no longer play any Universal movies in any of our theatres in the United States, Europe or the Middle East.” “AMC believes that with this proposed action to go to the home and theatres simultaneously, Universal is breaking the business model and dealings between our two companies,” CEO Adam Aron added in the letter carried by US media.



In this file photo an Oscars statue is displayed on the red carpet area on the eve of the 92nd Oscars ceremony at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California.



In this file photo taken a man wearing a mask walks past the closed box office in front of the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. —AFP photos

OSCARS SUSPEND MOVIE THEATER RULE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS

Movies that skip the big screen will be allowed to contend for Oscars this year, the Academy said Tuesday in a significant rule change forced by the coronavirus pandemic. Traditionally the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences requires at least a seven-day run in Los Angeles theaters for movies to be eligible for Hollywood’s biggest prize. But picture houses in America’s second city have been closed since mid-March, with no date set for them to reopen. “Until further notice, and for the 93rd Awards year only, films that had a previously planned theatrical release but are initially made available on a commercial streaming... platform may qualify,” the Academy said in a statement.

Debate has raged in recent years over Oscar contenders produced by streaming giants such as Netflix, including last year’s “The Irishman” and 2018’s “Roma.” Until now, the films have been shown at theaters for brief windows before moving online, in order to remain eligible. The Academy, seen as the apex body of the Hollywood film industry, insisted that its commitment to viewing “the magic of movies” at a theater is “unchanged and unwavering.” “Nonetheless, the historically tragic COVID-19 pandemic necessitates this temporary exception to our awards eligibility rules,” added President David Rubin and CEO Dawn Hudson.

Once theaters reopen, the Academy will set a date from which the rule change will no longer apply, and standard theatrical qualifying requirements will return. But films released at theaters in major cities outside Los Angeles will also become eligible. Under other new rules agreed by governors in a Tuesday Zoom video call meeting, sound mixing and sound editing Oscars will be merged. Allowances will be made for scrapped film festivals that serve as qualifying events for movies in certain categories. With the pandemic threatening to wreak havoc on Hollywood’s award season, industry bodies have been scrambling to adapt to the closure of theaters and postponement of major titles.

Last month the Golden Globes became the first to relax entry rules, allowing films that had planned “a bona fide theatrical release” to compete even if the release was later scrapped. Other major award shows contacted by AFP at the time said it was too early to decide on changes. Major US movie theaters say they do not plan on reopening until the summer, despite Georgia authorizing cinemas to resume screenings on Monday, and Texas planning to follow suit. The 93rd Oscars will still take place on February 28, 2021 as planned, the Academy said.—AFP

Iraqi family in Germany returns cash hidden in sewing machine

An Iraqi family living in Germany were pleasantly surprised when they stumbled upon two old sewing machines by the side of the road, just as they were in need of home-made coronavirus masks. But the real surprise was lurking inside one of the machines: 1,000 euros (\$1,085) in cash, stashed there by the previous owner and forgotten about. “We immediately called the police who tracked down the owner,” 21-year-old Sherzad Ahmed told AFP Monday. “He was very, very happy.” The feelgood story happened in the small German town of Morsbach last Wednesday, local police said in a statement.

The 56-year-old owner had hidden the money in the sewing machine when he was visiting Christmas markets as a travelling salesman last year before forgetting all about the “secret hiding place”, police said. Ahmed, who came to Germany with his parents and two sisters four years ago, said they never considered keeping the cash. “No, no, no,” he laughed, adding that the owner had rewarded the honest finders with 200 euros. Ahmed’s father repaired the machines and his mother, who works in an old people’s home, has been churning out masks ever since.—AFP

Reinvent the reel: Hollywood mulls new measures to restart shooting

Movie moguls, directors and lawyers are searching for radical solutions to reopen Hollywood as soundstages gather dust and studio profits slide weeks after cameras stopped rolling due to coronavirus. The film industry has been on lockdown in California since mid-March following strict stay-at-home orders, with movie and television shoots particularly exposed to the pandemic because of the large casts and crews required. But even as politicians mull a gradual easing of restrictions, insiders say Tinseltown’s sky-high costs — and liabilities — mean filmmaking could look very different to what came before, and be many months away.

“It’s impossible to make a ‘Star Wars’ or a Marvel

movie tomorrow morning,” said Nicolas Chartier, Oscar-winning producer of “The Hurt Locker.” “Logically, there’s too much liability and there’s too much fear,” agreed fellow producer Stephen Nemeth (“Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.”) “I can’t see a movie like ‘Dune’ getting produced now. I can’t see another epic film like ‘Mad Max’ — these films are 250 crew members and 250 extras. We just can’t control it.” Though California has been praised for its pandemic response, the movie industry heartland has still recorded 45,000 cases, disproportionately centered around Los Angeles.

As such, insurance companies refuse to cover future production halts caused by on-set coronavirus out-

breaks — delays that could cost millions on blockbuster projects. “Coronavirus waivers” signed by employees have been touted as a way to protect studios from lawsuits, but are unproven particularly where A-list stars are involved. Replacing crowd scenes with computerized background actors is another option being explored, but “would cost a fortune,” said Chartier. “In my opinion, the big movies as we knew them — to the extent that they’re ever going to be back as we knew them — won’t be until there is an actual vaccine,” added Nemeth.

‘Moral dilemma’

One possible interim solution is temperature, virus or antibody tests for those entering sets. On-set social distancing is being trialed in Sweden and Denmark, where production has resumed on sterilized soundstages, and studios are discouraged from hiring over-70s or those with health conditions. Steven Soderbergh, director of prescient 2011 pandemic thriller “Contagion,” is leading a taskforce to explore similar options in Hollywood.

But those restrictions are far from practical on crowded film sets, and could lead to discrimination and other dangers, warned producers Jean de Meuron and Elena Bawiec. “The crew that are most vulnerable is the ‘below-the-line’ crew — the gaffers, the grips, the electric, the camera,” said de Meuron. “You can’t put six-foot distance... the focus puller is right next to the camera operator, they’re within a couple of inches from one another.” —AFP



In this file photo a man in a mask walks past a sign near Madame Tussauds wax museum, one of the popular tourist attractions in Hollywood, California.



In this file photo the closed Paramount Studios are seen amid the coronavirus pandemic in Los Angeles, California.—AFP photos

Fuel truck bomb kills more than 40 in northern Syria

BEIRUT: A fuel truck bomb in a market in northern Syria killed at least 46 people including Turkish-backed rebel fighters on Tuesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The blast in Afrin, a city controlled by Ankara's proxies, came as people went shopping in preparation to break the Ramadan fast, according to the US State Department, which condemned the attack as a "cowardly act of evil".

