

11 Boeing begins test flights for grounded 737 MAX



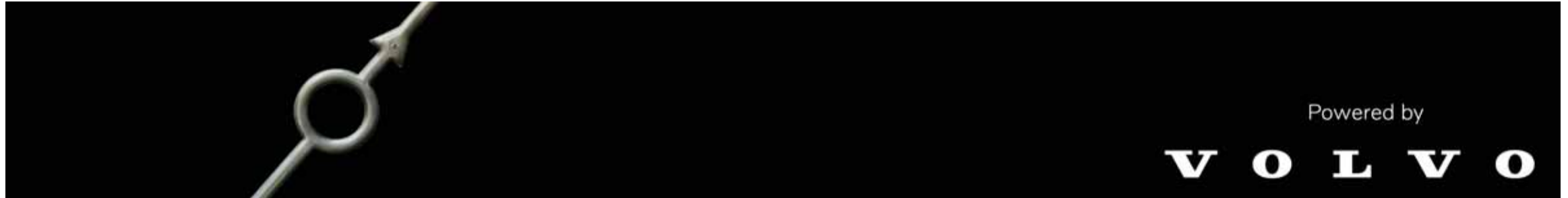
14 Francis Bacon triptych sells for \$84m at online auction



16 Iraq virus spike risks pushing strained doctors over the edge



18 Spy claims hit America's Cup in New Zealand



People flock to malls as more virus curbs eased

Kuwait airport to resume commercial flights from Aug 1

Zain Bahrain launches 5G commercial services

Bader Al-Kharafi: Zain plays a big role in kingdom's Economic Vision 2030

MANAMA: Zain Group announces that its mobile operation in Bahrain has launched 5G commercial services, creating substantial change for the kingdom's telecom industry, fostering new innovative business models and unlocking opportunities for many sectors. The state-of-the-art 5G network built in partnership with global solutions provider, Ericsson, will enable customers to benefit from super high-speed data, extremely low latency and ultra-high reliability and unleashes highly connected technologies trends such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and the internet of things (IoT).

As 5G becomes mainstream, Zain Bahrain will continue its dedication to transforming industries and enhancing people's digital lives and explore new



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

use cases and capture new revenue streams by addressing industry digitalization.

Continued on Page 16

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Thousands of people headed to malls and traffic jams returned yesterday as Kuwait entered the second phase of easing of coronavirus restrictions. Malls, restaurants and cafes, in addition to public parks, reopened following a closure that exceeded three months. Curfew hours were also relaxed to start from 8 pm instead of 7 pm and end at 5 am. Malls are allowed to operate until 6 pm, while dine-in is not allowed at restaurants and cafes. Government offices reopened partially at a capacity not exceeding 30 percent. The second phase is scheduled to last for 30 days.

Commercial flights at Kuwait International Airport will resume from Aug 1, the government's communications office said on Monday, after being suspended in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Cabinet agreed on a three-stage resumption starting at 30 percent capacity with a maximum of 10,000 passengers and 100 flights daily, the statement said. The second six-month stage starts on Feb 1, 2021 at 60 percent capacity with a maximum of 20,000 passengers and 200 flights daily. The third stage starts on Aug 1, 2021 at 100 percent capacity with more than 30,000 passengers and 300 flights daily.



KUWAIT: Mask-clad shoppers walk inside the Avenues Mall yesterday as Kuwait entered the second phase of easing restrictions imposed due to the spread of COVID-19. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



WASHINGTON: In this photo taken on June 26, 2020, US President Donald Trump looks on during a meeting in the East Room of the White House. — AFP

Trump briefed on bounties by Russia in Feb

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump received a written briefing about alleged Russian bounties offered to Afghan militants to kill American troops as early as February. The New York Times said Monday in a new report undercutting the US president's assertion that he was not told of the threat. Trump has come under

increasing pressure to explain mounting media reports saying he was informed that Russian military intelligence had offered and paid cash to Taliban-linked militants for US soldiers' deaths — and did nothing in response.

The Times, citing two unnamed officials, said the claim had been included in a written version of the president's daily briefing in late February. CNN confirmed the story but cited an official saying the document was produced "sometime in the spring". Trump has denied being informed of the assessment while the

Continued on Page 16

Iran issues arrest warrant for Trump

TEHRAN: Iran said Monday it has called for Interpol to help arrest President Donald Trump and 35 other US officials for the January killing of its top general in an American drone strike. Tehran prosecutor

Ali Qasi Mehr, quoted by state news agency IRNA, said 36 US political and military officials "involved in the assassination" of General Qasem Soleimani "have been investigated and were ordered to be arrested through Interpol".

"These people have been charged with murder and terrorist acts," he said. "At the top of the list is US President Donald Trump, and his prosecution will continue even after the end of his term," said the prosecutor, referring to his bid for re-election in November. Qasi Mehr, quoted on

the judiciary's Mizan Online official website, said "the Iranian judiciary has issued arrest warrants against the 36".

He called for the international police agency Interpol to issue red notices, which are not arrest warrants but issued for those wanted for prosecution or sentencing. Interpol, however, told AFP that any such intervention would be contrary to its constitution, without directly confirming it had been contacted by Iran. Under Article 3 of the constitution, "it is strictly

Continued on Page 16

India bans 59 Chinese apps

DELHI: India on Monday banned 59 Chinese mobile apps, including the wildly popular TikTok and WeChat, over national security and privacy concerns two weeks after a deadly Himalayan border clash between the nuclear-armed neighbors. Relations between the world's two most populous nations have been strained following the deaths of 20 Indian troops in hand-to-hand fighting with their Chinese counterparts on the western end of the high-altitude, contested border in mid-

June. The apps "are engaged in activities... prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defense of India, security of state and public order," the Ministry of Information Technology said in a statement. "The government of India has decided to disallow the usage of certain apps... This decision is a targeted move to ensure safety and sovereignty of Indian cyberspace."

The statement said the move was taken after the ministry received several complaints alleging theft of users' data and violations of user privacy. It was unclear when the ban would come into force. Most of the applications are highly popular in India, including ByteDance-owned video-

sharing apps TikTok and Helo, file-sharing app SHAREit and Alibaba's UC browser and UC News, with a combined user base of more than half a billion.

TikTok yesterday denied sharing Indian users' data with the Chinese government. "TikTok continues to comply with all data privacy and security requirements under Indian law and have not shared any information of our users in India with any foreign government, including the Chinese government," TikTok India chief Nikhil Gandhi said in a statement.

"Further if we are requested to in the future we would not do so. We place the highest importance on user privacy and integrity," he said, adding that it had

Continued on Page 16

Inferno guts lumber warehouse



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A massive fire in an open lumber warehouse belonging to the Ports Authority west of Mina Abdullah refinery was extinguished by firefighters yesterday

morning. There were no injuries, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate announced on Twitter. Firemen shielded more than 3,000 new cars from the blaze, in addition to paint supplies and large quantities of diesel. (See Page 4)



FARIDABAD, India: This photo illustration shows a person using the social media video-sharing app TikTok yesterday. — AFP

Population density caused rapid COVID-19 spread in isolated areas

Kuwait Cabinet examines conditions in shadow of pandemic

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet held its weekly session via videoconference on Monday under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, discussing the country's health conditions in the shadow of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), namely in some isolated districts. Following the session, Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said the ministers examined a report presented by the Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf, explaining conditions in the isolated areas of Farwaniya, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula with respect of the population density and living conditions. Such a status has caused rapid spread of the novel coronavirus, amid risks of its transmission to other areas, she explained to the ministers.

The assistant undersecretary presented results of isolation of these districts, namely proportions of increasing confirmed cases and results of field medical examinations. Her report included proposals on how to preserve the residents' health, ensure correct implementation of health conditions, preserving the health system, without contradiction with the plan for phased restoration of normal life. On these bases, the

Cabinet decided to task the ministerial coronavirus emergency committee to examine in details conditions of these areas, results of the isolation, along with consideration to the need for boosting the economy in the shadow of the residents' living and social conditions. The panel study will be referred to the next Cabinet session scheduled tomorrow.

Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah briefed the ministers about the country's health conditions in the shadow of the pandemic, along with the reaped positive results, stressing on the necessity to continue to adhere to the health terms, social distancing and relevant medical measures. Meanwhile, President of the Directorate General for Civil Aviation Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah and senior DGCA officials briefed the Cabinet about a three-phase plan to resume operations at Kuwait International Airport, which would begin on August 1. The cabinet assigned DGCA to make sure the airport

fully equipped to honor health authorities' criteria in a drive to curb spread of the virus.

The government, said Saleh, also assigned the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs to start resuming services for people with disabilities, and rehabilitation services for students with mental disability.

The government approved a draft decree over the establishment of the international American university, and was referred to His Highness the Amir. It also approved draft decrees over an MoU between Kuwait and South Korean custom departments, an Arab protocol on combating human trafficking and an Arab agreement on fighting transnational organized crime. The government also approved draft agreements with Sierra Leone, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Gambia, Greece and the Netherlands. It also approved draft laws regarding the civil and commercial laws, postponing installments of insol-



Cabinet to discuss panel study tomorrow



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

vent fund and Public Institute For Social Security. In the meantime, the government condemned an attack on a stock exchange in the Pakistan city of Karachi which killed and injured a number of people. Kuwait, said Minister Saleh, rejects all forms of terrorism and violence. —KUNA



KUWAIT: People wearing face masks walk inside the Avenues Mall yesterday as Kuwait entered the second phase of easing restrictions imposed due to the spread of COVID-19. Malls and commercial complexes around Kuwait are allowed to open daily between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Heavy traffic jams returned to Shuwakh yesterday as Kuwait entered the second phase of easing restrictions imposed due to the spread of COVID-19. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



KUWAIT: The Ministries Complex welcomed public sector employees who returned back to their offices yesterday as Kuwait entered the second phase of easing restrictions imposed due to the spread of COVID-19. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Hashem claims expats sending death threats to her

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Safa Al-Hashem, an outspoken critic of expats, claimed yesterday she received a death threat via email from an expat, allegedly for repeatedly calling to replace foreigners with Kuwaitis. The lawmaker said it was the ninth death threat she has received by email, all from expats belonging to one nationality. Although she did not reveal the nationality, she released the email, which

refers to it.

Hashem said she has been getting death threats "simply because I am a Kuwaiti member of parliament who has been calling for amending the demographic structure and imposing charges on expats". She blamed the government for not taking any effective measures to reform the population composition, which is severely tilted in favor of expats, saying all government promises in this regard have not been fulfilled.

Hashem directed her criticism at expat legal experts who work at the Council of Ministers, Civil Service Commission and other government departments, who "played with our legislation to deprive Kuwaitis from taking top jobs". But Hashem's latest complaint was strongly criticized by some social

media activists, who accused her of trying to exploit such incidents for electoral purposes. Well-known presenter and owner of the private Scope TV Fajer Al-Saeed said Hashem should stop such election stunts.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly secretariat yesterday asked MPs who attended a regular session some two weeks ago to test again for the coronavirus ahead of resuming meetings. Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem told the Assembly on June 17 that a lawmaker was suspected of contracting the disease and called on all MPs and staff who attended the sessions to test for the virus. Later, the health ministry advised MPs to undergo a 14-day quarantine that ended on Tuesday. The lawmaker who was suspected of contracting the disease - Hamdan Al-Azemi - later said that he twice tested negative.

MP Al-Humaidhi Al-Subaei called on the health minister to lift a lockdown on Mahboula that has been in place for over 100 days. Addressing the health minister, the lawmaker demanded to know the reasons for continuing the lockdown and why there has been a rise in cases in several other areas but they were not placed under lockdown.

The criminal court has set July 13 to issue its verdict in the first case of visa traders that involve a Kuwaiti and three Egyptian accomplices. The government has referred about a dozen of such cases to the public prosecution. Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh said government efforts to "eradicate the cancer" of visa trading will continue, adding that he will also continue to work to amend legislation and toughen penalties against those working in this illegal trade.

Local

'Living Aid' links families in need with sponsors in Kuwait amid COVID-19

Two sisters use Instagram to facilitate charity in time of crisis

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The damage caused by the COVID-19 crisis has affected thousands of people in Kuwait, so various organizations groups, and even individuals have taken the initiative of finding different ways to help people in need.

Living Aid Kuwait is a humanitarian charitable project based on bringing together families in need and people desiring to help them by sponsoring them. Two Kuwaiti sisters, who prefer to stay anonymous, set up an Instagram account @LivingAidKuwait to match people affected by the pandemic with people willing to sponsor them.

"We at Living Aid Kuwait don't accept donations. Our way of attracting both sponsors and needy families is by using our Instagram platform to announce the list of families in need. Potential sponsors and other needy families who see the list end up approaching us," one of the founders told Kuwait Times. Some excerpts:

Kuwait Times: How many people are working on this project?

Currently, our team consists of two people and a volunteer to translate the content of our Instagram account. Our plan is to add more volunteers in the near future.

KT: How did you come up with this idea?

When the pandemic first spread and lockdowns started to take effect, we wondered about the status of low-income people and how they are surviving, especially when many businesses are terminating their employees and many others are permanently closing. However, we didn't know how to reach them.

By coincidence, we came across the @food_box_kw Instagram account. Their idea was if you know someone in need, order for them from a selection of grocery boxes and baby-need boxes on their website, which are very reasonably priced, and they would be delivered the next day. We sent the account to our house workers to inform us of anyone in need. Soon, they provided us with 11 names of people in desperate need of something to eat or baby milk and diapers. Apparently, one of our household workers had put it up as her Facebook status and many reached out to help.

We were excited - finally, we had a link to someone in need. We made a small Excel sheet and ordered grocery and baby boxes from @food_box_kw.

The next day, our house worker informed us of more people reaching out and we repeated the process over and over again until it became too expensive and our WhatsApp was flooded. We knew we had to come up with another way to help, and to make sure we weren't being used.

We sat for a couple of days thinking it over - not wanting to accept donations was very important, and we knew many people would want to help those families in need but didn't know how. Just like us, they were clueless. Then the idea of matching those people together (the families in need and the people willing to help) came to our mind. It would allow us to help without it depleting our funds. We came up with a name and a logo within 10 minutes and started our Instagram page. We already had several clips of interviews done the previous day with some families while delivering their food boxes, so we posted them



Eighty-eight families sponsored in 16 days

on our page to show people our process of obtaining information about each family/person.

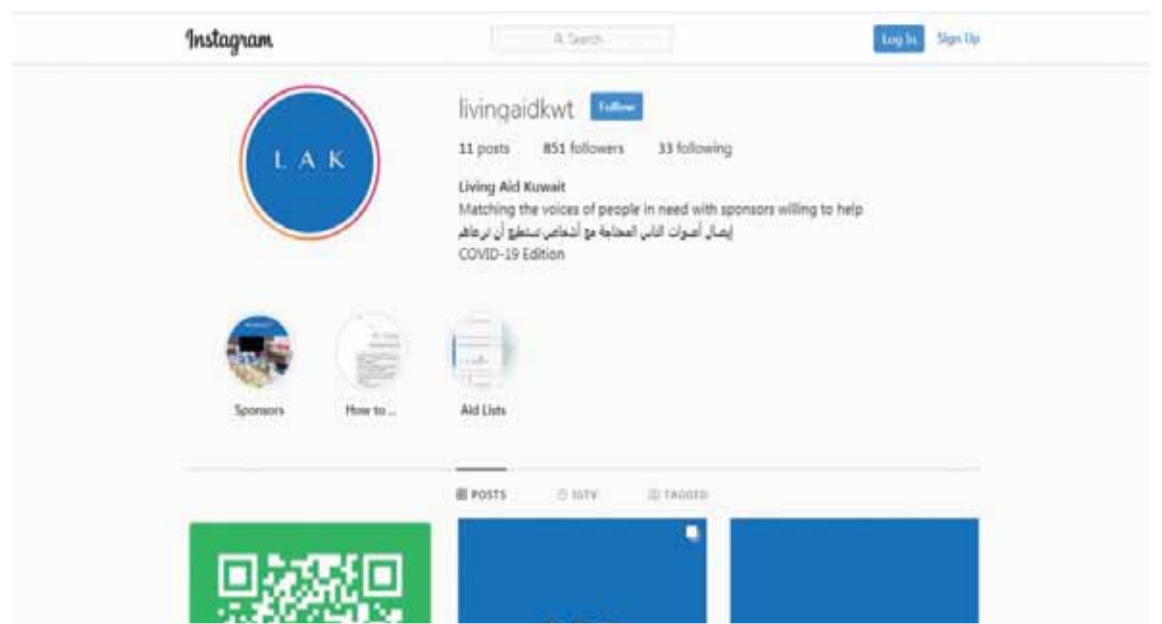
We decided the family-interview system is a great way to confirm information that was previously sent to us on our many platforms. In addition, posting these interviews would allow for transparency and encourage potential sponsors to approach us.