Photos released by the Syrian Civil Defense rescue workers, also known as the "White Helmets", showed firefighters battling to douse

flames amid gutted buildings and rescue workers carrying charred bodies away from the scene on makeshift stretchers. Rami Abdul Rahman, head of the Britain-based Observatory, a monitor with a network of sources inside Syria, said "at least 46" people had been killed and 50 wounded, some critically, adding that the death toll could rise. At least six pro-Turkish Syrian fighters were among the dead, he added. In a post on its official Twitter account, the Observatory said 11 children were among those killed.

It was not immediately clear who was behind

the blast, one of the largest to rock Afrin since Turkish troops and allied rebels seized the region from Kurdish forces in March 2018 after a two-month air and ground offensive. The Turkish defense ministry blamed the attack on the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which it views as a "terrorist" offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). "The enemy of humanity PKK/YPG has once again targeted innocent civilians in Afrin," the Turkish ministry said on Twitter.

US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugus said the attack had claimed the "lives of

dozens of people shopping in the central market as they prepared to break the Ramadan fast". "Such cowardly acts of evil are unacceptable from any side in this conflict." The PKK has been waging a bloody insurgency in Turkey for three decades. In January, at least seven people were killed in a car bombing in Azaz, another northern city held by pro-Turkey forces, according to the Observatory. The Syrian conflict has killed more than 380,000 people since 2011 and forced more than half of the country's pre-war population from their homes. — AFP

US gov't reveals details of sunlight study on virus

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Homeland Security revealed to AFP on Tuesday new technical details regarding its highly anticipated study into how ultraviolet radiation destroys the new coronavirus, saying that its experiment had accurately mimicked natural sunlight. A summary of the research was presented last week at the White House, with some scientists calling for caution until a more comprehensive report was made public.

US President Donald Trump raised eyebrows last week when he used his daily live national press briefing to ask whether light could become a medical treatment. "Supposing we hit the body with a tremendous - whether it's ultraviolet or just very powerful light," he said. "Supposing you brought the light inside the body, which you can do either through the skin or in some other way." Trump continued on to suggest that people inject disinfectants to cure the virus, an idea that health experts quickly shot down.

DHS official William Bryan had briefed the media that the amount of virus on a non-porous surface shrunk by half in just two minutes when sunlight was present, the temperature was 21-24 Celsius and humidity was 80 percent. The amount of virus suspended in air shrunk to half its amount in just 1.5 minutes at room temperature and 20 percent humidity, he added.

These eye-catching results surprised experts because most of the UV light contained in natural sunlight belongs to a subtype called UVA, which causes human skin to tan and age but has not generally been proven harmful to viruses. David Brenner, director of the Center for Radiological Research at Columbia University Medical Center, told AFP.

On the other hand, a part of the spectrum called UVC is particularly adept at warping the genetic material of animal and virus cells and is widely used in sterilizing lamps, but it is not present in sunlight because it is filtered out by the Earth's atmosphere. Asked for further details on the type of UV light that

was used, Lloyd Hough, a DHS scientist overseeing the test, said: "The spectrum of light that was used was designed to approximate natural sunlight that you would expect to see at noon at sea level at a mid-latitude location (eg, mid-Atlantic, 40 degrees N) on the first day of summer."

"More specifically, it approximates the wavelengths of light predicted by the National Center for Atmospheric Research's (NCAR) Tropospheric Ultraviolet and Visible (TUV) Radiation Model for noon at 40 degrees N latitude at sea level on June 21st in range of 280 and 400 nanometer wavelengths." The wavelengths specified pertain only to long- and medium-wave ultraviolet, also known as UVA and UVB - the UV components of sunlight that penetrate the atmosphere - and not UVC.

A DHS spokesman added that the test - which was conducted at the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center in Maryland - was carried out on droplets of simulated saliva on a stainless steel surface. Brenner, who is himself performing research into another area of the UV spectrum called far-UVC, which kills microbes without penetrating human skin, said the DHS findings did not comport with previous research.

"There is a peer-reviewed paper in the literature from the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) showing the earlier SARS-CoV virus did not respond to UVA light (though it did respond to UVC light)," he said, adding it is "reasonable to assume that all coronaviruses respond roughly the same way to light." The results as presented were "straining credulity", he added. But a DHS spokesman said that study would soon be submitted for peer review and published in scientific journals. "While the results are still undergoing a rigorous scientific review, we felt it important to share information on the emerging trends that are being identified in our tests," the spokesman said. — AFP

How poo can be silver bullet in...

Continued from Page 1

came up positive in Rome and Milan. Experts say drinking water in countries with strict treatment procedures is also safe.

While the presence of the virus in feces does not mean that it can be transmitted through them, being exposed to effluent "could pose a health risk", warned researchers Willemijn Lodder and Ana Maria de Roda Husman from the Dutch Centre for Infectious Diseases Control in a paper in The Lancet. The center reported late last month that it detected genetic material from the virus in waste water in Amsterdam. But the pair also insist that wastewater could be a precious "data source, indicating if the virus is circulating in the human population".

It could even allow experts to "track the virus", French virologist Professor Vincent Marechal of the Sorbonne university in Paris told AFP. In a study of waste water in Paris - which has yet to be validated by other scientists - Marechal and his team found that the rise in levels of genetic material from the virus in water "followed precisely the number of (coronavirus) deaths". Marechal is now call for a national waste water warning system in France which might help "anticipate a second wave" of the virus.

Given the large number of coronavirus cases that have little or no symptoms, wastewater testing could signal the presence of the virus even before

the first cases are clinically confirmed in areas untouched by the epidemic or where it has ebbed. "That would allow barrier measures to be put place and give us time, a key element with this epidemic," Marechal added. Such a system has already worked against other viruses. In a study published in 2018, researchers showed how polio being detected in waste water in Israel in 2013 gave time for a vaccination campaign to be launched, which meant no child was paralyzed by the disease.

For the Sars-Cov-2, waste water studies in several countries are still at an early stage. But some scientists are enthusiastic about their potential. "It could be used as an early warning tool for pandemic surveillance," Dr Warish Ahmed, of the Australian public research agency CSIRO, told AFP. Having found the virus in waste water in Queensland, he said it could also be a key indicator to show if lockdown and other measures were working.

"Access to this type of data could underpin... a surveillance program to identify areas where there is evidence of COVID-19 outbreaks, without requiring testing of all individuals," Dr Warish added. He said although it was a "cost effective way of tracking community-level infection", he warned that it should be used "in combination with other measures, such as the testing of individuals."

Its relative cheapness would also make it useful for countries that "don't have the technical or logistic means to test the carriers" of the virus, Marechal said. He has called on the World Health Organization to set up a worldwide waste water virus detection network, which would help combat other killer diseases beyond COVID-19. "It could be essential in Africa," he said. "To protect a population, you have to safeguard water quality." — AFP

More than three million people worldwide are known to have caught the respiratory disease that first emerged in China in December. China's outbreak appears to be under control with no new deaths reported for two weeks straight and confirmed fatalities at around 4,600 - although much doubt has been cast on these figures' accuracy. Chinese state media said yesterday that the top legislature will next month hold its annual meeting, which had been postponed for the first time in decades due to the virus.

Scientists are scrambling to develop treatments and a vaccine, with myriad studies under way - including one from the US Department of Homeland Security into how ultraviolet radiation destroys the virus. Trump raised eyebrows last week when he asked whether light could become a medical treatment. While that research has not yet been published, people in Indonesia are soaking up rays in the hope that the tropical country's plentiful sunshine will ward off the disease. Hundreds of New Yorkers were able to access walk-in virus and antibody tests for the first time on Tuesday, even without serious symptoms or underlying health issues. — AFP



TANGERANG, Indonesia: This photo taken on April 3, 2020 shows people posing as they soak up some sun with the belief that the sun can boost their body immunity amid concerns over the coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

With fever checks and masks, Dubai...

Continued from Page 1

by the security measures in place. "This shows there is progress in the fight against the virus and that life will soon return to normal," said the young man, his neatly-trimmed beard partially obscured by a blue surgical mask.

The United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is a member, has registered more than 11,000 cases of coronavirus and nearly 100 deaths, and the easing of restrictions has started even though the daily number of new infections is on the rise. For weeks, only the mall's grocery stores and pharmacies carried on working, but the UAE has now allowed malls, restaurants and even hair salons to reopen under social distancing rules.

Thermal cameras fixed to the ceiling around Dubai Mall record temperatures of passersby. Children aged between three and 12, and people of

over 60 or in higher risk groups for the respiratory disease are not allowed in. Protective masks are compulsory - with staff sporting them both in ready-to-wear stores as well as high-end European designer boutiques.

The mall's cinema, skating rink and large fountains, which in normal times attract thousands of tourists packed in for evening shows, remain closed. The mall is operating at 30 percent of capacity to ensure social distancing, and each shop displays the maximum number of people allowed in at a time - from five to several dozen depending on size. "We have introduced technology to control the number of people entering, and receive reports every hour," said Najla Boujellal who works for the mall's owners Emaar. She said they hope to gradually increase to the normal flow of 250,000 visitors per day.

Tourism is a lifeblood for Dubai's economy, and in 2019 it welcomed over 16 million foreign visitors, aiming for 20 million this year before the coronavirus epidemic crippled global travel. Dubai's tourism chief, Hilal Al-Marri, said this week in an interview with Bloomberg TV that the emirate could reopen to international tourism "in July", after having halted arrivals in March. — AFP

Bollywood star, 'Slumdog' actor...

Continued from Page 1

passion for acting and studied at the elite National School of Drama. But his training in Shakespeare and Chekhov did little to ease his entry into the Hindi film industry, which was largely focused at the time on churning out formulaic song-and-dance blockbusters. Even as he landed a role in 1988's "Salaam Bombay" - directed by first-timer Mira Nair - his part was slashed to a cameo.

He sobbed for hours when he found out about the cuts, he told India's Open magazine. "It changed something within me. I was prepared for anything after that," he said. Television roles followed, along with a handful of bit parts in Bollywood, where producers routinely dismissed him as looking too unconventional to play the lead. By the time British director Asif Kapadia cast him as a mercenary in "The Warrior", he was ready to quit acting, frustrated over the direction of his career.

But, in a sign of the global success that lay in wait, the 2001 film raked up awards and won Khan praise - including in India, where a new generation of directors was eager to experiment with fresh storylines. His drama school training came in handy when he was cast in "Mogool" and "Haider" - contemporary Hindi adaptations of "Macbeth" and "Hamlet". But he also charmed audiences in lighter fare such as "Piku", featuring Bollywood superstars Amitabh Bachchan and Deepika Padukone, and "The Lunchbox", in which he played a lonely accountant in love with a housewife.

Bachchan led tributes to Khan yesterday, describing him as "an incredible talent" and "a gracious colleague" whose death had left "a huge vacuum" in the industry. Khan's "Slumdog Millionaire" co-star Anil Kapoor said he was "incredibly saddened" by the news. "He was an inspiration for everyone, a remarkable actor, unmatched talent & a

great human being," Kapoor said on Twitter. "Thank you for enriching our Cinema," tweeted top filmmaker Karan Johar, who praised the star for "raising the bar as an artist".

Khan consciously sidestepped traditional Bollywood tropes, focusing on the subtleties of his craft. This allowed him to carve out a stellar career in Hollywood as well, where he collaborated with Oscar-winning directors such as Danny Boyle and Ang Lee and appeared in the HBO show "In Treatment".

Filmmaker Colin Trevorrow, who directed Khan in the 2015 blockbuster "Jurassic World", described the actor as "a thoughtful man who found beauty in the world around him, even in pain". "In our last correspondence, he asked me to remember 'the wonderful aspects of our existence' in the darkest of days," Trevorrow tweeted.

In an interview with AFP in 2015, Khan said Western audiences "appreciate the elements and layers you bring to the character". But he added: "The informality and personal connections in Bollywood are nice. Things are too compartmentalized in Hollywood, and the system can be rigid."

The father-of-two acted in almost 100 films, winning awards and the admiration of his peers for his nuanced performances. During the press promotions for their film "Inferno" in 2016, Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks reportedly described Khan as "the coolest guy in the room". But his life took a tragic turn in 2018, when he was diagnosed with cancer. The news devastated his fans and India's film community.

Khan took a sabbatical to seek treatment in London - accompanied by his family - before returning to play a middle-aged father in "Angrezi Medium", a follow-up to the 2017 hit "Hindi Medium". He suffered a relapse in the months leading up to the film's release, however, forcing him back to Britain. In an interview with the Mumbai Mirror newspaper in March 2020, he described life after the diagnosis as "a rollercoaster ride, a memorable one". "Happy moments were underlined because of the inherent uncertainty. We cried a little and laughed a lot," he said. — AFP

Million cases in US; economic...

Continued from Page 1

a nationwide lockdown, complaining they could no longer feed their families. And with warnings mounting of a meat shortage in the US, the White House said President Donald Trump would sign an executive order compelling meat-packing plants to stay open, despite a string of coronavirus deaths in the industry.

The United States has reported its millionth coronavirus case, and at over 58,000 the country's COVID-19 death toll is by far the world's highest - surpassing the number of Americans killed in the Vietnam war. Italy, Spain and France have been the worst affected European countries, with each reporting more than 23,000 deaths. Nations from Russia to Nigeria also plan to ease lockdown measures, despite warnings from experts of a second wave of contagion if restrictions are lifted too hastily.