Collecting information

The information we gather from people in need include: Their work history; were they affected by COVID-19 or were destitute from before; how many people are they supporting in Kuwait and abroad; if their rent is still high, we encourage them to have a discussion with the building guard (harris), the agent (wakel), the representative (mandoob) or even the owner of the building in order to reduce their rent expense and consequently the sponsorship amount; if their sponsors decided to cover rent; how much they spend on groceries; and how much they spend on baby needs.

avirus pandemic with a value of KD 405 million (\$1.3 billion).

The Ministry of Health had the lion share with 49 percent, or 202 contracts, with a value of KD 198 million (\$637 million), said Darwish, for the purchase and import of medicine, personnel protective equipment for frontline workers and ventilators. Darwish spoke about the urgent contracts examined by SAB. She said 63 percent of contracts, valued KD 696 million (\$2.2 billion) were urgent. They included services, maintenance, cleaning and construction. Darwish, meanwhile, said SAB rejected 197 contracts valued KD 311 million (around \$1 billion) because they failed to abide by SAB's criteria. SAB formed, on March 12, a team to examine the urgent contracts amidst spread of the pandemic. The team ended its mandate with the beginning of the restoration of normal life. — KUNA



Getting in contact

This information is gathered in a list and published as our Instagram story @livingaidkwt. Sponsors approach us via DM, choose the family, the cost with or without rent and the number of months the sponsorship covers. Once we get the agreement from the family in need, then their details are sent to the sponsors. And with that final step, our part is over. What is left is for the sponsor to reach out to the family and deliver the funds. We encourage the sponsors to chat with the families, request to see their living conditions and listen to their stories.

We keep contact with both the sponsors and the families to resolve any issues. Since our account only started on June 13, 2020, our plan is to reevaluate the families' situation by the fourth week, as some businesses are restarting, and many employees are going back to work.

Some families who reside inside lockdown areas have approached us for aid. Since visiting them and assessing their situation is not possible for the time being, we make sure that their basic needs are covered. They are currently included in our database in order to visit them once the lockdown is lifted.

KT: How many families you've sponsored so far?

Eighty-eight families as of June 28, 2020 (in 16 days).

KT: How do you find the families in need?

They find us through our Instagram account. Also, when we visit the families that approach us, we come across other people on the streets who need help as well, in addition to referrals from previously-sponsored families.

KT: Which areas have the most families in need?

Farwaniya, Mahboula, Salmiya, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Hawally.

KT: When will this project end?

The sponsorship program that our account offers should become redundant when the economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis are resolved.

KT: How do you choose the family that will receive help among other families?

We only accept new family requests when we sponsor the ones we already have. As for families in lockdown areas, we would like to start with families that have the largest number of children and then move down the list to single people. We'd like to add one more thing: We are cross-referencing our database with other aid groups in order to mitigate the risk of fraud.

Audit Bureau approves KD 1.101 billion contracts

KUWAIT: Kuwait's State Audit Bureau (SAB) said Monday it approved 545 out of 849 contracts since March 12 with a value of some KD 1.101 billion (\$3.5 billion). Auditing process taking place at the start of the contracts contributed to saving around KD 44 million (\$141 million) for the State's Treasury, said Fatma Darwish, SAB's senior auditor for social affairs, said in a statement. She said 37 percent of contracts, or 307, were related to coron-

Final decision on school year after July 15

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education (MOE) announced Monday that the final decision on concluding the school year for all grades will be made after July 15. In this regard, MOE's assistant undersecretary for educational research and curriculums affairs Salah Dabshah said that the recently launched online platform for grade 12 students had only cost KD 400 (around \$1,320) and that it is supervised by 7,267 educationists with the aim of continuing education

under all circumstances, and in light of the spread of COVID-19. Dabshah added that the platform is mainly run by national manpower to avoid the need to hire private companies.

In the meantime, MOE's assistant undersecretary for public education Osama Al-Sultan said that 90 percent of grade 12 students (27,728 out of a total of 29,908) have already registered to use the online platform. "Registration is way beyond expectations and will remain open until all students are registered," Sultan added, noting that registration is being done without using a database in order to allow illegal residents join in. The education ministry has not provided timetables or details on when it plans to launch online classes for grade 12 students via the online platform. The current plan calls for grade 12 students to resume classes by August, and students of other grades by October. — KUNA

News in brief

'Isolated' co-ops open 24 hours

KUWAIT: Co-ops and central markets will be allowed to open 24 hours to serve residents in the isolated areas (Farwaniya, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula). They are not allowed to serve people with no pre-booking appointments, however.

Twenty five flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that 25 flights were to depart from Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 4,305 passengers. They included ten flights to India, eight flights to Egypt, three flights to Nepal, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Jordan, one flight to Afghanistan, and one flight to Bangladesh.

Oil exports to Japan down

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan fell 3.2 percent in May from a year earlier to 7.48 million barrels, or 241,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the second consecutive monthly decline, government data showed Tuesday. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 10.6 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 8.2 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report. Japan's overall imports of crude oil in May plunged 25.0 percent year-on-year to 2.28 million bpd, down for the fifth month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 92.9 percent of the total, up 5.7 percentage points from the year before. Saudi Arabia remained Japan's top oil supplier, but imports from the kingdom slid 5.5 percent from a year earlier to 932,000 bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 730,000 bpd, down 28.9 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 153,000 bpd and Russia fifth with 92,000 bpd, respectively. Japan is the world's-third biggest oil consumer after China and the US.

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Local



KUWAIT: Firemen battled a blaze that gutted a 8,000-square-meter timber warehouse of the Kuwait Ports Authority in western Miina Abdullah Monday night. Firefighters from the army, Ministry of Interior, National Guard, Medical Emergency, Kuwait National Petroleum Company and Kuwait Ports Authority took part in extinguishing the flames, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate said in a statement.

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Firemen battle Amghara blazes



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firefighters from four different fire stations worked together to put out flames that gutted lumber and ceramics left in an open yard in Amghara Monday. Firemen isolated the area to keep the flames from spreading before extinguishing the fire. No injuries were reported. Jahra vocational, Tahreer, Kabd and Amghara fire stations responded to an emergency call reporting the fire, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate said in a statement. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



Fire guts Sulaibiya warehouse

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen battled a blaze reported yesterday morning in a heavy equipment spare parts' warehouse in Sulaibiya, covering an area of 1,000 square meters. Sulaibikhat, Doha, Tahreer and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh fire stations rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call, and worked together to prevent the flames from spreading to a nearby 18,000-square-meter factory. They were able to extinguish the fire while no injuries were reported, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate said. An investigation was opened.



Local

Kuwait, ICRC High-Level Policy Dialogue explores COVID-19 humanitarian challenges

Pandemic compounds suffering of people in war-torn countries

KUWAIT: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) Monday held the third edition of the annual High-Level Policy Dialogue to exchange insights on trends in the humanitarian environment and responses amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The event, held by videoconference, brought together Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, President of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Abdulwahab Ahmad Al-Bader, Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, and Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC, to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kuwait and the Middle East region and explore how they can enhance cooperation to provide sustainable responses to the needs of affected persons.

In countries affected by armed conflict, the pandemic compounds the suffering of millions of vulnerable people that are already struggling to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, water, and medical care. The ICRC shared its experience in trying to address those challenges in Iraq and discussed examples of its response in Yemen and Syria.

The participants acknowledged that beyond treating and preventing COVID-19 infection, the numerous long-term secondary impacts remained a major concern. The pandemic threatens every aspect of peoples' lives, amplifying inequalities, disrupting communities and reversing development gains made in the past decade. It is also a massive education crisis, and potential food security crisis that could deepen poverty and hunger.

"Globally, we see hard-won development gains set back as schools shut, wages are lost, businesses close, and health needs are put at risk. The socioeconomic impact has been substantial," said Peter Maurer, the ICRC's president.

The response should look to support the social system, building on past experience of pandemics. "I am confident that the continued partnership with the State of Kuwait, the KRCS and KFAED will contribute to the alleviation of human suffering through a dedicated collaborative approach to humanitarian causes," he added. There is also a critical role for states to play to facilitate the work of international actors while maintaining the necessary exceptional measures for fighting the pandemic, Maurer said.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, said that this strategic dialogue should be an example



Participants in the videoconference.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends the meeting. — KUNA photos

importance of the critical nexus between humanitarian action and development work.

The High-Level Policy Dialogue between ICRC and the State of Kuwait affirms the shared commitment to principled humanitarian action as a public good. The role of states in supporting and facilitating humanitarian action, exemplified by Kuwait's international initiatives in general and support to ICRC remains crucial. This is doubly true given the new operating constraints that the COVID19 pandemic has wrought. The ICRC and the State of Kuwait reiterated their commitment to fighting the dire consequences of the COVID19 pandemic through humanitarian and development work on both local and international levels. The State of Kuwait and the ICRC reaffirmed their commitment to their policy engagement by confirming the fourth high-level policy dialogue to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2021.

to be followed between other states and humanitarian organizations. "Our dialogue demonstrates that many changes occurred during the current crisis. It also shows the importance of emphasizing the cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the ICRC in the framework of international humanitarian law, which is a pillar of Kuwait's foreign policy," he stated.

Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, President of the KRCS, said "participating in this high-level dialogue ensures the delivery of effective, coordinated humanitarian

response, which should be an integral part of the diplomatic relations between countries."

Abdul Wahab Al-Bader, the Director General of KFAED, reassured that humanitarian efforts through partnership and practical strategic dialogue fosters response to the COVID-19 pandemic, inside Kuwait and globally.

The event concluded with a joint statement, reiterating the continued support of the State of Kuwait to the humanitarian efforts of the ICRC, underscoring the im-

Europe must continue to support the Syrian people

By Josep Borrell

The conflict in Syria is entering its tenth year. Ten years of war, suffering and grief. And it's still not over. Syrians continue to live in fear and despair, their future held hostage. While the war forced half the population to flee their homes in the past decade, those who stayed behind are facing an unprecedented economic crisis and the threat of the Coronavirus.

At the fourth Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region" on 29 and 30 June, more than 80 countries, regional and international organizations and UN agencies were scheduled to sit around a virtual roundtable to address all the key dimensions of the Syrian crisis: political, humanitarian, financial, and regional. We reaffirm our strong support to the UN efforts for a political solution to the conflict and to the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. A political solution, reached through a UN-mediated, inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue, is the only way of achieving sustainable peace in Syria. The alternative is ever more misery caused by the obstinate determination of the long discredited regime.

This year, on top of being the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, Syria is close to economic collapse. The regime's mismanagement of the economy, widespread corruption, the financial crisis in neighboring Lebanon and the Coronavirus pandemic have brought the country's economy to its knees. The situation is dire. Syria faces its highest inflation rate ever, alongside a record devaluation of its national currency. Eight in ten Syrians reportedly live in poverty

and even top-tier salary earners are left with little real purchasing power. Basic goods are becoming scarce; food and medicine are starting to become unaffordable to ordinary people.

Syrians want the same things as every person and family anywhere else in the world: personal security, jobs and a future for their children. In other words, they need prospects for the future. The EU and its Member States have been supporting Syrians everywhere since the start of the conflict. Over €20 billion have been provided in humanitarian, stabilization and resilience assistance since 2011 - for Syrians in Syria and in support of the neighboring countries.

We are very grateful for the solidarity shown by Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in particular. They are looking after more than 5.6 million Syrian refugees. These countries are struggling with complex domestic situations: they continue to need assistance to meet the growing needs of both the refugees and their own people. The EU is also helping them. Our assistance in response to the Syrian crisis does not only benefit Syrian refugees but also the Lebanese, Jordanian and Turkish people, to create job opportunities, infrastructure including schools, as well as better health and water services.

The EU Regional Trust Fund (MADAD) has helped communities in Lebanon and Jordan by providing basic income, access to health services and to education and much more, ensuring that Syrian refugees and local hosts alike have a foundation to build a better future. In Turkey, the EU supports an emergency social safety net, the access of Syrian refugees to high quality Turkish health services, and school enrolment.

In Syria itself, we have been doing what we can to foster livelihoods, support communities and stimulate the very basics of economic life. Since 2011, the EU put in place sanctions in response to the actions of the regime and its supporters. The goal of these measures is to put pressure on the Syrian regime to halt repression and negotiate a lasting political settlement of the Syrian crisis in line with UNSC Resolution 2254, under UN auspices.

These sanctions target designated people and entities, not the population. They do not prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid or prohibit the export of food, medicine or medical equipment. Today, we want to tell the Syrian people and the people of the countries hosting the refugees that we know what they have been going through, that we care and that we will continue to stand by them.

We know that the Syrian refugees' dearest dream is to go back home. We are ready to help make this happen once the conditions are in place. But, to what home? It is not realistic to expect refugees to return to the risk of being arrested, tortured or forced to fight a war they wanted to escape. Their security of life and of property needs to be guaranteed. And we know that the stability necessary for the reconciliation and reconstruction of Syria will only come once the regime renounces brutality and embarks on a process of genuine political dialogue, backed with tangible changes and moves that will heal Syria's wounds. That was, is and remains our goal. Our motto is that the Syrian people must decide the future of Syria. As EU, we will stand by them in doing so.

— Josep Borrell is the High Representative of the European Union For Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission.

Kuwait Foreign Minister calls EU representative

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah conducted on Monday a telephone call with Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union. Discussions during the call addressed preparations for Brussels fourth conference on future of Syria and regional countries, which was due yesterday. It was held at joint invitation from the EU and he United Nations Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Coordinator, Mark Lowcock. Borrell expressed appreciation of the leading humanitarian role played by the State of Kuwait to relieve afflicted nations, noting that it hosted three donors' conferences for Syria, under leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who along with Kuwait earned admiration of the international community. — KUNA



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau meets with Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in this file photo.



Kuwait's Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah receives his Canadian counterpart Harjit Sajjan during the latter's visit to Kuwait in December 2019.



Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah (center) and Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Louis-Pierre Emond (left) participate in last year's 'Canada Day' celebration.

Embassy celebrates 'Canada Day'

KUWAIT: Louis-Pierre Emond, Ambassador of Canada to the State of Kuwait, released the following statement on Canada Day, addressing the Canadian community in Kuwait as well as "all our Kuwaiti friends":

"Canada Day is the national Day of Canada and is celebrated every year on July 1. It celebrates the anniversary of the effective date of the Constitution Act of 1867, which united the three separate colonies of the Province of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Across the country and around the world, Canadians gather to celebrate our country's birthday.

"This year the celebration will be different as we all celebrate a 'stay at home' birthday. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on health systems, economies and our lives and we all need to work together to respond effectively to the pandemic. I am proud that Canada is working with international partners to prevent, detect and respond to COVID-19 and to sup-

port those affected around the world. We have moved quickly to make significant investments in vaccine research and development and are actively working with partners to help ensure the continued flow of essential goods and supplies. Canada stands ready to work with Kuwait as we move toward a long-term recovery from the pandemic.

"The relationship between Kuwait and Canada continued to grow over the last year in all areas of common interest. The people-to-people links between Canadians and Kuwaitis continue to be at the core of the relationship we are building with our friends from Kuwait.

"This is best illustrated by the large and always increasing number of Kuwaiti students going to Canada every year. Close to 500 Kuwaitis study in Canada, most of them medical students who will build friendships and relationships with Canadians that will last a lifetime and will spark various commercial, research and scientific

exchanges.

"Key Kuwaiti projects in Canada continued to develop positively. Projects like KUFPEC's Kaybob-Duvernay shale gas development, PIC's partnership with Pembina to build a propane dehydrogenation plant and polypropylene upgrading facility, and EQUATE's operations in Fort Saskatchewan. The Kuwait Investment Authority also has interests in Canada.

"Our commercial links are growing and we hope to see continued expansion in areas such as oil and gas, life sciences, defense and security, agriculture and food, and infrastructure.

"Kuwait is an important partner of Canada, a fact proven by the numerous high-level visits of the past months. Since my arrival in Kuwait in 2018 we received visits from the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Governor-General Julie Payette, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defense, and a Special Envoy of the

Prime Minister.

"Over the last months we were proud to continue to promote women empowerment in Canada and abroad. Here in Kuwait we have organized various events focused on women empowerment in trade, sports and politics.

"Various virtual celebrations will take place on social media over the next days so please feel free to watch and participate online.

"As we all get through this pandemic together, Canada and Canadians in Kuwait are pleased to celebrate once again Canada Day with all of our friends from around the world.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his government and people for their continuous support of Canada and the Canadian community in Kuwait."



Ukraine becoming 'online baby store'; surrogacy booms

Army of women workers on India's COVID front line



HONG KONG: Police enter a shopping mall to disperse people attending a lunchtime rally in Hong Kong yesterday, as China passed a sweeping national security law for the city. — AFP

China passes national security law

US ends arms exports, China restricts visas in Hong Kong row

HONG KONG: China's parliament passed national security legislation for Hong Kong yesterday, setting the stage for the most radical changes to the former British colony's way of life since it returned to Chinese rule 23 years ago. State media is expected to publish details of the law - which comes in response to last year's often-violent pro-democracy protests in the city and aims to tackle subversion, terrorism, separatism and collusion with foreign forces - later on. Amid fears the legislation will crush the global financial hub's freedoms, and reports that the heaviest penalty under it would be life imprisonment, pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong's Demosisto group said it would dissolve. "It marks the end of Hong Kong that the world knew before," Wong said on Twitter.

The legislation pushes Beijing further along a collision course with the United States, Britain and other Western governments, which have said it erodes the high degree of autonomy the city was granted at its July 1, 1997, handover. The United States, already in dispute with China over trade, the South China Sea and the novel coronavirus, began eliminating Hong Kong's special status under US law on Monday, halting defense exports and restricting access to high-technology. China said it would retaliate. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, speaking at her weekly news conference, said it was not appropriate for her to comment on the legislation as the meeting in Beijing was still going on, but she threw a jibe at the United States. "No sort of sanctioning action will ever scare us," Lam said. Lau Siu-kai, vice-president of a think-tank under the Beijing cabinet's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, told Reuters the law was passed unanimously with 162 votes. It is expected to come into force imminently. The editor-in-chief of the Global

Times, a tabloid published by the People's Daily, the official newspaper of China's ruling Communist Party, said on Twitter the heaviest penalty under the law was life imprisonment, without providing details. Authorities in Beijing and Hong Kong have repeatedly said the legislation is aimed at a few "troublemakers" and will not affect rights and freedoms, nor investor interests.



A turning point for Hong Kong

Meanwhile, The United States has ended sensitive defense exports to Hong Kong, further ramping up pressure in a row over the financial capital's autonomy from China. The US announced the decision hours after China said it would curb visas to some Americans heading to Hong Kong, itself a response to a US move. The United States has been leading a global up-

'Overpowering'
 The legislation may get an early test with activists and pro-democracy politicians saying they would defy a police ban, amid coronavirus restrictions, on a rally on the anniversary of the July 1 handover. At last year's demonstration, which came amid a series of pro-democracy protests, a crowd stormed and vandalized the city's legislature. "We will never accept the passing of the law, even though it is so overpowering," said Democratic Party chairman Wu Chi-wai. It is unclear if attending the unauthorized rally would constitute a national security crime if the law came into force by then. A majority in Hong Kong opposes the legislation, a poll conducted for Reuters this month showed, but support for the protests has fallen to only a slim majority.

US ends exports
 The Commerce Department simultaneously said it was revoking its special status for Hong Kong. It will now treat the financial hub the same as China for so-called dual-use exports that have both military and civilian applications - and which are highly restricted when sought by Beijing. China promised autonomy for Hong Kong before Britain returned the territory in 1997 but wants no repeat of massive and sometimes destructive protests that rocked the territory last year. "It gives us no pleasure to take this action, which is a direct consequence of Beijing's decision to violate its own commitments under the UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration," Pompeo said. — Agencies

roar over a national security law which Hong Kong activists say will destroy the city's freedoms. "We can no longer distinguish between the export of controlled items to Hong Kong or to mainland China," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

"We cannot risk these items falling into the hands of the People's Liberation Army, whose primary purpose is to uphold the dictatorship of the CCP by any means necessary," he said, referring to the Chinese Communist Party. The direct impact will be modest. The State Department last year approved \$2.4 million in defense sales to Hong Kong, of which \$1.4 million worth were actually sent, including firearms and ammunition for law enforcement, according to official figures.

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China 'sterilizing' Uighurs to control population: Report

BEIJING: Chinese authorities are carrying out forced sterilizations of Uighur and other ethnic minority women in an apparent campaign to curb the population, a study said Monday, triggering swift international condemnation. China called the allegations baseless but the United States demanded an immediate end to the campaign described in the report, which was based on a combination of official regional data, policy documents and interviews with ethnic minority women.

China is accused of locking more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in re-education camps. Beijing describes the facilities as job training centers aimed at steering people away from terrorism following a spate of violence blamed on separatists. Now a report by Adrian Zenz, a German researcher who has exposed China's policies in Xinjiang, says Uighur women, among other ethnic minorities, are being threatened with internment in the camps for refusing to abort pregnancies that exceed birth quotas.

Zenz's data-driven work - which uses public documents found by scouring China's internet - on the camps has previously been cited by experts on a UN panel investigating the facilities. Women who had fewer than the legally permitted limit of two children were involuntarily fitted with IUDs, says the report. It also reports that some of the women said they were being coerced into receiving sterilization surgeries. Former camp detainees said they were given injections that stopped their periods, or caused



XINJIANG: A Uighur woman waits with children on a street in Kashgar in China's northwest Xinjiang region. Chinese authorities are carrying out forced sterilisations of women in an apparent campaign to curb the growth of ethnic minority populations in the western Xinjiang region. —AFP

unusual bleeding consistent with the effects of birth control drugs.

Government documents studied by Zenz also showed that women in some rural minority communities in the region received frequent mandatory gynaecological exams and bi-monthly pregnancy tests from local health officials. Zenz found that population growth in Xinjiang counties predominantly home to ethnic minorities fell below the average growth in primarily Han majority counties between 2017 and 2018, a year after the officially recorded rate of sterilizations in the region sharply overtook the national rate in 2016. Uighur activists say China is using the internment camps to conduct a massive brainwashing campaign aimed at eradicating their distinct culture and Islamic identity.

'Ethno-racial domination'
 China appears to be using coercive birth control in Xinjiang as part of a "wider game plan of ethno-racial domination," Zenz wrote in the report. "These findings raise serious concerns as to whether Beijing's policies in Xinjiang represent, in fundamental respects, what might be characterized as a demographic campaign of genocide" under UN definitions, Zenz said in the report. The US State Department called the campaign "reminiscent of the abuses against members of ethnic and religious minority groups throughout the 20th century." "We call on the Chinese Communist Party to immediately end these horrific practices and ask all nations to join the United States in demanding an end to these dehumanizing abuses," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a frequent critic of Beijing, said in a statement. —AFP

Post-COVID, more in West see China as major power

WASHINGTON: The coronavirus pandemic has led a growing number of Westerners to see China as a top power, with the lead of the United States slipping, a study said yesterday. A survey of French, German and US opinion released by the German Marshall Fund of the United States found significant increases in perceptions of Chinese influence since the outbreak of COVID-19 - in which Beijing has alternately been portrayed as a culprit and an aid provider.

The proportion of people who said China was the most influential global player shot up from 13 to 28 percent in France between surveys in January to May, from 12 to 20 percent in Germany and from six to 14 percent in the United States. "Chinese influence in the world was kind of an abstract idea before the crisis," said Martin Quencez, deputy director of the German Marshall Fund's Paris office. "When you think about the dependency on China for mask and medical equipment, for instance, this has become very concrete," he said.

Quencez expected a lasting impact, saying that the changes in perceptions were seen across generational and political lines. "It seems more structural than just a quick response to the crisis," he said.

The public in all three countries still said that the United States was the most influential nation but less overwhelmingly. In France, 55 percent of people said the United States was the top global player in May, down from 67 percent in January. Similar figures were reported in Germany.

One comparative loser was the European Union, which the French and Germans had put solidly in second place, over China, before the pandemic. Despite China's perceived influence, the survey found that majorities in both Germany and France said their countries should get tougher on Beijing over climate change, human rights and cybersecurity. The figures were lower in the United States, possibly because President Donald Trump's administration has already been championing a hard line and pushing Europe to do likewise. The Trump administration has blamed COVID-19 on poor management in China, where the virus was first detected late last year.

Critics say Trump is trying to deflect from his own handling of COVID-19 in the United States, which has suffered by far the highest death toll of any country. The survey also showed a sharp transatlantic divide on the influence of Britain, which left the European Union this year. Fifty-three percent of Americans said Britain was the most influential country in Europe, an opinion shared by just eight percent of Germans and six percent of French. The study, conducted with the Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany and Institut Montaigne in Paris, surveyed more than 1,000 different people in each country both from January 9-22 and May 11-19. — AFP

International

Racism in UK: The effects of a 'hostile environment'

Floyd's death sparks a wave of Black Lives Matter protests

LONDRES: Ijeoma Moore came to Britain from Nigeria as a toddler and is now 25. "I have lived here since I was two. I feel very much British," she said. But two years after a scandal involving the "Windrush" generation of 500,000 Caribbean migrants who came to Britain after World War Two, race and identity remain hot topics. The death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, during a US police arrest has sparked a wave of Black Lives Matter protests across the country.

And there have been calls to take down colonial-era statues to figures who were involved in, or profited from, the international slave trade. Moore said she cannot remember having studied colonialism at school and was shocked at the treatment of some of the Windrush migrants. They were supposed to have been granted British citizenship but still had to prove every year they had a right to remain, under threat of expulsion. "If that happened to them, what could happen to me?" she asked. Currently, Moore herself has only a limited right to remain in Britain, which means she has to renew her papers every 30 months.

It takes 10 years to get permanent resident status, and then another year to apply for British nationality in what she said was a "very complicated" - and expensive - process. "I think I paid £1,500 (\$1,840, 1,640 euros) the last time I made my application back in 2017. The next one is this year and the fees have increased again," she said. "I am looking to pay at least £3,000 for my next application." She is now a member of the We Belong group of young migrants, born abroad but who have grown up in Britain, and have had to battle "hostile" gov-



LONDON: Performers in costume enact a Windrush-inspired performance on the main Parade day of the Notting Hill Carnival in west London. — AFP

ernment immigration policies. "They (the government) should not look at black people or migrants like they are bad things but



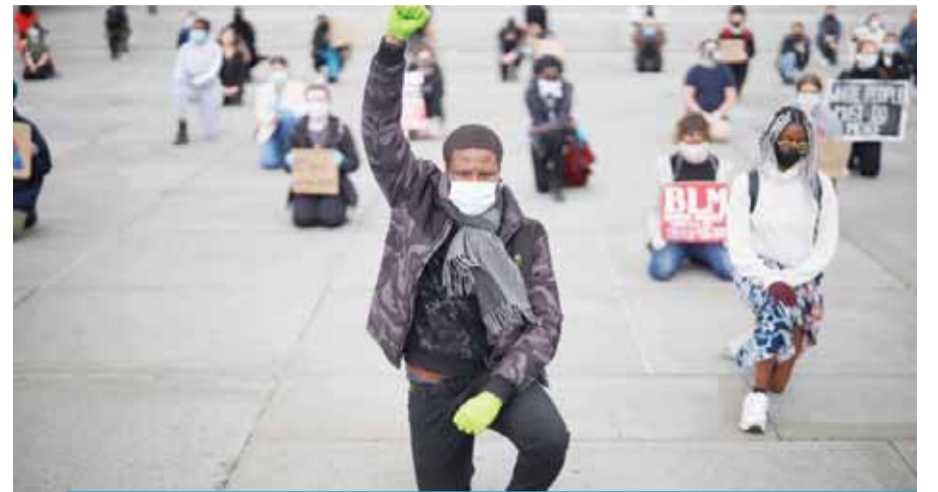
Group tackles hostile policies

see how much they contribute to society," she added.

'Right the wrongs'
Although the British government has

promised to "right the wrongs" suffered by the Windrush migrants from its former colonies, many of the victims are still bitter. "We don't matter," said Anthony Bryan, 63, who arrived in Britain in 1965. Several decades later, he found himself placed in detention twice and threatened with deportation. But at the very last moment, lawyers managed to secure his release. The experience left him traumatized, he said, and he is still waiting for compensation. But he has at least received his British passport, which meant he could visit his mother in Jamaica in 2018, the first time he had left the country in 53 years.

With other activists, he recently brought a petition signed by more than 130,000 people to Downing Street, calling on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to act. In March, a damning report denounced the "hostile en-



LONDON: A protester makes a Black Lives Matter fist at a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in central London. — AFP

vironment" towards immigrants by successive governments and said it was grounded in racism. The report's author said earlier this month there was a "grave risk" of similar failures happening again if the government did not implement a series of its recommendations.

Face history

For many, British society has been too slow to change. In Bristol, southwest England, anti-racist campaigners toppled a controversial statue of 17th-century merchant and slave trader Edward Colston and threw it in the port, after years of inconclusive wrangling about its future. Statues to leading Black, Asian and minority ethnic figures are few and far between, increasing alienation. "Some people will always see me like a foreigner, no matter what I say or how

I speak," said Moore. But next year, the first permanent sculpture celebrating the Windrush generation will be unveiled in London, based on archive photographs from the time and people's stories.

Sculptor Thomas J Price, 39, said the bronze, three-metre (10-foot) piece will show "what it means to descend from the Windrush generation and to live in Britain today". It will stand outside Hackney Town Hall, in the northeast of the capital. Price, whose grandmother was a nurse and came to Britain from Jamaica, said the sculpture would give people "a sense of visibility" and a "sense of belonging". The removal of Colston's statue was a good thing, he said, as it "raised awareness" of the issue. "The UK needs to face its history, the disparities, how black people have been treated. We can't move forward until it's done." — AFP

UK locks down Leicester after virus flare-up

LEICESTER: Britain has imposed a stringent lockdown on the English city of Leicester following a local flare-up of the novel coronavirus just as Prime Minister Boris Johnson attempts to nudge the United Kingdom back to normality. The United Kingdom has been one of the world's worst-hit areas, with more than 54,000 suspected deaths, though infections have been waning in recent weeks and Johnson is rolling back nationwide restrictions to revive the economy.

However, in Leicester, in the eastern Midlands of England, the seven-day infection rate was 135 cases per 100,000 people, three times higher than the next highest city. Leicester accounted for 10% of all positive cases in England in the past week, the government said. "We will be bringing forward a legal change very shortly, in the next couple of days, because some of the measures that we've unfortunately had to take in Leicester will require a legal underpinning," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky. Asked if some aspects of the lockdown would be enforced by the police, he said: "Yes, in some cases."



LEICESTER: People walk by an electronic billboard displaying a government message reminding people to wear face coverings on public transport as a precaution against spreading COVID-19 in the centre of Leicester. — AFP

Schools close

The Leicester lockdown was overshadowed by a major speech by Johnson later on Tuesday in Dudley, just 50 miles away, in which he will detail plans to rebuild the British economy after it was battered by the coronavirus lockdown. Hancock said the government was still analyzing the exact reasons behind the rise of cases in Leicester. However, city mayor Peter Soulsby said it had been hard to get details from the government and even the exact boundaries of the lockdown. "It's obviously going to be quite a challenge enforcing it," Soulsby told Sky.

"Policing it is going to be something of a challenge until we know actually what the area is to be policed." Schools in the city, where the remains of King Richard III of England were found under a car park in 2012, will close from Thursday with Hancock saying there had been an unusually high incidence of infections in children there. "In the very significant testing that we've brought into Leicester ... We have seen a number of positive cases in the under 18s and that's why we took the decision with a heavy heart to close schools in Leicester," Hancock said. — Reuters

Suspect pleads guilty to 13 murders, rapes

SACRAMENTO: An elderly ex-policeman confessed on Monday to being the violent serial prowler known as the "Golden State Killer," pleading guilty to 13 murders and admitting to dozens of rapes and break-ins that terrorized California during the 1970s and '80s. Joseph James DeAngelo, 74, entered the pleas as part of a broader deal with prosecutors sparing him from a potential death sentence in return for his admission to all of the offenses he stood accused of - charged and uncharged - in 11 California counties. Under terms of the unusual plea agreement, approved by Superior Court Judge Michael Bowman at Monday's hearing, DeAngelo faces life in prison without the possibility of parole rather than a potential death sentence. Prosecutors said the deal ensured that aging survivors and victims' relatives lived to see the case resolved, sparing them further legal proceedings likely to have dragged on for 10 years.