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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very hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You seem to want to become old and wise before your time, Aries. Today's aspects will take you by the hand and lead you back into the heat of the action, experiencing life in all its intensity. Yes, we know you're really afraid of all this. But if you don't get back into action, you'll stay alone in your little corner. The world needs you. Don't be afraid to share your gifts.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Although you might find the day ahead somewhat stressful, it's a key day in your professional evolution. Since you've lacked inspiration lately, you must not miss the opportunity you'll be presented with today. You could find out about an opportunity in a new field, which may lead to a new passion or commitment. Expect to see a new vision of the future forming within you, Libra!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

There is some probability that you'll want to escape from reality today, Taurus. You aren't anxious to face a situation that demands that you commit yourself. Is this because you're afraid that you cannot assume this new responsibility? This is an honest-to-goodness chance to fulfill your dreams of success. There can be no question of evading it! Get busy!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Today the celestial energy will be trying to teach you something, Scorpio, specifically, how to share with others. But first, you must get to a place where you truly want to share something of yourself. Have you examined your tendency to run away? You seem to be afraid that they'll overwhelm you or that you'll owe them something. This isn't the case, Scorpio. Why not give other people a chance to get to know you?



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You face a day of some conflict, Gemini. Nevertheless, the discord will prove quite useful. This is probably one of the best opportunities in recent weeks to become aware of some family matters. These matters may have been occurring behind your back for some time now. News about a bit of past personal history could surprise you, and perhaps even upset you for a short time.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

If you admit you've made a mistake, people are more likely to forgive you. You have a confrontational day ahead, Sagittarius. There's no doubt that you're in a stationary position concerning your career. That may be crimping your style somewhat, financially speaking, but you'll make better progress if you assume your responsibility and see your mistakes. However, don't be too critical of yourself! It's all part of the learning process.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

It might seem like you no longer completely believe in what you're doing, Cancer, perhaps because you've been going a little too quickly in your quest to get what you need. Your social life may have slowed down a lot now - just when you decided to go full speed in this domain. Surprising what the astral energy can do, isn't it? Don't get upset. You can't do a thing about it.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Some of your demons may come back to haunt you today, Capricorn. You could find yourself battling some of those same old doubts and insecurities that you thought you'd left behind. Your desire for a higher standard of living will have you preoccupied with money concerns in the middle of the day. These concerns will pass, so take a deep breath and try not to worry too much.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may have been wishing for some recognition and appreciation lately. The day ahead will show you which path will be the most productive. In order to succeed, Leo, you have to plan everything carefully and focus on one goal. You should be sure you have support for that goal. There's a long, hard climb ahead, but you're bound to make it!



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

It might seem like you no longer completely believe in what you're doing, Aquarius, perhaps because you've been going a little too quickly in your quest to get what you need. Your social life may have slowed down a lot now - just when you decided to go full speed in this domain. Surprising what the astral energy can do, isn't it? Don't get upset. You can't do a thing about it.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

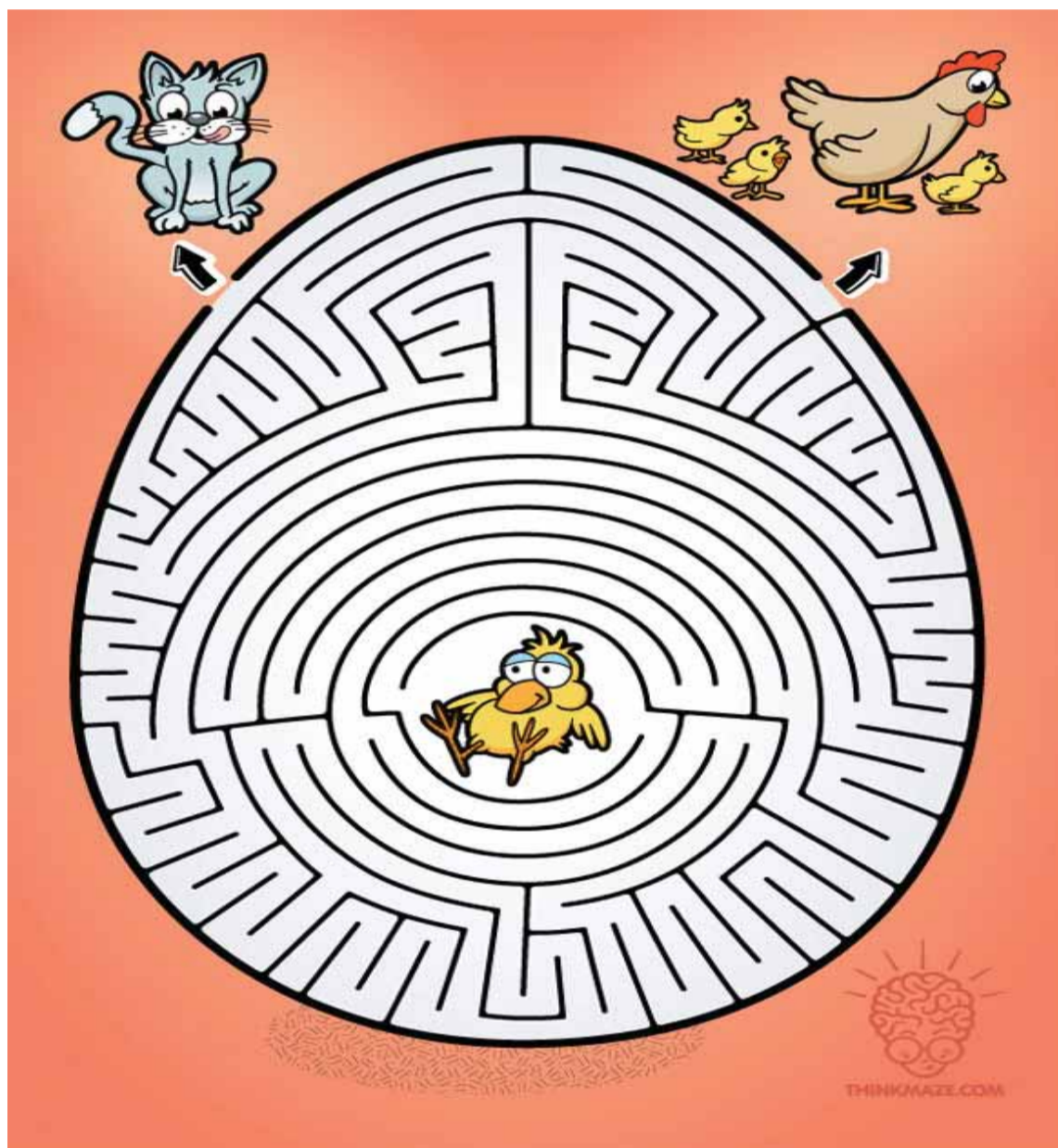
If you happen to be training for a new trade, learning a new technique, or perhaps you're being evaluated after an internship period, you can expect these pursuits to conclude on a high note. You may have been somewhat afraid that those in authority would frown upon your originality, Virgo. On the contrary, it seems the people in charge appreciate it more than you know.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Today's planetary energies will be very demanding, Pisces. As you agonize over whether or not you're up to "standard," the planets, in a very cheeky way, respond that you are not! That's because you're moving too quickly. The change in direction that you're making at the moment is profound, yet you're trying to take it lightly. Dare to slow down and go deeper.