"The time for justice stands in front of us now," said Amy Holliday, deputy district attorney for Sacramento County. The hearing

was held in a Sacramento university ballroom, rather than a courthouse, to allow for socially distanced seating amid the coronavirus pandemic. The defendant and his attorneys wore medical-style, clear plastic face shields. DeAngelo, dressed in orange jail garb, sat expressionless and slack-jawed in a wheelchair throughout the seven-hour proceeding. He spoke in a weak, raspy voice only to give yes and no answers to procedural questions from the judge, and later to answer "guilty" when Bowman asked his plea to each of 13 counts of first-degree murder and kidnapping.

He also replied "I admit" to dozens of allegations of rape, robbery, and other crimes as prosecutors took turns presenting "factual-basis" statements graphically detailing every murder, sexual assault and burglary with which DeAngelo was accused. His admissions encompassed a total of 161 uncharged crimes, prosecutors said. Prosecutors also revealed that on the day of his arrest, while alone in an interview room, DeAngelo was overheard having an ani-



In this file photo Joseph James DeAngelo, the suspected 'Golden State Killer', appears in court for his arraignment on April 27, 2018 in Sacramento, California. — AFP

mated conversation with himself, referring to an apparent alter ego named "Jerry," whom he described as being "in my head" and compelling him to "do those things."

'Not afraid to face him'

One of many surviving victims who attended the hearing, Kris Pedretti, said she felt satisfied with the outcome of DeAngelo's plea, telling Reuters during a break, "I do think he is owning it." Pedretti, who was 15 when sexually assaulted, said she and other survivors "want people to know that there's hope and that we're not afraid to face him." DeAngelo's arrest in 2018 capped more

than 40 years of investigation that authorities finally solved through DNA evidence and data from commercial genealogy websites. The breakthrough came about two months after the case gained renewed national attention in the bestselling book, "I'll Be Gone in the Dark." A TV documentary series spawned by the book premiered by coincidence on HBO on Sunday. Besides the 13 murders and kidnappings, prosecutors said DeAngelo was tied to nearly 50 rapes and more than 120 home invasions - mostly in and around Sacramento, the eastern San Francisco Bay area and Southern California. — Reuters

US-Russia tension soars once again

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump has spent much of the past four years musing about warmer ties with Russia. But explosive new allegations show that relations may only get worse. Top Democrats have demanded answers and even some Republicans have urged retaliation after reports, first published by The New York Times, that a Russian unit offered rewards to Taliban-linked militants to kill US-led forces in Afghanistan. The furor comes weeks after Trump again offered an olive branch to President Vladimir Putin, speaking of inviting him to an expanded summit of the Group of Seven, from which Russia was kicked out over its 2014 takeover of Crimea. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the top Democrat in Washington, said that with Trump, "all roads lead to Putin."

Senator Cory Gardner, a Republican in a tight re-election bid, said he would push to declare Russia a state sponsor of terrorism - a designation with far-reaching legal implications. Trump said he was not briefed on the Afghanistan charges. He has scoffed in the past at US intelligence, particularly its finding that Russia interfered to sway the 2016 election to him over Hillary Clinton. In

one of the rare moments where he faced severe criticism within Republican ranks, Trump appeared to take Putin at his word during a 2018 summit that Russia did not meddle in the election.

'Superficial' plan with Putin

Every US president since the end of the Cold War has taken office seeking better relations with Russia - but with mixed results. James Jay Carafano of the conservative Heritage Foundation, who served on Trump's presidential transition team, said Trump's Russia promises in 2016 were "just as superficial as everybody else's." "He didn't have a secret plan to have better relations with Russia," Carafano said. "If you want a better relationship with Russia you would need a different Putin. And this is the problem everybody has, is you don't get a different Putin," he said.

Putin, a Soviet-era intelligence officer who has spoken of restoring lost Russian glory, has been president or prime minister since 1999 - and a referendum Wednesday could let him stay in power until 2036. "There's nothing that we really need from the Russians that we can't live without. And there's nothing that Russians can really do for us that is worth bargaining for," Carafano said. Reports said US intelligence was assessing the Russian unit's motivations in Afghanistan, from seeking to bog down the United States in a war that Trump is seeking to end, to retaliation for US attacks on Russian mercenaries in Syria. — AFP

Facebook advert boycott enters a new phase

WASHINGTON: The advertiser boycott of Facebook has morphed into a global digital activist campaign aimed at curbing hateful and toxic content on the social media giant. But its impact remains unclear. The unprecedented move has been joined by major brands like Unilever, Starbucks, Levis and Coca-Cola, with nearly 200 firms pausing advertising on the world's leading social network, and has wiped out billions in Facebook's market value. Some companies have signed on to the #StopHateForProfit campaign organized by social justice activists, while others have simply acted on their own to avoid the toxic atmosphere of Facebook.

Ford, for example said it would pause all social media advertising to "re-evaluate our presence on these platforms," adding that "content that includes hate speech, violence and racial injustice on social platforms needs to be eradicated." The boycott gained momentum amid the latest civil unrest as activists have pressed Facebook to be more aggressive in curbing racism and inflammatory content, including from

President Donald Trump. "We've entered a totally new era of digital activism," said Greg Sterling, a digital marketing analyst and contributing editor at Search Engine Land.

"Non-profit groups are appealing to advertisers to police social media, given the general reluctance or refusal of the companies to do so themselves. Indeed, all social media will be compelled to re-examine and adjust or adopt new policies that don't permit hate and racism to proliferate." Michelle Amazeen, a Boston University professor of communication, said the latest action "suggests that social media need to take this issue seriously or it's going to affect their bottom line." Amazeen added that the movement highlights that "long overdue pressure is finally mounting on social media platforms to be accountable gatekeepers and stop promoting hate and violence for profit."

The wave of announcements last week sent Facebook shares tumbling, leading to a loss of some \$50 billion in market value, with a partial bounceback on Monday. Facebook appeared to respond Friday by announcing it would ban a "wider category of hateful content" in ads. Chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said Facebook also would add tags to posts that are "newsworthy" but violate platform rules - following the lead of Twitter, which has used such labels on tweets from Trump. — AFP

International

More domestic flights, interstate trains; India eases virus lockdown

Pilgrims trickle back to the Ganges; India lockdown eases

NEW DELHI: India will allow more domestic flights and interstate train services to operate but keep schools shut as the nation of 1.3 billion further eases its lockdown despite growing concern about rising coronavirus cases. The South Asian nation recorded almost 550,000 virus infections on Monday, including 16,475 deaths, making it the fourth worst-hit in terms of case numbers after the US, Brazil and Russia. But with the economy struggling during the shutdown, authorities have sought to restart activities while maintaining "containment zones" to try and limit the virus spread.

"Domestic flights and passenger trains have already been allowed in a limited manner. Their operations will be further expanded in a calibrated manner," the Home Affairs ministry said late Monday in its "Unlock 2" guidelines. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to address the nation in a speech yesterday. The new measures - which also include a shorter night curfew - will come into force today and remain in place until the end of July. The night curfew would be further relaxed to permit the movement of people and goods for work or when they take public transport, the ministry said.

Schools, metro trains in cities, cinemas, gyms and swimming pools would remain closed, while activities in "containment zones" would still be severely restricted, it added. Under a major easing of the lockdown in early June, places of religious worship, hotels, restaurants and shopping malls were allowed to reopen. The virus has particularly hit India's densely populated cities and there are now major concerns for New Delhi which has overtaken Mumbai with more

than 85,000 cases. The government has been criticized over a lack of testing that experts say has hidden the true number of cases in India.

Pilgrims trickle back

Meanwhile, life is slowly returning to normal among the hallowed temples of Haridwar, one of Hinduism's holiest places, but the Indian pilgrimage town still has a forlorn air as the country emerges from its coron-



India records 16,475 deaths

avirus lockdown. The town usually teems with tens of thousands of visitors who flock from far and wide for a dip in the holy waters of the Ganges and to catch riverside prayer ceremonies at dusk. But India remains in the grip of a raging COVID-19 outbreak that has claimed more than 15,000 lives and infected over half a million people.

For the first time in as long as any local can remember, pilgrims stopped coming in late March after India imposed the world's biggest coronavirus shutdown.

MK Vashista, a wizened priest, told AFP that his elders would recount how even in the Spanish flu pandemic a century ago - which hit India hard - cremations on the banks of the holy river still took place constantly. "Things still didn't stop here at that time, like they have now," he said. In the past few weeks as India has eased restrictions - even as case numbers have surged - a few pilgrims have begun to return.

Now though, instead of broadcasting hymns and chants, Haridwar's loudspeakers blare announcements telling people to wear masks and use sanitizer. Temples ask devotees to keep a safe distance from each other and keep away from the statues of the gods that they usually touch, bless and offer flowers, sweets and crumpled rupee banknotes to. "Look around," Tanmany Vashista from the Shri Ganga Sabha, one of Haridwar's most influential religious groups, told AFP, pointing to a few hundred pilgrims on the streets, most in masks and keeping their distance. "This isn't even one or two percent of the normal times."

Centuries of records

Hugging the banks of the Ganges as it emerges from the Himalayas, Haridwar is believed to be one of four places where drops of the elixir of immortality were spilled from a pitcher carried by the mythical bird Garuda. A trickle of customers are now returning for the town's famous ancient order of some 2,500 Hindu priests who since time immemorial have registered births and deaths for visiting pilgrims.

Deepak Jha, one eighth-generation such "purohit", says the chunky ledger he is rolling up and tying with

string contains records going back 11 generations for thousands of families. "This is our culture, our tradition and history. It may be difficult for people to find their kids' school notebook after six months, but we've kept these records for centuries," Jha said. The tomes, some 500 years old - the birch leaves used before then have long since crumbled - are written in a mix of Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, reflecting the area's complex mix of languages and cultures. People from all over come to trace their ancestors and are visibly touched to see their forebears' handwriting, tipping the priests handsomely for a detailed family tree.

'We can't live in fear'

Haridwar's usually narrow and congested bylanes, full of shops selling religious books, artifacts, statues of Hindu gods, clothes, toys and sweets, have also never been so deserted. "It isn't a good situation right now," Jyoti Arora, the owner of a shop bereft of customers told AFP. "Right now, who knows who could be corona positive? Even we take a daily risk coming for work, but we have to do it for our families." Many normally busy hotels, eateries and restaurants remain shut.

Thousands of workers have gone back to their home villages, and nobody is sure when they will come back. One of the few pilgrims to return is Mohit Kumar, who came from Delhi to take a purifying dip in the Ganges, which is looking slightly cleaner for the lockdown. "We can't live in fear. We have taken all precautions, and pray that everyone around us stays healthy," he said, accompanied by two friends as he headed to the holy river. — Agencies

Army of women workers on India front line

MEERUT: Unprotected and poorly paid, an all-women army of health workers confront suspicion, anger and the threat of infection as they go door to door searching for coronavirus sufferers in India's poor communities. About a million accredited social health activists, or ASHAs, are deployed in cities and villages to administer basic medical care such as vaccinations and delivering babies. But as the number of confirmed infections in India soars past 500,000, the women find themselves on the front line of the battle against the contagion, identifying potential cases and educating locals in the hope of slowing its spread.

ASHA workers told AFP they had nothing except their headscarves to protect them from the virus and were often abused by people angry about the government's handling of the outbreak, which is one of the worst in the world. "I have been an ASHA for 14 years now and never have I been as scared to knock on a door with my bare hands. We don't have gloves, not even masks," said Alka, who asked AFP

not to use her surname. Alka and her colleagues visit households and ask the occupants to fill out a questionnaire on any virus symptoms they might have and their recent travel histories.

Many of the residents are among the millions of migrant workers left jobless and destitute by the months-long virus lockdown imposed by the government in March. If someone looks like a potential case, the ASHAs report them to authorities. Some ASHAs have been physically attacked by villagers who fear they are carrying the virus or are government spies. During a recent doorknock in a village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, Alka and her two colleagues were spotted by eight men in a store who came out and surrounded them.

The men shouted at the women about the shortage of basic food and protection against the virus. Standing her ground, Alka said she told the men: "Even we don't get gear and grains. Where will we get it for you?" Such harassment is bearable, she told AFP. "Recently some locals tore the clothes on one woman while she was working." Given the lack of contact tracing in India, the ASHAs were "critical elements" in India's fight against COVID-19, said Anant Bhan, a leading public health expert. The women know their communities well, Bhan said. But their work is difficult and poorly paid despite a 1,000 rupee (\$13) coronavirus bonus. — AFP



MEERUT: Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers (2nd left to right) Nir-mala, Alka and Meenkashi talk to a woman during a door-to-door survey to check on residents after the government eased a nationwide lockdown imposed as a preventive measure against the COVID-19. — AFP

Distorted virus news takes root in the West

LONDRES: Coronavirus misinformation spread by Russian and Chinese journalists is finding a bigger audience on social media in France and Germany than content from the European nations' own premier news outlets, according to new research. Whether it is distorted coverage or outright conspiracy theories, articles written in French and German by foreign state media are resonating widely on Facebook and Twitter, often with their origins unclear, the Oxford Internet Institute said in a report published on Monday.

The institute, which is part of Oxford University, looked at content generated by leading media outlets from Russia and China, as well as from Iran and Turkey - all of which are state-controlled or closely aligned to regimes in power. Its report comes as the US government imposes new restrictions on Chinese state media, and builds on previous research by the in-

stitute that laid bare the penetration of such foreign outlets in English-language markets. In their French, German as well as Spanish output, state media groups have "politicized the coronavirus by criticizing Western democracies, praising their home countries, and promoting conspiracy theories about the origins of the virus," the institute said. "A majority of the content in these outlets is factually based. But what they have, especially if you look at the Russian outlets, is an agenda to discredit democratic countries," Oxford researcher Jonathan Bright told AFP.

"The subtle weave in the overarching narrative is that democracy is on the verge of collapse." The institute looked at output from Russia's RT broadcaster and Sputnik news agency; China Global Television Network (CGTN), China Radio International (CRI) and Xinhua News Agency; plus foreign-language output from Iranian and Turkish networks. It measured median engagement per shared article - how many times a user actively shares or likes an article on Facebook, or comments about it and retweets it on Twitter. The study covered each outlet's 20 most popular stories from May 18 to June 5. — AFP

Ukraine becoming 'online baby store'; surrogacy booms

KIEV: Tears of joy stream down Andrea Viez's face as she lifts her baby boy, born to a surrogate mother in Ukraine. "He's a star," the Argentinian in her late 40s says, her voice trembling. After nine years of trying to have a child, Viez can finally hold her son in her arms, thanks to a booming surrogacy industry in Ukraine that has given hope to thousands of struggling would-be parents. But behind their dream-come-true is a highly profitable and murky business that many worry is taking advantage of desperate young women and operating in a grey zone open to abuse.

"Ukraine is becoming an international online baby store," the country's commissioner for children's rights Mykola Kuleba warned last month, condemning the "exploitation" of Ukrainian women and calling for a ban on the industry. The fact that Ukraine is one of the few countries allowing commercial surrogacy for foreigners was oddly thrown into the spotlight by the coronavirus. When travel restrictions imposed to fight the pandemic prevented dozens of parents from picking up their children born to surrogates, a local surrogacy company posted a video online showing the infants lying in rows of plastic cots in a hotel on the edge of Kiev.

The BioTexCom clinic hoped to draw attention to the stranded babies' plight. It worked and the government stepped in to help parents like Viez obtain special permits



KIEV: Argentinian Andrea Viez holds her baby as she and her husband collect their son born to a surrogate mother, in the Hotel Venice in Kiev. — AFP

and pick up their children a few weeks later. Though it has existed since the early 2000s, the industry exploded in Ukraine after India and Thailand outlawed commercial surrogacy for foreigners about five years ago. One of the poorest countries in Europe, the post-Soviet nation is also known for its attractive prices, with birth through a surrogate costing about \$42,000. In the United States it can cost more than twice as much.

'Total chaos'

There are no official statistics, but experts say between 2,500 and 3,000 children are born every year through surrogacy in Ukraine for foreign parents. About a third of customers are Chinese. The industry is poorly regulated and rife with abuse and corruption, says Sergiy

Antonov, who runs a law firm specializing in reproductive issues. Women are sometimes not paid promised amounts or are housed in terrible conditions during the later stages of their pregnancies. In some cases parents have discovered they have no genetic link with children born to surrogates. Authorities suspect some clinics are also using surrogacy as a cover for illegal commercial adoptions. "It's total chaos," Antonov says. Olga Korsunova, a 27-year-old going through her fourth surrogate pregnancy, says women "very often" have trouble obtaining money they were promised. They are most often hired through intermediaries who keep part of the surrogacy fee. Korsunova is paid \$400 a month during a pregnancy and receives \$15,000 after delivery. — AFP

Stock exchange attack 'targeted China, Pakistan'

KARACHI: Separatists from Pakistan's Balochistan province attacked the national stock exchange in Karachi on Monday, killing four people in a brazen daylight assault the breakaway group said also targeted Chinese interests. Four gunmen drove up to the entrance gate of the Pakistan Stock Exchange around 10:00 am (05H00 GMT) then lobbed a grenade before opening fire with automatic weapons, officials said.

All four attackers were killed in an ensuing firefight as they attempted to storm the exchange, along with three security guards and a policeman, the Karachi police said in a statement. In an email to AFP, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility and said the assault was not only targeting "Pakistan's economy" but was "an attack on Chinese economic interests in response to China's exploitative plans in Balochistan".

The BLA have long accused China of plundering Balochistan, the largest of Pakistan's four provinces that makes up the southwestern part of the country. The separatists say Chinese-backed projects unfairly exploit the region's mineral and hydrocarbon resources. Impoverished Pakistan has repeatedly turned to Beijing for investments and loans including under the \$54-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that Western critics say will be of greatest benefit to China in the long run.



KARACHI: Mourners carry the coffin of a private security guard, killed in a gunman attack at the Pakistan Stock Exchange building, during his funeral in Karachi. — AFP

The BLA have targeted infrastructure projects and Chinese workers in Pakistan multiple times in recent years, including an attack on Beijing's consulate in Karachi that killed four people in 2018. In May last year, the BLA attacked a luxury hotel near Gwadar, where a deepwater port development is a CPEC flagship project. The BLA is just one of several insurgent groups fighting primarily in Balochistan, which has been rocked by separatist, Islamist and sectarian violence for years.

Shot in the head

Pakistan's military praised the swift response of the city's security forces in Monday's attack, while the Karachi police released a video of one member of a provincial secu-

urity unit describing the firefight. "I shot one of them dead... The second guy saw me and... he took out a grenade. I shot him twice in his hand and his weapon fell down. I then shot him in the head as he tried to pull out the grenade pin," said Mohammad Rafiq, a member of an elite rapid response team. The video of the officer was shared widely online, with social media users calling Rafiq a hero. Last year, the US State Department designated the BLA as a global terrorist group, making it a crime for anyone in the United States to assist the militants and freezing any US assets they may have. Following Monday's attack, Pakistani authorities vowed to strike back against any group found responsible, promising to dismantle their networks and destroy their bases. — AFP

Business

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10 Pandemic set to undo decade of progress in Africa: IMF**10** Nepal families face hunger as virus hits remittances**11** Latin America's airline apocalypse signals a future with weak rivalry

TOKYO: People wearing face masks walk across a street at Kabukicho district of Tokyo. Japan's unemployment rate rose to 2.9 percent in May, official data showed yesterday. —AFP

Japan jobless data mask woe for millions

Country's unemployment rate climbed to 2.9% in May

TOKYO: Unlike most major global powers, Japan has been spared an explosion in unemployment during the coronavirus pandemic, despite the world's third-biggest economy suffering its first recession in more than five years.

However, economists say the situation is not as rosy as the low headline figure may suggest, with millions struggling to make ends meet on precarious temporary contracts. The latest figures published yesterday showed Japan's unemployment rate climbed to 2.9 percent in May, up 0.3 percentage points from April and the third consecutive increase.

There were 120 jobs available for every 100 job-seekers, compared with 132 in April. This was the steepest fall in this closely watched indicator since the 1974 oil crisis. Economists forecast the unemployment rate in Japan will hit four percent by the end of the year, as the tourism and hospitality sectors suffer from border closures and people staying at home because of the virus.

Many countries would welcome an unemployment rate of "only" four percent, with the luxury of having more jobs than jobseekers. The US unemployment rate hit 13.3 percent in May, with more than 47 million people laid off since coronavirus lockdowns began.

Temporary contracts

So why has Japan's rate stayed so low? One major explanation lies in the country's dearth of workers owing to an ageing population. Japan has the world's only "super-aged" society where more than 28 percent of people are 65 and over. This means firms are reluctant to lay people off even during a recession, as they

fear they will have few options to recruit when the crisis passes. Japanese law also makes it difficult for companies to hire and fire flexibly during a downturn, notes Munehisa Tamura from the Daiwa Institute of Research.

"Therefore, even if an economic shock happens, generally speaking, it does not directly lead to an immediate and sharp spike in unemployment," he told AFP. Even then, analysts point out the low rate does not account for millions—especially women—who gave up their job during the pandemic to care for family and are

not counted as jobseekers. And some critics say the apparently healthy unemployment data belies the daily reality for millions—especially the 40 percent of the workforce on temporary or part-time contracts. The government launched a massive economic package that includes funds to help businesses keep employees on — 4.2 million are on this furlough system, according to government data, some six percent of the workforce.

It also pointed out that it was unclear whether the health and safety situation next March would allow for the organization of an event that usually draws more than 600,000 visitors and 10,000 journalists. This year's edition was cancelled after Switzerland banned large gatherings before introducing stricter lockdown measures to fight the novel coronavirus.

The wealthy Alpine nation has, like other European countries, lifted many of those measures, but still has restrictions on large gatherings. The foundation said that back in March, it had asked the canton of Geneva to provide financial support to help cover 11 million Swiss francs (\$11.6 million, 10.3 million euros) it lost when the 2020 edition was cancelled at the last minute, and to help prepare for next year's show.

The GIMS is the largest public event organized in Switzerland, and usually fills the Geneva region's coffers with around 200 million francs each year, the foundation pointed out. At the beginning of June, it said, the Geneva cantonal government approved a


Firms leave shift workers in limbo
'In limbo'

These staff are still technically on the payroll of their firms and so not included in the official unemployment data but many temporary workers complain they are getting paid very little or nothing at all.

"I was told to stay home, using my paid holidays," said one restaurant employee, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity. But his handful of paid holidays were quickly used up.

"For all of April, May and until now, I have been paid no salary. Absolutely zero." He said seven other shift workers were in a similar position, while four full-time regular employees were continuing to work and be paid.

His employer, contacted by AFP, declined to comment. But the case is far from unique, experts say.

Union official Tetsuya Obayashi told AFP it was "easier for companies to leave shift workers in limbo". "When the economy comes back, they can use them again. Shift-workers are nothing but a convenient buffer."

According to Ipeei Torii, head of an NGO supporting overseas workers, the worst affected are foreign staff, who made up just 2.7 percent of the workforce in 2019 but frequently occupy temporary and precarious jobs. "They will be the last to go back to work," he told AFP.

Geraldine, a hotel cleaner in Tokyo from the Philippines, told AFP she is now working just 10 days a month, three hours a shift. "I earn less than 10 percent of my salary," she said. "Right now I'm living on my savings. But they are almost completely gone." —AFP


Saudi economy contracts 1% amid oil plunge

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's economy contracted by 1 percent in the first quarter, official data showed yesterday, but the figures only marginally captured the collapse in oil prices and the coronavirus crisis, which deteriorated in March. "This negative growth originated mainly from the contraction in the oil sector by 4.6 percent, while the non-oil sector recorded a positive growth rate of 1.6 percent," the General Authority for Statistics said, citing preliminary estimates. The world's largest oil exporter is facing its worst economic decline this year after the COVID-19 pandemic dampened global crude demand and measures to contain the coronavirus hurt the kingdom's non-oil economy.

"The coronavirus crisis means that this is somewhat old news and the figures for Q2 will almost certainly be terrible," James Swanston, MENA economist at Capital Economics said.

In the first quarter, the value of Saudi Arabia's oil exports plunged by about \$11 billion year on year, and in April alone the drop was of about \$12 billion, official data showed this month. Sharp production cuts in May and June, aimed at lifting oil prices, are likely to weigh further on oil GDP in the second quarter, and figures released by the central bank this week showed the non-oil economy continued to suffer in May.

Profits for the banking sector posted an annual decline of nearly 40 percent in May and points of sale transactions were down by nearly 16 percent, according to Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority data. "Lockdown measures and weak confidence continued to take a toll on spending," said Dubai-based Arqaam Capital, which estimated consumer spending fell by 32 percent year on year last month after a 35 percent decline in April.

Hoping to raise non-oil revenues, the government has ordered an increase in value-added tax, but this is likely to dampen consumer spending and slow down economic recovery as measures to contain the coronavirus are lifted, economists have said.

The International Monetary Fund estimates Saudi Arabia's economy will shrink by 6.8 percent this year. —Reuters

Geneva auto show 2021 cancelled over virus crisis

GENEVA: Geneva's auto show was cancelled this year amid the coronavirus pandemic, and organizers said Monday they were also scrapping the 2021 edition as the auto sector reels from the crisis.

The executive committee of the foundation that runs the Geneva International Motor Show, a major event on the auto industry calendar, said that after polling exhibitors, it had "given up the idea to organize a 2021 edition." "A majority of exhibitors have said they probably will not participate in a 2021 edition and that they would prefer taking part in a 2022 edition," a statement said. The GIMS Foundation noted the auto sector was "currently facing a major crisis, and the



GENEVA: This file photo shows a press day of the Geneva International Motor Show in Geneva. The annual Geneva International Motor Show was cancelled earlier this year amid the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

loan of 16.8 million francs, but it had been forced to turn down the money due to the reimbursement conditions, and a stipulation that it host an event in 2021.

Instead, it said that it was exploring selling GIMS to the Palexpo exhibition space where the show normally is held. —AFP

Business

Pandemic set to undo decade of progress in Africa: IMF

Sub-Saharan African economy could shrink 3.2% in 2020

WASHINGTON: The coronavirus pandemic could set back incomes in sub-Saharan Africa by a decade as weak oil prices, a tourism standstill and business lockdowns shrink the region's economy 3.2 percent in 2020, an IMF official said Monday.

Activity is expected to recover in 2021, but countries first will have to get through a year in which many will see tepid growth at best, while those that rely on commodities or tourism will suffer severe declines.

"It is a worrisome picture, really, in terms of the economic outlook, and really reflects the continuing weak global economic environment that countries in the region face,"

Africa director for the International Monetary Fund Abebe Aemro Selassie told AFP.

The continent is grappling with more than 383,000 cases of coronavirus, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. The IMF on Monday released its updated outlook for sub-Saharan Africa, showing the downturn is set to cause a drop in real per-capita income of as much as 15 percent in all but two countries, meaning the region overall will suffer a decline of 7.0 percent, back to where it was a decade ago.

With oil prices low globally, crude exporters will be badly hit. Nigeria is expected to shrink by 5.4 percent and Angola by 4.0 percent, its fifth straight year of economic contraction. Flight bans and health concerns mean less tourists, and the

IMF expects the Seychelles to shrink by 13.8 percent in 2020 and Mauritius by 12.2 percent.

Even diversified economies will suffer. Ethiopia's GDP is expected to grow just 1.9 percent in fiscal year 2020 then "stall completely" the following year, the IMF said. South Africa, the continent's most-industrialized economy—which also has the highest number of recorded coronavirus infections—will contract 8.0 percent in 2020 due to lockdowns imposed to curb the virus, a risk Abebe said countries across the continent face.

"Unfortunately, the region remains still on the exponential side of how the pandemic is playing out in the vast majority of countries," he said. "Absent vigilance, there's no reason why we cannot expect the same kind of dynamics that we've seen elsewhere in terms of the pandemic."

Crisis lender to jack up Africa aid



Fear of spillovers

The Washington-based crisis lender has moved quickly to roll out support programs to help African economies weather the downturn, with aid totaling up to \$10 billion over the last two months or so, and more to be announced, Abebe said. Africa also stands to benefit from debt relief agreed to in April by the G20 representing the world's largest economies.

There is "strong willingness to provide" the relief and about 25 countries have applied, though details are still being discussed with some creditors, Abebe said.



An exterior view of the building of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is seen in Washington, DC. The coronavirus pandemic could set African incomes back a decade as weak oil prices, curbed tourism and business lockdowns contract the continent's economy 3.2 percent in 2020, an IMF official said. —AFP

The world's poorest continent is expected to rebound in 2021 with growth in sub-Saharan Africa of 3.4 percent, assuming lockdowns have eased and the pandemic does not get markedly worse with a second wave of infections.

But given the tentative nature of the "phase one" trade deal between the United States and

China, and Washington's threat of new taxes on European goods amid a trade feud, Abebe warned that wider tensions could threaten Africa's recovery. "A tense geopolitical environment, one which leads to adverse trade outcomes, growth outcomes, economic outcomes, will also have some spillover on the region." —AFP

India plans sops for auto firms to boost exports

NEW DELHI: India is drawing up an incentive scheme for the autos sector aimed at doubling exports of vehicles and components in the next five years, four sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The Department of Heavy Industries (DHI) has sought feedback from auto industry groups on the initial proposal, which suggests giving incentives over five years to increase local production and procurement for export, the sources said.

The incentives would be based on the sales value of vehicles or components and eligible companies would need to meet certain conditions, including a minimum revenue and profit threshold and presence in at least 10 countries, two of the sources said, adding the form the incentives would take had not been decided.

DHI did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The move is part of India's effort to create 'champion' sectors to attract investment, generate jobs and boost manufacturing, and comes amid calls by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to be self-reliant as a nation.

India wants to promote exports and has identified some sectors, including autos and textiles, for which incentive plans are being designed, said a senior government official. "For autos the government has engaged with various stakeholders. We have to see what needs to be done in the global context," said the official, adding that even though talks are in early stages and details have not been finalized there is a plan to give a "big push" to the sector.

India's auto sector exports touched \$27 billion in the fiscal year ending March 2019, led by companies including Ford Motor, Hyundai Motor, Maruti Suzuki, Volkswagen and Bosch, which analysts say stand to gain the most. The push, however, comes at a time when auto sales globally have been battered because of the coronavirus pandemic and demand may take a while to recover.

To make it a success in the present scenario, India needs to ensure the proposal is not complicated by too many conditions and is not based on sales targets, said Vinay Piparsania, consulting director, automotive, at Counterpoint Research. "Having a liberal trade policy will allow companies to bring in new and global technologies which will increase their scale and India's competitiveness as an export hub," he said. —Reuters



MANESAR: Cars are seen parked at Maruti Suzuki's plant at Manesar —Reuters

Nepal families face hunger as virus hits remittances

KATHMANDU: Nepali housewife Shiba Kala Limbu grimaced as she recalled how she went hungry in order to feed her five-year-old daughter after the coronavirus pandemic cost her husband his job as a mason in the Gulf state of Qatar.

The 25-year-old said she had no money for rent after the payments from her husband, Ram Kumar, stopped. "It is painful," she said, as she peeled potatoes in a dimly lit kitchen that doubles as her bedroom in the Baniyatar locality of the Nepali capital.

"I skipped several evening meals to save whatever little food I had for my daughter." The spread of the deadly respiratory disease caused by the virus has choked economies worldwide and pitched millions of migrant workers out of jobs, leaving them unable to send money home.

More than 56 percent of Nepal's estimated 5.4 million households receive remittances that are a vital lifeline for families that have no other source of income, official figures show. Remittances totaled \$8.1 billion last year, or more than a quarter of Nepal's gross domestic product, but are likely to drop 14% in 2020 because of the global recession caused by the virus, as well as a fall in oil prices, the World Bank says.

Millions of Nepali migrants work in the oil-rich Gulf countries and Malaysia. Remittances are crucial for lower-middle-class families that have moved to city centers and rely on them to pay for rent, groceries, school fees and utilities, said analyst Ganesh Gurung. "Without remittances these families will get poorer and crimes like human trafficking and prostitution could rise," said Gurung, an expert on migrant issues at the Nepal Institute of Development Studies think tank.

China factory activity picks up in June

BEIJING: China's factory activity picked up pace in June, official data showed yesterday, although analysts warned weak global demand and a potential coronavirus resurgence are weighing on its longer-term recovery.

The world's second-largest economy has been whirring back to life after the virus and sweeping lockdowns prompted a near-halt in activity at the start of the year. But economists caution that momentum may weaken in the second half of 2020 as key markets struggle to recover from the crisis and as orders for medical supplies abroad—which have boosted exports—peak and fall.