Find the way



Join the dots



Crossword

Hollywood Film Stars
Word Search

DIRECTIONS:
Find and circle the
ALL CAP NAMES
in the grid. Look
for them in all
directions including
backwards and
diagonally.

- Fred ASTAIRE
- Humphrey BOGART
- Marlon BRANDO
- James CAGNEY
- Charlie CHAPLIN

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



- Gary COOPER
- James DEAN
- Kirk DOUGLAS
- Errol FLYNN
- Henry FONDA
- Clark GABLE
- Cary GRANT
- Alfred HITCHCOCK
- Gene KELLY
- Paul NEWMAN
- Laurence OLIVIER
- Gregory PECK
- James STEWART
- Spencer TRACY
- John WAYNE
- Orson WELLES

Sports

Photo of the Day



VERMONT: Sean Neary rides during the Red Bull Slide In Tour at Stratton Mountain, Vermont, USA. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

MotoGP boss
'optimistic'
of July start

PARIS: MotoGP chief Carmelo Ezpeleta said on Monday he was hopeful the season would start in July after having to cancel or postpone the opening eight races due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Right now we are optimistic to make a season between July and November," Ezpeleta, the CEO of MotoGP promoter Dorna, told broadcasters BT Sport. "If it's possible then we will be able to but it depends on the situation because we need to take care about different things," he added.

Ezpeleta said the two other options being considered are commencing in September as well as starting later in the year. Six of the of the season's 12 races not to be postponed or cancelled are set to be held in Europe. Despite his positivity the Spaniard said having borders closed across the world poses a problem. "One is any individual country will need to allow us to do it when the doors are open and second is the possibility of travelling from one country to another," he said.

"In principle we will concentrate on trying to make a championship in Europe. "Depending on what the situation is, we will consider the possibility of going to the end of the year if the countries allow us to do it," he added. Ezpeleta said if the campaign is to start then the races will be held behind closed doors. "We consider right now the most possible scenario is without spectators because unfortunately we don't think for this season it will be possible unless there is vaccine. It will be difficult to have spectators," he said. Confirmation regarding the MotoGP season will be published in the coming days, a source told AFP. — AFP

Andy Murray says resuming season stalled by pandemic not top priority

Tennis players want to get back to competing as soon as possible

LONDON: Resuming the tennis season stalled by the coronavirus pandemic is not the most important thing as players first want to live their normal lives again, former world number one Andy Murray said.

Professional tennis has been suspended since March because of the outbreak and the ATP and WTA Tours have said the hiatus will continue at least until mid-July. Murray had previously said that tennis would be one of the last sports to resume. "I'm sure all tennis players want to get back to competing as soon as possible," Murray said following his win over Rafa Nadal in the virtual Madrid Open esports tournament.

"But right now, that is not the most important thing. First of all, we want to get our normal lives back. Then, hopefully, over time things will start to allow for travelling and sport will be able to go back to normal.

"But I don't see that happening very soon ... The first thing is to try and find a way to stop the virus spreading and once we've done that we'll be able to do more normal things rather than thinking about

competing in sport."

Murray said reopening borders for international travel could stall the progress made in curbing the spread of the virus. "If we get back to international travel, then maybe there could be a second wave of infections," he said.

"That would slow everything down again and that's not what anyone wants. Let's just get things back to normal first." Murray also had a bit of banter with Nadal after handing out the Spanish 19-times Grand Slam singles champion a lesson in video game.

In a post-match interview, Murray said: "If you speak to Rafa, tell him not to be such a bad loser next time." "I don't need to train a lot to beat him in this game. He's not very good," Murray joked, after his 3-0 win during which he lost only one point. "If I practised a lot, it would have been even worse for him today!"

Nadal said he was not in the frame of mind to go out and compete on a tennis court when the lockdown ends. "My hope is to see my family and friends

again and to go out for a party or to the sea to swim," the 33-year-old told the Spanish press recently. "I want to feel free again and be able to hug my loved

ones, as I'm a loving person.

"I can't conceive a future where I can't hug players I haven't seen in months." — Reuters



Andy Murray

AIBA moves 2021 world boxing championships

NEW DELHI: The 2021 Men's World Boxing Championships have been moved to Belgrade from New Delhi, the International Boxing Association (AIBA) said on Tuesday. In a statement, AIBA said it had terminated New Delhi's contract after it did not pay an agreed host fee, meaning that India will have to pay a cancellation penalty of \$500,000 (461,366 euros).

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) blamed AIBA for its inability to pay the host fee, saying that AIBA's bank account in Lausanne was "frozen". "AIBA could not resolve these issues," Indian media quoted the BFI as saying.

"We have reasons to believe that the decision to change the venue of WCH-2021 was taken in haste without due consultation with BFI ... the penalty that is imposed is shocking and surprising."

The BFI added that it feels it has no obligation to pay any cancellation or penalty fees to AIBA and is working towards "an amicable solution". The AIBA was last year stripped by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) of its right to run boxing at the Tokyo Games due to serious mismanagement. Boxing competition at the Tokyo Games, which have been postponed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, is instead being organised by the IOC Boxing Task Force.

AIBA interim president Mohamed Moustahsane said there are plans to hold the world championships after the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics, slated to open in July 2021 after being postponed for a year due to the coronavirus pandemic. "Because of rescheduling of the Olympic 2020, AIBA Executive Committee will discuss with the host country possible dates to adjust," said Moustahsane. "We believe that we will keep planned timeframe and conduct World Championships in 2021 after the Games if the pandemic situation is under control." —AFP

Ryder Cup may go ahead without fans: Harrington

NEW YORK: Staging this year's Ryder Cup without fans is not in the event's best interests but it might have to "take one for the team" and proceed that way amid the COVID-19 crisis, Team Europe captain Pdraig Harrington told The Times newspaper.

The golf calendar has been severely affected due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has infected more than 3.11 million people globally, causing over 216,000 deaths.

Three of the year's four majors have been rescheduled and the British Open has been cancelled, but the Ryder Cup is scheduled in Whistling Straits, Wisconsin during Sept. 25-27 with PGA of America chief Seth Waugh saying it may be held without fans.

"Everyone wants fans to be there, but the question is does sport need the Ryder Cup and should the Ryder Cup take one for the team?" Irishman Harrington told the Times <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/sport/pdraig-harrington-ryder-cup-may-have-to-take-one-for-the-team-and-play-without-fans-00p9fr80s>.

"Would it be for the greater good of sport? It wouldn't be in the Ryder Cup's best interests but it could be in the best interests of enough people who want to see a big sporting occasion on TV."