China's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a key gauge of activity in factories, came in at 50.9 points in June, better than the 50.5 forecast in a Bloomberg News poll of analysts and up 0.3 points from May. Anything above 50 is considered to show expansion.

The non-manufacturing PMI came in at 54.4 points from 53.6, according to the National Bureau of Statistics

(NBS). The readings will be welcomed as the economy slowly emerges from the disease, having shrunk in the first quarter for the first time in decades.

NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe noted that the surprise uptick came as "supply and demand continued to pick up" in June, while imports and exports are also looking better as major global markets restart their economies. But he warned there were still "uncertainties", with the import and export indexes below the 50-mark and a larger number of small enterprises reporting a lack of orders.

UOB economist Ho Woei Chen told AFP the poorer performance of small businesses suggests China's government needs to continue providing targeted support. And while there was a relatively good recovery in the second quarter, Nomura chief China economist Lu Ting flagged "strong headwinds ahead and heightened uncertainty".

"The momentum could lose some steam in coming months," he warned. Lu told AFP the manufacturing PMI improvement may have been driven by an improvement in new export orders but they remained in contraction territory, adding that the fall in the employment sub-index also did not bode well.

"The rebound in new COVID-19 cases in Beijing and some surrounding



KATHMANDU: A Nepali housewife Shiba Kala Limbu ties up her five-year-old daughter Masim Limbu's hair in Kathmandu. —Reuters

Limbu, the housewife, used to receive up to 20,000 Nepali rupees (\$165) every month before the pandemic.

But in the last six months she has received only 40,000 Nepali rupees from her husband, most of it borrowed from his friends. "That's all he has managed to send this year," she said. "I used some of it to pay for the rent and the rest to buy groceries." In the southwestern town of Gajedah, Radha Marasini said her husband, Indra Mani, lost his job as a security guard at a textile factory in India's northern city of Ludhiana after the outbreak.

As her income dried up, the 43-year-old had no option but to turn to a local lender and pay crip-

pling interest rates to ensure she and her 15-year-old son can survive. "If the corona (virus) situation does not improve, we'll have to eat only one meal a day," Marasini said.

The virus has caused 13,248 infections and 29 deaths in Nepal. Some migrants, like Limbu's husband Ram Kumar, are staying overseas despite the loss of their jobs, in hopes the situation will improve and they can resume work.

"It is traumatic to be away from the family," Kumar said from Qatar, which plans a limited reopening of restaurants, beaches and parks from July 1. "If there was any hope for finding a job in Nepal, I would go." —Reuters



BEIJING: A woman wearing a face mask picks out shoes at a shop in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

cities dealt a blow to the service sector," he said, adding that recent data suggested no clear recovery in tourism in recent months.

Premier Li Keqiang has made stabilizing employment a top priority, targeting new urban employment of over nine million—a drop from 11 million targeted in 2019 — after the pandemic hit.

Martin Rasmussen of Capital

Economics added that overseas shipments "look ripe for a pullback despite the improvement in export orders", with demand for virus-related products like masks that were needed in the global outbreak likely to weaken. "But the continued rapid issuance of government bonds means that infrastructure spending should remain strong and help keep the recovery on track," he said. —AFP

Business

Latin America's airline apocalypse signals a future with weak rivalry

Airlines mull once-unthinkable cooperation with rivals

SAO PAULO: Bankrupt LATAM Airlines and Avianca Holdings are dramatically retrenching their once grand ambitions amid the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing competition in Latin America as they mull once-unthinkable cooperation with rivals.

Since May, LATAM has exited Argentina, partnered with rival Azul SA in Brazil and cut back domestic operations in Chile, while Avianca has departed Peru.

LATAM is now open to a deeper alliance with Azul, even as the two airlines usually control a combined 60 percent of Brazil's domestic market.

industry group. "Less connectivity means less choice, and less choice usually translates into higher prices."

All airlines in Latin America face some risk of disappearing, analysts say. Dominant LATAM and Avianca have filed for bankruptcy protection, while auditors for Brazil's Gol Linhas Aereas Inteligentes are seeking to include a formal warning in the airline's financial statements that the carrier risks disappearing.

Azul and Aeromexico have hired restructuring advisers, while Panama's Copa Holdings has not flown since late March, straining its finances.

One airline that could stand to benefit is Chile-based JetSMART, which is considering entering Brazil's domestic market.

JetSMART's expansion is backed by deep pockets at private equity firm Indigo Partners, which also holds stakes in Frontier, Wizz Air and Mexico's Volaris. Indigo Partners founder Bill Franke told Reuters he expects to look into helping Avianca's restructuring. That could bring Avianca closer to JetSMART, keeping the Colombian airline's markets safe from competition. Avianca declined to comment.

'Dividing the market'

If JetSMART expands to Brazil, it would arrive as competition is diminishing. Last year, LATAM and Gol fought to keep Azul from entering a key Sao Paulo airport. "JetSMART in Brazil would wreak havoc on the current players," said an air industry executive.

But the coronavirus has turned competition into a secondary concern, evidenced by the lack of pushback against the LATAM-Azul code-share. The code-share "would have been untenable before," said Carlos Ozores, an aviation consultant at ICE.

The current partnership applies only to non-overlapping routes, but LATAM said it is "open to evaluating the possibility of the eventual future expansion of this code-share" to overlapping routes. "They are dividing the market for themselves," an executive at a rival airline said of LATAM and Azul.

Gol CEO Paulo Kakinioff said code-share agreements - in which two or more airlines publish and mar-



An employee does maintenance work in an Avianca airlines aircraft on the tarmac at El Dorado International Airport during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. - AFP

ket the same flight sharing one aircraft - will reduce air-travel supply, "which will benefit all of us." The LATAM-Azul partnership has led to speculation about the future.

"It could be the first step for deeper integration, even a merger," said Andre Castellini, an aviation consultant at Bain & Company.

LATAM and Azul deny merger talks, but a source familiar with the code-share talks said it is "possible." More than mergers, so-called joint business agreements are in vogue. Recently, LATAM signed one with Delta Air Lines Inc., while Avianca, Copa and United have announced a rival one. The agreements allow for deep route integration, without all the expenses and red tape of an actual merger.

LATAM was born out of the difficult merger of

Chile's LAN and Brazil's TAM, which saddled the new carrier with big expenses. Not long ago, LATAM and Avianca had their planes in almost every corner in Latin America, controlling a combined 60 percent of the domestic markets in Colombia, Chile and Peru.

But Avianca pulled out of Peru in May, calling the domestic market unprofitable, surrendering to LATAM, which has dominated travel there since the 1990s.

LATAM, in turn, departed Argentina earlier this month after losing an accumulated \$350 million since 2012. What it shows is airlines willing to surrender market share that they fought hard in normal times to maintain. "To talk about competition in this context makes no sense, this is a fight for survival," Bain's Castellini said. "Airlines are going to prioritize their survival over their market share." - Reuters



Scaling back could reshape air travel

The scaling back could reshape air travel in Latin America, weakening competition regionally and driving up ticket prices while also helping some carriers survive. The moves show how the industry is already shrinking through attrition, as airlines are too cash-strapped to consider buying the competition.

"More than consolidation, many airlines will disappear," said Eliseo Lamazares, an aviation consultant at KPMG. Latin American governments increasingly recognize there is a new reality, and have shifted their priorities to keeping local airlines alive instead of attracting new players.

Attrition has also occurred in Ecuador, where TAME shut down, and in Mexico, where Interjet has scaled back. "If this trend is allowed to continue, connectivity around the region will be affected," said Peter Cerda, vice president for the Americas at IATA, an airline

BP sells petchem arm to Ineos for \$5 billion

LONDON: British energy group BP, hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic slashing demand for oil, announced Monday the sale of its petrochemical business to privately-owned rival Ineos for \$5.0 billion (4.4 billion euros).

"The agreed sale... will further strengthen BP's balance sheet and delivers its target for agreed divestments a year earlier than originally scheduled," a statement said. BP chief executive Bernard Looney added: "I recognize this decision will come as a surprise and we will do our best to minimize uncertainty. I am confident however that the businesses will thrive as part of Ineos, a global leader in petrochemicals."

BP said that 1,700 staff employed by its petrochemical business worldwide were expected to transfer to Ineos on completion of the sale that meets a \$15-billion divestment target one year early. "Today's agreement is another deliberate step in building a BP that can compete and succeed through the energy transition," Looney said. The Irish national, who became CEO of BP in February, is targeting "net zero" carbon emissions for the company by 2050.

In the immediate future, BP must rebuild its finances, having earlier this month said it would take a hit of up to \$17.5 billion in the second quarter. With the coronavirus fallout ravaging global oil demand, BP has decided also to axe around 10,000 jobs, or 15 percent of its global workforce. After companies worldwide closed their doors and airlines grounded planes at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak towards the end of the first quarter, oil prices dropped off a cliff, causing them to briefly turn negative. Prices have however rebounded sharply in recent weeks as governments ease lockdowns and businesses slowly reopen.

'Top-class business'

"We are delighted to acquire these top-class businesses from BP, extending the Ineos position in global petrochemicals and providing great scope for expansion and integration with our existing business," Ineos founder and chairman Jim Ratcliffe said in a separate



An INEOS logo on the JS Ineos Insight ship as it arrives to dock at Grangemouth in Scotland. British energy group BP, hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic slashing demand for oil, announced Monday, the sale of its petrochemical business to rival Ineos for \$5.0 billion (4.4 billion euros). - AFP

statement Monday. BP's aromatic and acetyls business consists of 15 sites—five in the Americas, two in Europe and eight across Asia.

"Aromatics provides the building blocks for the global polyester industry, key to fibers, films and packaging," Ineos said in its statement. "Acetyls support a wide range of downstream industries in food flavoring and preservation, pharmaceuticals, paints, adhesives and packaging," it added.

Ineos will pay \$4.0 billion to BP upon completion of the deal—and the remaining \$1.0 billion by June 2021. BP's share price was up 3.2 percent at 314.5 pence in London afternoon deals following news of the sale.

The sale "raises cash for a firm that has been severely hit by the pandemic, while streamlining and potentially reinventing the oil giant (BP) into a different kind of energy company," said Connor Campbell, analyst at Spreadex trading group. Ineos, majority-owned by British billionaire Ratcliffe, employs around 22,000 people across 26 countries.

In 2005, Ineos spent \$9.0 billion on purchasing chemical assets and refineries from BP. Under previous CEO Bob Dudley meanwhile, BP kick-started a \$15-billion divestment program. In the past year, the energy major agreed also to sell its Alaska operations to Hilcorp Alaska for \$5.6 billion.

Together the disposals were initially aimed at recouping \$10 billion to finance BP's \$10.4-billion purchase of US oil and gas operations belonging to mining group BHP Billiton. - AFP

German Amazon workers strike for pay deal

FRANKFURT: Hundreds of workers walked out at Amazon sites across Germany Monday to press for a binding pay and conditions agreement and highlight coronavirus risks, but the company has so far brushed off their demands. "We're upping the pressure as Amazon has so far given no sign of understanding and is endangering employees' health for company profits," Orhan Akman, a representative for service workers' union Verdi, said in a statement.

Local worker representatives estimated that up to 450 employees joined the strike at an Amazon logistics center in the western town of Rheinberg. Walkouts were also planned to last into Tuesday in Werne, Leipzig, Bad Hersfeld and Koblenz, some accompanied by protests. Akman highlighted a recent coronavirus outbreak in Bad Hersfeld with "30 to 40 colleagues infected" as one pressing reason for the labor conflict.

As well as improved measures to protect workers' health, the union wants Amazon to sign on to regional wage agreements covering retail and e-commerce stores—a battle Verdi has been waging for years. Opposition Greens party co-leader Annalena Baerbock backed the strike, calling for "fair wages, dignified working conditions and above all a collective bargaining agreement" at Amazon. But the company said that it already pays wages "at the upper end of the scale for comparable work", adding that it offers "chances for many people to develop their careers and above all a safe working environment". It highlighted \$4 billion of spending worldwide on measures to protect employees and customers from coronavirus infection, from hand disinfectant to protective masks. The strike will have "no influence on maintaining deliveries, as the vast majority of employees are working as normal," Amazon said. - AFP



Gulf Bank winner Al-Rashdan claims cash prize up to 12 times his salary

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the winner of its third monthly Salary Account draw of the year, which was postponed since March. This month's lucky winner, Mohammad Mansour Rashed Al-Rashdan, will take home a cash prize of up to 12 times his salary. The Salary Account draw took place at Gulf Bank's Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

With the 2020 Kuwaiti Salary Offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 15,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.



SEATTLE, WA: A Boeing 737 MAX aircraft lands following a FAA recertification flight at Boeing Field on Monday in Seattle, Washington. - AFP

Boeing 737 MAX test flight takes off

SEATTLE: US regulators launched a test flight of the Boeing 737 MAX on Monday, a key step in recertifying the jet that has grounded for more than a year following two fatal crashes.

A MAX plane took off from Boeing Field in Seattle at 1655 GMT, a Federal Aviation Administration spokesperson said. The initial flight will last "several hours" and will be followed by additional trips expected to take about three days, the spokesperson said in a statement.

But though the flight is a critical step, the regulator stressed that the process for returning the once top-selling aircraft to the skies is not over.

"While the certification flights are an important milestone, a number of key tasks remain," the FAA spokesperson said, adding that the agency will be "deliberate" and "thoroughly review Boeing's work" before allowing the plane to return to service. "We will lift the grounding order only after we are satisfied that the aircraft meets certification standards."

The MAX has been grounded globally since March

13, 2019, following an Ethiopian Airlines crash that killed 157 people. That catastrophe came just a few months after a Lion Air MAX crash that killed 189 people. The troubling similarities between the two accidents, both of which occurred shortly after takeoff, along with the pilots' inability to regain control of the plane, led global aviation authorities to ground the model indefinitely.

For months, the US aerospace giant has been struggling to get the medium-haul aircraft—previously Boeing's main source of revenue—back into service. The MAX's anti-stall flight system, the MCAS, was partially to blame for both crashes. But other technical malfunctions, including one involving electrical wiring, were subsequently detected during the aircraft's modification process, slowing down its recertification.

Shares of Boeing opened sharply higher Monday and rose further following news the flight had gone off. Near 1630 GMT, Boeing shares were up 10.2 percent to \$187.26.

Civil aviation authorities cannot approve the modified model until they have examined how it performs in the air, and looked at the thousands of data points collected during the test flights. But beyond that Boeing still must develop pilot training protocols for the MAX that will be subject to public comment and a final review by a technical advisory board. - AFP

South Pole warmed three times the global rate in last 30 years: Study

BUENOS AIRES: At the South Pole, considered the coldest point on Earth, temperatures are rising fast. So fast, in fact, that Kyle Clem and other climate researchers began to worry and wonder whether human-driven climate change was playing a bigger role than expected in Antarctica. Temperature data shows that the desolate region has warmed at three times the global warming rate over the last three decades up through 2018, the South Pole's hottest year on record, the researchers report in a study published Monday in *Nature Climate Change*.

Looking at data from 20 weather stations across Antarctica, the South Pole warming rate was seven times higher than the overall average for the continent.

"The South Pole seemed to be isolated from what was going on across the rest of the world," said Clem, who has focused his research at the Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand on better understanding the Antarctic climate. "But all of the sudden, it ramps up with rapid warming, some of the strongest warming on the planet."

Clem and his colleagues wanted to explain why the icy continent began warming rapidly after a period of cooling during the 1970s and '80s: was it natural variability? Or was it part of the wider trend of global warming caused by human industrial activity?

The answer, they found, was both.

The South Pole warming is partly connected to naturally rising temperatures in the tropical western Pacific being propelled southward by cyclones in the icy waters of the Weddell Sea, off the Antarctic peninsula.

But that pattern, believed to be part of a multi-decade natural process, explained only some of the warming trend. The rest, the researchers said, was due to human-induced climate change.

"The end result is a massive warming," Clem said, though he acknowledged that it's difficult to determine exactly how much each factor played a part. With temperature records for the South Pole dating back only about 60 years, the region's climate is little understood.

Still rigid

Scientists have known that Pacific weather systems can influence the western Antarctic and the Antarctic peninsula, where rising air and water temperatures already are causing ice to melt. Researchers are closely watching the continent amid concerns that ice loss will lead to higher sea levels worldwide.

What happens closer to the Antarctic coastlines has more influence on this ice melt. But this "significant" new finding that the southernmost point of the globe is also vulnerable to warming was a surprise for Alexandra Isern, head of Antarctic studies for the US National Science Foundation.



Temperature data shows that the South Pole has warmed at three times the global warming rate over the last three decades.— File photo

"An area of the planet that we felt was very isolated is actually not as isolated as we thought," Isern said.

Still, the South Pole is not yet in any danger of melting. "These temperature changes are quite striking, but it's still pretty darn cold," said climatologist Julianne Stroeve, who is a professor in Manitoba, Canada, while working for the

National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado. So far, temperature changes haven't been significant enough "to translate into any mass loss" in the ice at Antarctica's interior, she said.

Temperatures at the South Pole, which sits on an icy plateau a mile and a half above sea level, generally range between minus 50 and minus 20

degrees Celsius (minus 58 and minus 4 Fahrenheit). But the average temperature rose by 1.8 degree C for 30 years up to 2018, the study found. Globally, temperatures rose about 0.5 to 0.6 degree C during that time. The new study shows that Antarctica is "waking up" to climate change, Stroeve warned. "That, to me, is alarming." — Reuters

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Lifestyle | Features

Francis Bacon triptych sells for \$84m at online auction

A triptych by Francis Bacon fetched \$84.6 million on Monday at a Sotheby's auction held without an audience and live-streamed to bidders worldwide in a first for the company forced to adapt its big events during the coronavirus pandemic. The British artist's work, inspired by Greek playwright Aeschylus' "Oresteia", is one of 28 large-scale triptychs—a painting in three parts—created by Bacon between 1962 and 1991. It previously belonged to a Norwegian art collector and had an estimated value of \$60-\$80 million.

Sotheby's spring auctions usually generate billions of dollars, but with New York City hard-hit by COVID-19, the auction house announced

last month it would stream a series of modern and contemporary art sales from London instead. Describing the event as "an historic evening", Chairman for Sotheby's Europe Oliver Barker introduced the auction, the first of its magnitude to be held without an audience.

A bidding war raged for around 10 minutes between one potential buyer placing bids online from China, and another—who was victorious, but chose to remain anonymous—making counter-offers on the phone to a Sotheby's specialist in New York. Another Bacon triptych, "Three Studies of Lucian Freud," sold in 2013 for \$142.4 million at Christie's in New York, making it one of the 10 most expensive paint-

ings ever sold at auction.

Sotheby's and Christie's 20th Century spring auctions sales usually occur at the same time, but Christie's announced earlier this month that it would hold its sale on July 10 this year. While online bids have until now rarely exceeded \$5 million, Jean-Michel Basquiat's drawing of a head, "Untitled (Head)" sold for \$15.2 million on Monday—a new Sotheby's record for an online purchase—and a painting by Joan Mitchell, "Garden Party," went for \$7.9 million. The event brought in a total of \$363.2 million, the auction house said.—AFP



Francis Bacon's Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus is exhibited as Sotheby's NY previews highlights of the Evening Sale at Sotheby's during the coronavirus pandemic in New York City.—AFP



In this file photo Canadian circus troop "Cirque du Soleil" performs in their acrobatic performance on ice titled CRYSTAL at Arena Riga, Latvia.—AFP

Cirque du Soleil files for bankruptcy protection

Cirque du Soleil announced on Monday it is filing for bankruptcy protection and cutting thousands of jobs as the world's most famous circus troupe seeks to survive the coronavirus pandemic. Struggling with a debt of more than US\$1 billion, the Canadian group said its application would be heard by the Superior Court of Quebec on Tuesday. If granted, the Canadian company will then seek bankruptcy protection in the United States.

1984, the Cirque set up big tops in more than 300 cities around the world, delighting audiences with enchanting contemporary circus acts set to music but without the usual trappings of lions, elephants and bears. But the pandemic left it fighting for survival, forcing it to cancel shows worldwide, from Las Vegas to Tel Aviv, Moscow to Melbourne, and furlough more than 4,500 acrobats and technicians—or 95 percent of its workforce.

Buying the Cirque

Founder Guy Laliberte had announced in May he was interested in trying to buy back the troupe, adding he wanted to keep the headquarters in Montreal and keep a Quebecois management team. The Quebec government offered a conditional loan a few days later of \$200 million. The provincial economic minister also said that an agreement had been reached with Cirque's current shareholders to buy out their participating shares. "Our current shareholders, with the help of Investissement Quebec," the Quebec government's arm, have filed a "proposal" to purchase the company, Lamarre said, noting they will have first right of refusal.

A group of shareholders—which includes private equity firm TPG, Chinese conglomerate Fosun and Investissement Quebec — will initially acquire company assets in exchange for providing \$300 million in liquidity as the restructuring venture seeks other investors. The expectation is that the company will emerge from the US bankruptcy process with less debt and able to "meaningfully advance toward an eventual restart by launching the in-court process immediately," Cirque du Soleil said. The plan establishes two employee assistance programs totaling \$20 million under the restructuring. Cirque announced it intends to re-hire most of the laid-off employees as soon as conditions allow.—AFP



In this file photo an Artist performs at a media preview in the all-new Cirque du Soleil production KURIOS - Cabinet of Curiosities in Sydney.

In a statement, Cirque du Soleil said it has entered into a purchase agreement with its current shareholders, including a mix of investors from the United States, Canada and China. It will immediately lay off 3,480 workers who had previously been furloughed. "For the past 36 years, Cirque du Soleil has been a highly successful and profitable organization. However, with zero revenues since the forced closure of all of our shows due to COVID-19, management had to act decisively to protect the Company's future," said Daniel Lamarre, chief executive of Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group.

"I look forward to rebuilding our operations and coming together to once again create the magical spectacle that is Cirque du Soleil for our millions of fans worldwide." Founded in

Kim Kardashian sells 20 percent stake in beauty brand to Coty



In this file photo US media personality Kim Kardashian attends the 2020 Vanity Fair Oscar Party following the 92nd Oscars at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills.—AFP

Kim Kardashian West has inked a deal to sell 20 percent of her make-up brand KKW Beauty to American cosmetics giant Coty for \$200 million, the pair announced on Monday. The agreement values the three-year-old company at \$1 billion. It will see Coty take "overall responsibility" for the brand's skincare, haircare, personal care and nail products, they said in a statement. "This relationship will allow me to focus on the creative elements that I'm so passionate about while benefiting from the incredible resources of Coty, and launching my products around the world," Kardashian said.

The purchase is expected to be completed in the third quarter of the fiscal year 2021 and sees

Coty deepen its collaboration with the celebrity Kardashian-Jenner family. In January, Coty, acquired a 51 percent stake in Kylie Jenner's cosmetics brand. Jenner is Kardashian's half-sister. The pair have built a beauty empire on the back of the success of the hit reality TV show "Keeping Up with the Kardashians," which first aired in 2007. Kardashian has 177 million followers on Instagram while Jenner has 183 million. Last week, rapper Kanye West, Kardashian's husband, announced a deal with his Yeezy fashion brand and Gap which saw the latter's shares surge.—AFP

Pioneering woman artist Delaunay's drawings to be sold

Dozens of works by the pioneering modernist artist Sonia Delaunay went under the hammer in Paris yesterday. The Ukrainian-born painter was a co-founder of the Orphism movement, which alongside Cubism shook the art world in the years before World War I. The 88 drawings and small gouaches trace the development of the Russian artist's work from the 1920s to the 1970s, by which time her geometric designs had appeared on fashion catwalks, textiles and costumes for the great ballet impresario Diaghilev. Delaunay, born Sarah Ilinitchna Stern, married a gay German art dealer so she could get hands on her own inheritance before falling in love with the aristocratic French avant-garde artist Robert Delaunay, who she later married.

Between them they helped create Orphism by breaking out of the boundaries of Cubism, making it more colour-

ful and fragmented, and pushing it toward the more abstract art that later became dominant. The cache of works being auctioned in the French capital were collected by the French publisher Jacques Damase. He is renowned for publishing the drawings of many modern art masters from Picasso to Max Ernst and Georges Braque. Damase was one of those responsible for reviving interest in her work, which had been overshadowed by her husband.

Delaunay, who died in 1979, left behind many drawings and designs for fashion and textile works as well as painting and sketches for posters and illustrations. A believer in making art accessible in every aspect of life, the sale also includes preparatory drawings for jewellery, ceramics and even playing cards.—AFP



Painting, "Rythme" (left) by French artist Sonia Delaunay is displayed next to a piece (center) entitled "Your Concentric Welcome" by Olafur Eliasson in Chaumont, eastern France.

Kaepernick will be subject of six-part Netflix series

Former NFL star Colin Kaepernick, who launched kneeling protests during US national anthems to protest police brutality and racial injustice, will be the subject of a six-part series, Netflix announced Monday. "Colin in Black & White" will focus on the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback's high school years, formative time that led to his social activism. Kaepernick, who has not played in the NFL since the 2016 season after starting his protest movement, will appear as himself as a narrator of the series, which will be guided by filmmaker Ava DuVernay.

The project, which completed the writing stage in May, shows how growing up as a black child with a white adopted family impacted his journey to the NFL as well as social activism. "Too often we see race and black stories portrayed through a white lens," Kaepernick said. "We seek to give new perspective to the differing realities that black people face. We explore the racial conflicts I faced as an adopted black man in a white community during my high school years. It's an honor to bring these stories to life in collaboration with Ava for the world to see."

Kaepernick played six seasons for San Francisco, leading the 49ers to the

2013 Super Bowl, where they lost to Baltimore. After a coaching change for the team, Kaepernick opted out of his contract in March 2017 but has remained unsigned since then. In September 2017, US President Donald Trump intensified the controversy over the kneeling protest, calling anyone kneeling during the anthem "sons of bitches".

The May death of unarmed black man George Floyd in police custody in Minnesota sparked global protests over police brutality and brought the Black Lives Matter movement into higher profile as Kaepernick had sought. NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has said the league was too slow in joining the movement and said he was open to a club signing Kaepernick for the 2020 season, set to begin in September. "With his act of protest, Colin Kaepernick ignited a national conversation about race and justice with far-reaching consequences for football, culture and for him, personally," DuVernay said. "Colin's story has much to say about identity, sports and the enduring spirit of protest and resilience." No release date was announced for the project.—AFP



In this file photo taken on September 11, 2016 Colin Kaepernick #7 and Eric Reid #35 of the San Francisco 49ers kneel in protest during the national anthem prior to playing the Los Angeles Rams in their NFL game at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California.—AFP

Iconic '2001: A Space Odyssey' suit to hit auction block

The elusive "2001: A Space Odyssey" spacesuit believed to have been worn by Dr. David Bowman when he "killed" HAL in the groundbreaking 1968 film goes on the auction block next month. The highlight of a Hollywood and space exploration memorabilia show that's set for July 17-18 in Beverly Hills, the spacesuit is conservatively estimated to fetch between \$200,000 and 300,000. It's a rare artifact from the classic by filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, who is thought to have destroyed most of the props and wardrobe from "2001"—widely regarded as one of most influential films of all time—to prevent their use in other productions without his authorization.



This handout photo released by Julien's Auctions shows a spacesuit worn in Stanley Kubrick's "2001 Space Odyssey", to be auctioned in July.—AFP photos

According to Jason DeBord—chief operating officer of Julien's Auctions, which is hosting the event—the only other significant piece from the film to go up at auction was the Aries 1B Trans-Lunar Space Shuttle, which in the movie transported Dr. Heywood R. Floyd from the International Space Station to the moon. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences—the organization behind the Oscars—snagged that prop in 2015 for \$344,000. The spacesuit is especially sought after because it is believed to have been used in one of the film's most iconic scenes—when Bowman destroys HAL 9000, a sentient computer that is killing the astronauts onboard to uphold its programmed mission.

Auctioneers believe this particular costume was used in that scene because its helmet has a base green layer of paint, the color of the helmet worn by Bowman, who was played by Keir Dullea. The near complete spacesuit was likely worn by other actors as well, as the helmet also has layers of white and yellow paint. Along with the helmet, the suit includes boots and an MGM shipping crate. The piece was auctioned off in 1999 and has been in controlled storage for two decades. "It just sort of fell off the face of the earth," DeBord told AFP. "It's kind of magical, because it's sort of a lasting artifact of the filmmaking process."

He said film buffs are hoping to track down a production plan of the Oscar-winning film to "align the different layers of paint with the shooting schedule, and possibly even get a little more specific about where it might have been used in the film." "2001" received four Academy Award nominations and won for visual effects, an accolade for its pioneering techniques that included accurately portraying space flight.

In 1991, it was added to the National Film Registry, earmarked for preservation by the Library of Congress. Among the more than 900 items going up for auction at the same event are the pilot control stick Neil Armstrong used on the Apollo 11 flight to the moon—estimated to go for \$100,000 to \$200,000—and an Apollo-era spacesuit glove designed for Armstrong, estimated at \$10,000 to \$20,000.—AFP



A fisherman drives a boat at the harbour of Sfantu Gheorghe village.—AFP photos



A reed roof wooden house, a traditional roof for Danube Delta's region, is pictured in Sfantu Gheorghe village.

A VANISHING WAY OF LIFE IN DANUBE DELTA'S NATURAL PARADISE

As the "last rower" left in one of the villages dotting Romania's Danube Delta, Iosif Acseste is all too aware of how the traditions and vistas of the region are slowly disappearing—an issue brought into sharper relief by the coronavirus pandemic. Acseste has been plying the Delta with his wooden boat for more than four decades now from his home village of Sfantu Gheorghe. "I know the Danube so well that if you throw me out of a helicopter I'd know where I was", says Acseste proudly. But living in a natural labyrinth, accessible only by boat, has its drawbacks.

Even though the region has been largely spared the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic, residents worry that they may end up beyond the reach of necessary medical care. "There is a good chance that it will be too late when the rescue boat arrives", says Acseste. It is only the latest challenge the modern world has thrown up for the Delta's fragile equilibrium. Included on Unesco's World Heritage list, this natural paradise spread across 5,800 square kilometres hosts over 300 species of bird and 45 freshwater fish species.



A pelican colony is pictured on Sacalin island in the Danube Delta.

relied on tourists eager to discover the canals and ponds in order to make a living. He guides them between the swamps pointing out sights such as yellow water lilies and colonies of pelicans. But as he slows his boat to avoid disturbing a shag drying its wings in the sun, even he admits the fall in visitor numbers has "given nature some respite". The streets may still be unpaved, covered with fine sand and framed by flower-filled gardens.

But these days the roar of motor boats drowns out the gentle rippling of oars through the water. Marius frets that the dilapidated cars which have replaced the horse-drawn carts of old "destroy Sfantu Gheorghe just as the boats equipped with powerful engines ravage the delta". Meanwhile, purpose-built houses have joined the landscape alongside the traditional homesteads.

Marius says the increasing noise and pollution in the Delta are not good for the millions of migratory birds which return from Africa each spring to nest in the islets. As for fish, the other mainstay of the inhabitants' livelihoods, that too is becoming increasingly scarce. Perhaps it's little wonder then that Sfantu Gheorghe is emptying out.

Isolated winters

The village has lost around 1,500 people since the transition away from communism in the early 1990s and now numbers just some 500 souls. Both Bondarencu's and Acseste's children have emigrated, joining millions of their compatriots seeking better lives in the West. "I love everything about this place, but I wouldn't want my children to stay here because they would be isolated six months a year", says Bondarencu.

Life has always been rough in the Delta, especially

in the cold and windy winters when fog complicates navigation and the Danube freezes over in some places. Sitting on a small bench in front of his house, retired 75-year-old fisherman Ilie Ignat well remembers spending weeks at a time cut off from the outside world in harsh winters. His trips on to the Black Sea almost ended in disaster many times but he nevertheless laments the passing of the way of life he grew up with. "The young people today don't want to put in the



Fisherman Iosif Acseste (left), 74 and his wife are pictured in Sfantu Gheorghe village.

effort," he says bitterly, adding: "The days of the oars are over." Even Acseste is voting with his feet. When the weather starts turning later this year he will leave Sfantu Gheorghe behind and move to Tulcea, the nearest big city, for the winter. The journey there takes four hours—on a passenger boat of course.—AFP



The old fishery, now abandoned, in Danube Delta couple of miles away from Sfantu Gheorghe village.

In normal times that makes it a magnet for bird-watchers and other tourists, with locals throwing open the doors of their traditional thatched houses for visitors every summer. But this year that vital source of income looks likely to shrink drastically in the wake of the pandemic. The deputy mayor of Sfantu Gheorghe, Aurel Bondarencu, hopes that Romanians might make up some of the shortfall by holidaying in the Delta instead of heading abroad but that would only offer temporary relief from the region's problems.