The PGA Tour plans to restart its season in June with the first four competitions closed to the public and Harrington said the PGA of America and European Tour would make a decision on the Ryder Cup after studying those events.

"If those PGA Tour events go well, behind closed doors, then we're far more likely to see a Ryder Cup as normal," three-times major winner Harrington added. "It massively increases the odds of being with fans because by September we may have moved on. I assume there's no chance of a vaccine (by September) so we're looking at how well contained it is by then and how treatable it is." — Reuters

Dave committed to coaching Wallabies

SYDNEY: Incoming coach Dave Rennie says he remains committed to joining the Wallabies, despite deep divisions that forced out Rugby Australia chief executive Raelene Castle last week.

Castle played a key role in recruiting Rennie to coach the struggling Australia Test side but quit the governing body after a sustained campaign mounted by her critics.

New Zealander Rennie said he was "gutted" at her departure but it would not stop him taking the reins at the Wallabies when he completes his contract at Glasgow Warriors.

"She's a big part of the reason I decided to sign with Australia," Rennie told reporters in Britain. "I was really impressed with her. She had a real clear plan of what the next few years would look like, so I'm really disappointed."

Rennie praised the "dignity and class" Cas-

tle displayed when ending a reign marked by a series of crises and escalating financial problems exacerbated by sport's coronavirus shutdown. The coach, who led Waikato Chiefs to back-to-back Super Rugby titles in 2012 and 2013 before moving to Europe, said he had spoken with Rugby Australia's board about plans for the post-Castle era.

"I am still very committed and we have been doing a lot of work in and around preparation for when the new season comes around," he said. However, the landscape Rennie will navigate when he takes over remains uncertain. He was originally due to start in time for a two-Test series at home against Ireland in July, which Rugby Australia concedes is now "highly unlikely" to proceed due to virus restrictions.

Rugby Championship matches against South Africa and Argentina are also in doubt, with Castle raising hopes before her departure that Bledisloe Cup Tests against New Zealand could be salvaged.

Both Australia and New Zealand have enjoyed success containing the virus, raising the prospect the Tests will be played if trans-Tasman travel restrictions are eased before the year's end. — AFP



Ex Rugby Australia boss Raelene Castle (left) and incoming coach Dave Rennie.

Sports

Scottish league chiefs appeal for calm as Rangers demand answers

West Ham, Brighton players return to training grounds

LONDON: Scottish Professional Football League board members pleaded on Tuesday for an end to "recrimination and division" after Rangers sparked a general meeting to propose an independent investigation into a vote on how to end the season.

The 42 clubs will cast ballots on May 12 on whether to instigate an external review of the circumstances surrounding a controversial vote to end the seasons in the lower three divisions.

The same resolution also gives the SPFL board the power to end the Premiership campaign if it deems that the matches cannot be played. That would see Celtic crowned champions for a record-equalling ninth season in a row on points-per-game as they led Rangers by 13 points when the season was stopped due to the coronavirus crisis.

The resolution to end the Championship, League One and League Two seasons was only passed when Dundee voted in favour, five days after clubs had been asked to cast their ballot. The Championship side originally planned to reject the resolution, but their emailed vote on April 10 was not received by the SPFL. An investigation by auditors Deloitte revealed "no evidence of improper behaviour". Rangers have called for the suspension of SPFL chief executive Neil Doncaster over the process and say they have evidence from a whistleblower that raises serious questions over the SPFL's handling of the affair.

A group of SPFL board members said in an open letter to clubs that it was dealing with a "fast-moving set of circumstances". "It's an unenviable job, and we are sure the many fair-minded people in Scottish football fully understand this," it said.

"All of the executive team retain our full support

and admiration. Further recrimination and division will only decrease our chances of playing football matches in Scotland any time soon. The players, fans and officials deserve our best collective efforts."

Rangers will need the backing of 32 of the 42 member clubs for an independent investigation. Football in Scotland has been suspended until at least June 10 but there are hopes the Premiership season could still restart behind closed doors if given government approval.

Meanwhile, West Ham, Brighton and Arsenal opened their training grounds to players as Premier League clubs took steps towards a potential re-start. The English top-flight is reportedly eyeing a resumption of the season on June 8 behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Project Restart" could see the 20 Premier League clubs resume full training by May 18, allowing players a three-week "pre-season". Premier League chiefs, due to meet with sides on Friday, are committed to finishing the season, with Liverpool on the brink of their first English top-flight title for 30 years. Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said he has spoken to clubs about restarting the Premier League "as soon as possible".

"I personally have been in talks with the Premier League with a view to getting football up and running as soon as possible in order to support the whole football community," Dowden said during a parliamentary questions session for the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

"But, of course, any such moves would have to be consistent with public health guidance." Brighton said in a statement on Monday the club were allowing "restricted external access to the training pitches for



LONDON: File photo shows Christopher Jullien scores the only goal of the game as Celtic see off Rangers in Scottish League Cup final to clinch a 10th domestic trophy.

first-team players only, for non-compulsory individual training".

"Players will need to book and be allotted staggered arrival slots, allocated their own area to train and expected to fully adhere to social distancing rules while doing so, and when arriving and exiting the facility," the statement added.

A West Ham spokesman said players in apartments or without safe access to green spaces were permitted access to training pitches. "Access will be limited to one player at a time and all sessions will be in line with government guidelines around social distancing," he said.

An Arsenal club spokesman confirmed on Satur-

day players would be allowed to return this week but access would be carefully managed. It was unclear whether manager Mikel Arteta, who tested positive for the virus last month but has since recovered, was present on Monday.

Tottenham also announced they would reopen some facilities from Tuesday, with a limited amount of pitches to be made available for players to use in individual sessions. The club said "only a restricted number of the squad" would be permitted at the training centre each day. Britain, on lockdown until May 7 at the earliest, has been one of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, with more than 20,000 hospital deaths. — AFP

Bundesliga could resume in late May

BERLIN: The Bundesliga could return by "the middle or end of May", Germany's sports ministers have said, as the league awaits the go-ahead from Angela Merkel's government to resume the season.

The sports ministers of Germany's 16 states met Monday and announced in a statement that it is "justifiable" for the league to resume "in empty stadiums" from "the middle or end of May".

"The German Football League must create and enforce the strictest hygienic and medical conditions, and monitor them with appropriate measures," added the statement. German Chancellor Merkel will meet state leaders in Berlin today, when it is hoped the Bundesliga will get the green light to resume.

All football in Germany ground to a halt in mid March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Last week, the German Football League (DFL) announced it is ready to resume from May 9, albeit behind closed doors with tight hygiene measures and players tested regularly.

A return in May would make the Bundesliga the first top league in Europe to resume as Germany cautiously eases lockdown measures.

Key politicians, including health minister Jens Spahn, have backed the league's plans, which are currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Labour. However, both newspapers Bild and Munich-based Sueddeutsche Zeitung claim May 9 is "probably" too soon for a restart. Last weekend, Borussia Dortmund's CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke warned that "the entire Bundesliga will go down" unless the league restarts.

"We must play again as soon as possible," Watzke told Der Spiegel. "Every week later makes it more critical. If we start in June, we might as well forget it." Watzke says a resumption of the Bundesliga would also send an important signal to other countries who may be hoping their football leagues can resume.

"It would be a quality certificate for what the Germans have achieved in this crisis," he added. Germany's top clubs are desperate for the league season to be completed by June 30 in order to claim an instalment of television money worth 300 million euros (\$325 million).

Magazine Kicker claims 13 of the 36 clubs in the top two leagues are on the verge of insolvency due to the crisis. Nevertheless, there is heated debate



DORTMUND: In this file photo taken on November 24, 2019 Hans-Joachim Watzke, manager of German first division Bundesliga football club Borussia Dortmund, gives a speech during the club's annual general meeting in Dortmund, western Germany. — AFP

about whether the Bundesliga should resume amid the pandemic which has so far claimed just under 6,000 lives in Germany.

Annalena Baerbock, the co-leader of the Green Party, says "it is deeply unfair" for professional football to restart when "a child is not even allowed to play on a lonely swing" with

playgrounds still closed.

Christian Seifert, CEO of the German League, says such arguments are understandable. "The fact that the Bundesliga can play again means it is compared to other areas" in German society, said Seifert, but "what we are doing is not arrogant or presumptuous". — AFP

FIFA medical chief wary of resuming season

LONDON: The chairman of FIFA's medical committee has said he is "sceptical" about restarting league football during the coronavirus pandemic and suggested national competitions concentrate on getting ready for next season instead.

There has been talk of Germany's Bundesliga and England's Premier League resuming behind closed doors. But Michel D'Hooghe, the head of global governing body FIFA's medical panel, told the BBC on Tuesday: "My proposal is if it is possible, avoid playing competitive football in the coming weeks."

"Try to be prepared for the start of good competition next season."

Dutch football chiefs have already abandoned this season's Eredivisie, with no promotion or relegation, while the future of the 2019/20 Ligue 1 campaign was thrown into doubt when the French Prime Minister said Tuesday that no major sport in the country could take place until the end of the summer.

Meanwhile D'Hooghe warned too quick a resumption of football could have "consequences of life and death". The Belgian added: "I speak as a medical doctor. I don't have to speak as an organiser of matches, but for the moment from my medical standpoint I would be very sceptical." D'Hooghe said playing football in the absence of a vaccine would create problems in upholding guidelines on social distancing designed to stop the spread of the virus.

"How will you avoid direct contact?" he said.

"That is my question." Meanwhile he urged football authorities to clamp down on spitting by players.

"I am a little bit afraid that to have a complete solution we will have to wait until we have a vaccination programme, but I think the time has come now to think of some hygienic rules."

"For instance to avoid spitting ... This is one of the things we have to consider because this is a real danger in the future." FIFA said it is proposing five substitutions per match when football resumes, to help players cope with the increase in the number of games. The world governing body has sent its proposal to the International Board (IFAB), the guardian of the laws of the game, which has to approve it before it can be implemented by national leagues, a FIFA spokesman said.

"When the competition resumes, the calendars will be overloaded with a higher than usual number of matches," he said. "The safety of the players is one of FIFA's priorities. One of the concerns is that the high frequency of matches may increase the potential risk of injuries," he added.

To address these concerns, FIFA has made a proposal to the IFAB to "temporarily relax Law 3 of the game to allow for a greater number of substitutions. Each team could make five substitutions during regulation time plus a sixth substitution during overtime." The proposal would need to be studied quickly by the IFAB as some leagues are planning to resume after stopping play because of the coronavirus pandemic in early May. The measure could remain in force throughout the 2020-2021 season and also apply "in theory" during next summer's European championships, according to a source close to FIFA.

"If this measure is validated by the board, each league and each body will be able to decide whether or not to apply it and in the competitions of its choice," added the FIFA spokesman. — AFP

Warner says England tour 'unlikely'

SYDNEY: Veteran batsman David Warner believes Australia's upcoming limited-overs tour of England will be scrapped because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Australians were scheduled to play three one-dayers and three Twenty20 matches against England in July, although changes to the English country cricket season now make that impossible.

There was speculation the tour could be delayed until September but Warner was doubtful it would go ahead. "At the moment it's highly unlikely we're going to go over there given what's happened in England," Warner told cricket.com.au.

He said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's infection with COVID-19 showed the gravity of the problem in the host nation. "He's back up on his feet now and that's fantastic news, but there's a lot more to this than just sport being played," Warner added. Australia has already cancelled a two-Test tour of Bangladesh in June, and a limited-overs home series against Zimbabwe is also in doubt. Australia are due to host the Twenty20 World Cup in October-November, for which the International Cricket Council has said it is "exploring all options".

Cricket Australia is particularly keen to go ahead with a Test series against India due to be played after the T20 tournament, warning this month it could lose hundreds of millions of dollars if it was scrapped. — AFP

Gayle slams Sarwan after Tallawahs exit

LONDON: Chris Gayle said Ramnareesh Sarwan was "worse than the coronavirus" as he blamed his "evil" former West Indies team-mate for his exit from the Jamaica Tallawahs team in the Caribbean Premier League.

The 40-year-old Gayle was released by Twenty20 franchise the Tallawahs last week and the big-hitting opener held assistant coach Sarwan responsible during a remarkable 15-minute video posted on his YouTube channel.

"Right now Sarwan, you are worse than the coronavirus right now," said Gayle. "You are a snake, you are so vindictive still immature, still stabbing people in the back. What transpired with the Tallawahs, you had a big part to play," said Gayle, the all-time leading run-scorer in Twenty20 internationals.

"You know, Sarwan, you're not the most loved person in the Caribbean ... You're so vindictive. You're still immature, still stabbing people in the back." Veteran left-hander Gayle, who has since joined the St Lucia Zouks for this year's edition of the CPL starting in August, led the Tallawahs to the title in 2013 and 2016.

Then, after a spell with the St Kitts & Nevis Patriots, the Jamaican rejoined the franchise last year. Although Gayle scored 116 in his second game back, he managed only 243 runs in 10 innings as the Tallawahs finished bottom of the table.

Gayle spent much of his Test career in the same West Indies side as fellow batsman Sarwan, 39, who retired from international duty in 2016. The self-styled 'Universe Boss', Gayle, who has not played for the West Indies since last year's World Cup, accused Sarwan of wanting to take complete control of the Tallawahs.

"You are no good. You are despicable," said Gayle of the Guyanese. "You want the franchise, have it. There's no Gayle. You run the show." In what was the second of three videos detailing his departure from the Tallawahs, Gayle — West Indies' all-time leading run scorer in one-day internationals — said the roots of his strained relationship with Sarwan dated back to their time playing age-group cricket together.

"From 1996, that's when our careers started in youth cricket days. We shared the same room in the West Indian Under-19s."

"You allowed the management staff to send me home from Barbados. I forgive but I'll never forget that. "You told the management team you can't sleep because Chris Gayle was watching TV too late in the night. That's what I got sent home for. "In everybody's eyes you act as if you're a saint ... Sarwan, you're evil, you're wicked, you're poison." — AFP

18 Andy Murray says resuming season stalled by pandemic not top priority



18 Dave committed to coaching Wallabies



19 Bundesliga could resume in late May



Soccer, rugby off until Sept: French PM



PARIS: File photo shows FIFA President Gianni Infantino (right) and President of French football Association (FFF) Noel Le Graet, pose next to the trophy after the official start of the organization of the 2019 FIFA Women World Cup in France on Sept 19, 2017, in Paris. —AFP

PARIS: Professional football, rugby and other sports in France cannot resume until the end of the summer because of coronavirus restrictions, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said on Tuesday. The announcement was made as the government unveiled its plans to gradually end the lockdown in France from May 11. The move makes the completion of the 2019-2020 Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 football seasons and Top 14 rugby union campaign appear increasingly unlikely. However, France's sports ministry told AFP after the speech that sports fixtures could not take place even behind closed doors before the end of July, leaving open the possibility that some matches could still be played in August.

In an address to the National Assembly, Philippe said: "The 2019-2020 professional sports leagues, notably football, cannot yet restart." "I would like to be precise here, no large sports gathering or any gathering of 5,000 people or more, needing the permission of the local police and long prior arrangements, will be allowed before September," Philippe added.

Ligue 1 had outlined its intention to resume matches in June, with players being recalled to training as of May 11. The French football league will hold

a teleconference today to decide what to do next.

Noel Le Graet, the president of the French Football Federation, said that he thinks the Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 seasons are "over". "We informed the executive board, what it already knew, that Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 will not start, that the National (third tier) will not start or the Women's D1 either," Le Graet told Brittany-based newspaper Le Telegramme.

"These four competitions are definitively over for the 2019-2020 season." If the season is abandoned, it begs the question of which teams would qualify for next season's Champions League and Europa League and whether teams would be relegated.

But Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas, whose side currently sit outside the Champions League places, said he "wasn't sure" the season will be ended. "Does this mean the championship is over? I'm not sure," he told AFP.

"Since the championship is not finished, I think that it's necessary to do everything to find an alternative

solution, by playing a certain number of play-offs during the month of August or postponing next season until September 15."

Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser Al-Khelaifi said the Ligue 1 leaders would be prepared to play their remaining games of this season's Champions League abroad. The French champions reached the quarter-finals with a last-16 victory over Borussia Dortmund behind closed doors shortly before the lockdown.

"We plan on competing in the Champions League, wherever and whenever it is held," he said in a statement. "If it is not possible to play in France we will play our matches abroad, ensuring the most stringent medical safety conditions for our players and all of our staff."

Le Graet said last week he was hoping both the French Cup and League Cup finals could be played before the league season restarts. PSG are scheduled to face Lyon in the League Cup final and are then due to play Saint-Etienne in the French Cup final.

French rugby union federation president Bernard Laporte said the announcement gave clubs clarity. "I thought football would be allowed to restart behind closed doors, but I'm not surprised," Laporte said.

"But it's a real headache (because) testing, social distancing, is even tougher in rugby. "It's clear now anyway, nothing until September." The Dutch football federation last week became the first in Europe to call an end to its season, with no team declared champions and promotions and relegations scrapped.

The Belgian Pro League is expected to follow suit, although other leagues are still hoping to resume, with the German Bundesliga planning for a possible return in mid-May.

The Tour de France is set to go ahead, though, albeit with restrictions on the number of spectators. Organisers have already moved cycling's show-piece event from its traditional mid-summer slot and it is now scheduled to start in Nice on August 29.

Around 23,000 people have died so far of coronavirus-linked illnesses in France. Schools and shops will re-open in May but restaurants and bars will remain closed for now, as will large museums, cinemas, theatres and concert halls. —AFP

New research says players at risk of virus spread to lungs

MANCHESTER: Research from Germany and Italy suggests that footballers and other athletes face a particular risk of the coronavirus infecting their lungs, raising major questions over attempts to restart professional soccer.

The research, produced by Italian immunologists and lung specialists based at institutes in Berlin, Rome and Verona, suggests that due to strenuous exercise, elite athletes are more likely to inhale virus particles and direct them to the lower areas of the lung.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, can cause lung damage and complications such as pneumonia and, in severe cases, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).

The preprint paper <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202004.0436/v1>, which has yet to be peer-reviewed, also suggests that athletes who are

asymptomatic could make their condition worse by infecting their lungs during strenuous exertion.

Soccer has ground to a halt in all major leagues in Europe and none have yet to resume. European soccer's governing body UEFA has set a May 25 deadline for leagues to outline their plans to re-start.

Leagues, governing bodies and clubs, however, have said they will only return when play is safe and that they will take medical advice. In their paper: "The First Comprehensive Immunological Model of COVID-19", Paolo Matricardi, Roberto Dal Negro and Roberto Nisini raise questions over the safety of playing while the virus remains at large.

"The pattern of breathing during strenuous exercise changes dramatically by a tremendous increase of ventilation (i.e.: inspiratory and expiratory volumes of air), and of alveolar ventilation in particular," the authors state.

"Professional athletes (are) particularly exposed (much more than individuals of common population) due to their frequent practice of extreme and long-lasting exercise." The researchers state that the "ideal lungs" of athletes, while helpful in normal conditions, significantly favour the deep inhalation of infectious agents.

"Even the SARS-CoV-2 can then spread more easily

to the deepest areas of the lungs during strenuous exercise, and there start its aggressive action," they said. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) is the name given to the 2019 novel coronavirus. COVID-19 is the name given to the disease associated with the virus.

"Not by chance, a great proportion of professional football players claimed the occurrence of fever, dry cough and malaise (and dyspnea in some cases) immediately after, or a few hours following their last official match," note the authors.

Adding to the dangers, the research says that players who have the virus but do not show symptoms, could make their condition worse by allowing the virus to move from their upper to lower airways.

Asymptomatic but infected athletes could exhale or eliminate aerosolised particles that may contain viruses which are then re-inhaled. "These droplets or aerosol might be re-inhaled and facilitate the spread of the virus from the upper to the lower airways," the paper states.

The authors also look at the risk of the virus being transmitted during a game. "In sports where many athletes are in close contact, such as team sports or marathons, the same particles have high chances to be inhaled by other athletes, facilitating viral transmission.

“Season over ‘definitively’”