Respite for nature

Even "normal" tourism wasn't without its problems in the time before the virus. Fisherman Marius, 51,



Swans sit at a channel leading to Sacalin island in the Danube Delta.



A frog sits on a water lily leaf on a channel in the Danube Delta close to the village of Sfantu Gheorghe.



A fisherman prepares his nets in Sfantu Gheorghe village in the Danube Delta.



People watch the sunrise on the Black Sea in Sfantu Gheorghe village where Danube spills its waters into the sea.



Abandoned wood boats are pictured next the harbour of Sfantu Gheorghe village.



A white egret takes off on a channel leading to Sacalin island in the Danube Delta.

Iraq virus spike risks pushing strained doctors over the edge

BAGHDAD: Unpaid salaries, mask shortages, threats from patients' families – doctors across Iraq are cracking under such conditions, just as they face a long-feared spike in coronavirus cases. "We're collapsing," said Mohammed, a doctor at a COVID-19 ward in Baghdad who declined to use his full name so he could speak freely. "I just can't work anymore. I can't even focus on the cases or the patients," he said, speaking to AFP at the end of a 48-hour shift.

Iraq has officially registered more than 47,000 coronavirus cases, with doctors increasingly infected. "I personally know 16 doctors who caught it over the last month," Mohammed said. The country's overall death toll is heading towards 2,000, with official daily fatalities starting to top 100 in the past week – and doctors warn they cannot keep up.

In the autonomous Kurdish north, a surge in coronavirus infections has pushed the number of cases there to over 5,000 – including at least 200 health workers – and the death toll to more than 160. The line at the public Ali Najji hospital in the northeastern city of Sulaimaniyah wound out the door, with dozens of people queuing to get tested – but inside, the medical staff was thinner than ever.

The Kurdish regional government, like federal authorities in Baghdad, is struggling to pay public-sector wages this year due to a collapse in oil prices and an economic recession brought on by the pandemic. That has had a devastating effect on personnel at state-owned medical facilities, who have not been paid in two months.

Health system 'broken'

Exhausted, thousands of healthcare workers at state hospitals in the Kurdish region announced earlier this month they would stop treating non-coronavirus cases. "At least 20,000 healthcare workers across the region are adhering to this partial strike," said Hawzin Othman, the head of Sulaimaniyah's medical syndicate. Among them are 800 doctors who joined over the past two weeks,

just as the Kurdish region began logging an uptick in COVID-19 cases.

Shevan Kurda, a 30-year-old doctor, is one of them. "We're working 10-hour shifts every day, but only to treat COVID-19 patients," said Kurda, who represents Sulaimaniyah's Medical Residents Syndicate. Kurda is owed three months of wages from 2019 and was not paid in either April or May this year.

Authorities and health workers across Iraq have long decried the state of the country's dilapidated hospitals, worn down by years of war, a lack of investment and corruption that has sapped funds meant for new equipment. Even Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi told reporters last week: "We do not have a health system. The health system is broken, and the most basic requirements are not available, because those who hold positions in some state institutions are incompetent. This has been accumulating for years."

Iraq is also a notoriously dangerous place to be a doctor, as patients' families are known to threaten medical staff – sometimes with death – if their loved one's condition deteriorates. This week, Iraq's medical syndicate declared a strike across the southern province of Dhi Qar after a female doctor was assaulted by a patient's relative.

'Matter of time'

In the capital Baghdad, doctors at several inundated coronavirus wards said they and their colleagues were on the brink of burnout, and complained of a long-standing lack of compensation for overtime. "There was no bonus for doctors working in field hospitals during the war against the Islamic State group," said Ammar Falah, a 27-year-old medic at one of the city's coronavirus wards.

"There was no bonus when there was mass mobilization for protests in October," he told AFP, referring to anti-government demonstrations that began late last year and left over 550 people

drone strikes. "Iran seeks to provide weapons to terrorist organizations. What will happen if the embargo is lifted?" Jubeir said. "Iran will become more... aggressive," he added. Earlier this month, a UN report said cruise missiles and drones used in attacks last year on Saudi oil facilities were "of Iranian origin". The attacks on Saudi state oil giant Aramco's facilities caused extensive damage and briefly interrupted production of half of the country's oil output.

Russia, China vetoes at UN
Hook said later in Bahrain that if the arms embargo expired, Iran would be able to acquire advanced arms and pose a greater threat to Gulf security and international shipping. "It will trigger an arms race in one region that needs it the least," Hook said on his second leg of the Gulf tour to garner support for extending the arms embargo on Iran. Allowing the UN arms embargo to expire would be a betrayal of the security council's responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, he said.

The US official also said that the embargo has constrained Iran's ability to freely move weapons to its proxies. Bahrain Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Zayyani expressed his country's total support for extending the arms embargo on Iran, accusing Tehran of continuing to supply arms to militias in Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq.

scoffed at the Iranian request to Interpol as a "propaganda stunt". "Our assessment is that Interpol does not intervene and issue red notices that are based on a political nature," he told a news conference in the Saudi capital Riyadh. "This has nothing to do with national security, international peace or promoting stability," Hook said. "We see it for what it is. It's a propaganda stunt that no-one takes seriously and makes the Iranians look foolish."

The killing of Soleimani, who headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, provoked massive outpourings of grief at home. Iran retaliated by firing a volley of ballistic missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq, but Trump opted against responding militarily. While the attack on the western Iraqi base of Ain Al-Asad left no US soldiers dead, dozens suffered brain trauma. — AFP

expand the strategic partnership between our companies and support the commercial rollout of 5G across Bahrain. This announcement endorses our global leadership as we continue to switch on this era-defining technology around the world to drive the Internet of Things, Industry 4.0., digitalized society, and incredible new mobile broadband experiences."

Zain Bahrain will be expanding 5G coverage across the kingdom throughout 2020 and will continue to grow the 5G network in 2021 and beyond. Furthermore, the operator is also modernizing and expanding its 4G LTE network for an unprecedented mobile experience on both 5G and 4G devices. This commercial launch in Bahrain follows the launch of 5G services in Zain Kuwait and Zain Saudi Arabia during 2019.



NAJAF: An Iraqi man in a hazmat suit mourns over a tombstone at a cemetery for COVID-19 victims on June 10, 2020. — AFP

dead. "You think they're going to give us a bonus now just because we're taking on more hours?"

Falah said the Al-Kindi Training Hospital where he works distributed just five N95 masks to doctors each month. But with so much interaction with infected patients, Falah said he needed to switch masks much more often and had begun using his \$750 monthly take-home pay to buy protective gear. "If the hours go up more or the workload increases, we'll go on strike too," he said.

At another Baghdad hospital, Wael, a 26-year-old doctor who asked his full name not be used,

admitted he was crumbling psychologically. "Before corona, you could recuperate from the pressure of work by seeing friends and family. But now I go from an isolation ward at work to isolation in my room at home," he told AFP.

He and other doctors said their biggest fear was spreading the virus from their patients to their families – and with the quickening rate of infection, their worst nightmare could become a reality. "I exhibited symptoms for a month but I was told to keep working. It's just a matter of time before we're all infected," Wael said. — AFP

New flu in China has potential to trigger pandemic

WASHINGTON: Researchers in China have discovered a new type of swine flu that is capable of triggering a pandemic, according to a study published Monday in the US science journal PNAS. Named G4, it is genetically descended from the H1N1 strain that caused a pandemic in 2009. It possesses "all the essential hallmarks of being highly adapted to infect humans," say the authors, scientists at Chinese universities and China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

From 2011 to 2018, researchers took 30,000 nasal swabs from pigs in slaughterhouses in 10 Chinese provinces and in a veterinary hospital, allowing them to isolate 179 swine flu viruses. The majority were of a new kind which has been dominant among pigs since 2016. The researchers then carried out various experiments including on ferrets, which are widely used in

flu studies because they experience similar symptoms to humans – principally fever, coughing and sneezing. G4 was observed to be highly infectious, replicating in human cells and causing more serious symptoms in ferrets than other viruses. Tests also showed that any immunity humans gain from exposure to seasonal flu does not provide protection from G4. According to blood tests which showed up antibodies created by exposure to the virus, 10.4 percent of swine workers had already been infected.

The tests showed that as many as 4.4 percent of the general population also appeared to have been exposed. The virus has therefore already passed from animals to humans but there is no evidence yet that it can be passed from human to human – the scientists' main worry. "It is of concern that human infection of G4 virus will further human adaptation and increase the risk of a human pandemic," the researchers wrote.

Asked about the virus yesterday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a regular press briefing that China "has been paying close attention to its development" and will take all needed action to prevent its spread and any outbreaks. The study's authors called for urgent measures to monitor people working with pigs. — AFP

India bans 59 Chinese...

Continued from Page 1

been invited to a meeting with the Indian government "for an opportunity to respond and submit clarifications". There are estimated to be about 120 million TikTok users in India, making the South Asian nation of 1.3 billion people the app's biggest international market. Other apps on the banned list include microblogging app Weibo and strategy game Clash of Kings.

But anger has been brewing across India since the soldiers were killed in a brawl along the disputed border in northern Ladakh region on June 15 in the deadliest faceoff for almost half a century between the two countries. It was the first time troops have been killed on their frontier since 1975. Beijing has not disclosed if there were any casualties among their troops. India and China fought a war over the border in 1962. New Delhi has accused China of intruding into its territory in the region, a charge Beijing has denied.

Trump briefed on bounties by...

Continued from Page 1

White House said Monday the claim had been kept from him because the intelligence underpinning it was unverified.

The Taliban reaffirmed their commitment to a February deal to draw down the war in Afghanistan during a call with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the group's spokesman has said. The Taliban have denied that their fighters received any Russian bounties, and the group's Qatar-based chief negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar reiterated their pledge not to strike against the US. Baradar told Pompeo that "according to the agreement, we do not allow anyone to use Afghan soil against the US and other countries", Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said Monday in a statement on Twitter.

The president is known for not regularly reading the daily brief, preferring to rely on conservative media reports on the day's big issues – but he is reportedly orally briefed by intelligence officials up to three times a week. Crucially, the officials told the Times the Russia assessment was

The June 15 violence took place around 4,500 m above sea level in the Galwan river valley abutting Aksai Chin, a strategic corridor linking Tibet to western China. Thousands of soldiers remain on alert, although both sides said they were trying to resolve the standoff through dialogue. The deaths triggered massive outrage and street protests in India. There were calls for the banning of Chinese businesses, which export goods worth nearly \$60 billion to India.

A senior minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government demanded a ban on Chinese food while a prominent trading union said it would boycott a range of commodities imported from China. A hotel union last week said they would not allow Chinese guests to stay in their properties. Millions of Indians downloaded "Remove China Apps", a mobile application that helped users detect and delete Chinese software, before it was removed by Google from its Play Store.

Media reports said Chinese consignments were being held up by customs at major Indian ports. Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi, however, which has a more than 30 percent share of the Indian market, is promoting itself as a company in line with the government's "Make in India" slogan, an apparent move to counter anti-Chinese sentiments. Chinese mobiles have an almost 65 percent share in the local smartphone market. — Agencies

considered sufficiently serious and credible to include in a May 4 article in the CIA's classified World Intelligence Review, its flagship intelligence product.

The White House briefed a small group of Republican lawmakers on its position Monday but top congressional Democrats have demanded that all members of Congress be briefed by the intelligence community. "The questions that arise are: was the president briefed, and if not, why not, and why was Congress not briefed," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a letter to Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe and CIA director Gina Haspel.

The Times previously reported that US intelligence officers and special forces in Afghanistan began raising the alarm as early as January, and that the National Security Council (NSA) held an inter-agency meeting in late March to discuss possible responses – but the White House didn't authorize any action.

"I am disgusted by Trump's incompetence," tweeted Tammy Duckworth, a former US Army helicopter pilot and combat veteran who is now a Democratic senator from Illinois. "He either didn't know that Russia was offering bounties for killing American troops or didn't care enough to remember a briefing that told him. Neither is acceptable for a Commander in Chief." — Agencies

Saudi, US urge extending arms embargo on Iran

RIYADH: US and Saudi officials on Monday called for extending a UN arms embargo on Iran, warning of major implications for regional security, accusing Tehran of arming Yemeni rebels. The embargo, put in place as part of a nuclear accord signed with Tehran in 2015, is set to expire in October but Washington is working to extend the ban as tensions with its arch-rival remain high.

Lifting the ban would "embolden" Tehran and could trigger a regional arms race, US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook told reporters in Riyadh. "This is not an outcome that the UN Security Council can accept," Hook said at a joint news conference with Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi minister of state for foreign affairs. At the conference venue, Saudi officials displayed remnants of intercepted missiles and drones they said were supplied by Iran to Yemen's Houthi rebels. Iran denies arming the rebels.

The Houthis have recently targeted Saudi cities, including the capital Riyadh, with a series of missile and



RIYADH: Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir speaks during a joint press conference with US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook on Monday. — AFP

Iran issues arrest warrant...

Continued from Page 1

forbidden for the organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character", said the agency based in the French city of Lyon. "Interpol would not consider requests of this nature." Trump ordered the killing of Soleimani in a Jan 3 drone strike near Baghdad international airport. Soleimani, a national hero at home, was "the world's top terrorist" and "should have been terminated long ago", Trump said at the time.

Brian Hook, the US pointman on Iran policy,

Zain Bahrain launches 5G...

Continued from Page 1

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi commented: "Zain Bahrain's 5G launch demonstrates our continuous commitment to investing in digitalization and the latest technologies for the benefit of our customers and playing our key role in the Kingdom's Economic Vision 2030."

Fadi Pharaon, President of Ericsson Middle East and Africa, said: "We continue to work closely with Zain to

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

very hard

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

You might experience a great deal of emotional confusion today, Aries. There's a debate brewing inside you. You're having a hard time deciding whether to pursue the practical or the fanciful. Looking to others for help could only add to the confusion, so take their advice with a grain of salt. If nothing seems clear to you, then wait it out and proceed when you have a better handle on things.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your artistic side may want to take to the airwaves in some way today, Libra. Perhaps you should consider building your own website or getting a spot on a local radio show. Your dreams need a vehicle for distribution. Give them the means to be dispersed to others. You have the ability to inspire many people. Take this ability seriously and make use of your creative talents.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Keeping things in balance will be a challenge today, Taurus. You're likely to find that there's conflict brewing that doesn't seem to want resolution. It's OK. Don't press the issue. You may find that the best solution is to escape into the clouds and come back to reality when the storm has settled. There's no need to try to untangle the knots if they simply don't want to budge.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You could find that what was so light and active yesterday runs into roadblocks today, Scorpio. It might seem as if you're suddenly heading straight for a brick wall regarding some of your current projects. Suddenly there's a more reserved tone to things, and you may have lost a bit of your precious momentum. Use this time to back off and reassess the wisdom of your direction.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Tension is likely to arise in many different areas of your life, Gemini. It's possible that you're either too dreamy or too practical for the issue at hand. It's important for you to strike a balance. The toughest part will be finding people and situations that agree with you. Other people are likely to be quite inflexible and stubborn, and you may have to adapt in order to reach a compromise.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

The pace of things is likely to slow down a bit compared to what was happening yesterday, Sagittarius. This is probably for the best. Take this time to do some planning and stabilizing. You've plowed forth into the fields. Now stop and assess what you've accomplished. Take things one step at a time and don't get ahead of yourself. Be patient and things will come your way naturally.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Yesterday's trajectory might run into a couple of snags today, Cancer. You could find that your dreamy nature conflicts with the planned and steady. This conflict of interests may be creating some tension that will be difficult to work with. Your emotions are apt to deceive you, so try not to get pulled off course by a passing whim. Try to keep your feelings well grounded.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You might find that there's a quality of dreaminess to your emotions today that keeps you from focusing on the task at hand, Capricorn. People are likely to be stubborn and confused, and you could be one of them. It might seem as if your mind is going in two directions and you aren't sure which way to proceed. Try to incorporate more of your dreams into your waking reality.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Try to keep yourself in line with your emotions today, Leo. It's possible that a powerful yet subtle force is slowly trying to pull you off track. If so, think about taking a break and doing some physical activity to get your blood pumping. Go for a walk with a friend to help clear your head so you can think more rationally about the decisions you need to make.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Little voices are whispering in your ear today, Aquarius. They could be asking you to join them in the clouds. You might get the feeling that there's a lot of tension between what your heart has to say and what your mind has to say. Don't be surprised if the energy of the day leaves you confused by the time the day ends. Don't stress about making hard decisions or commitments.

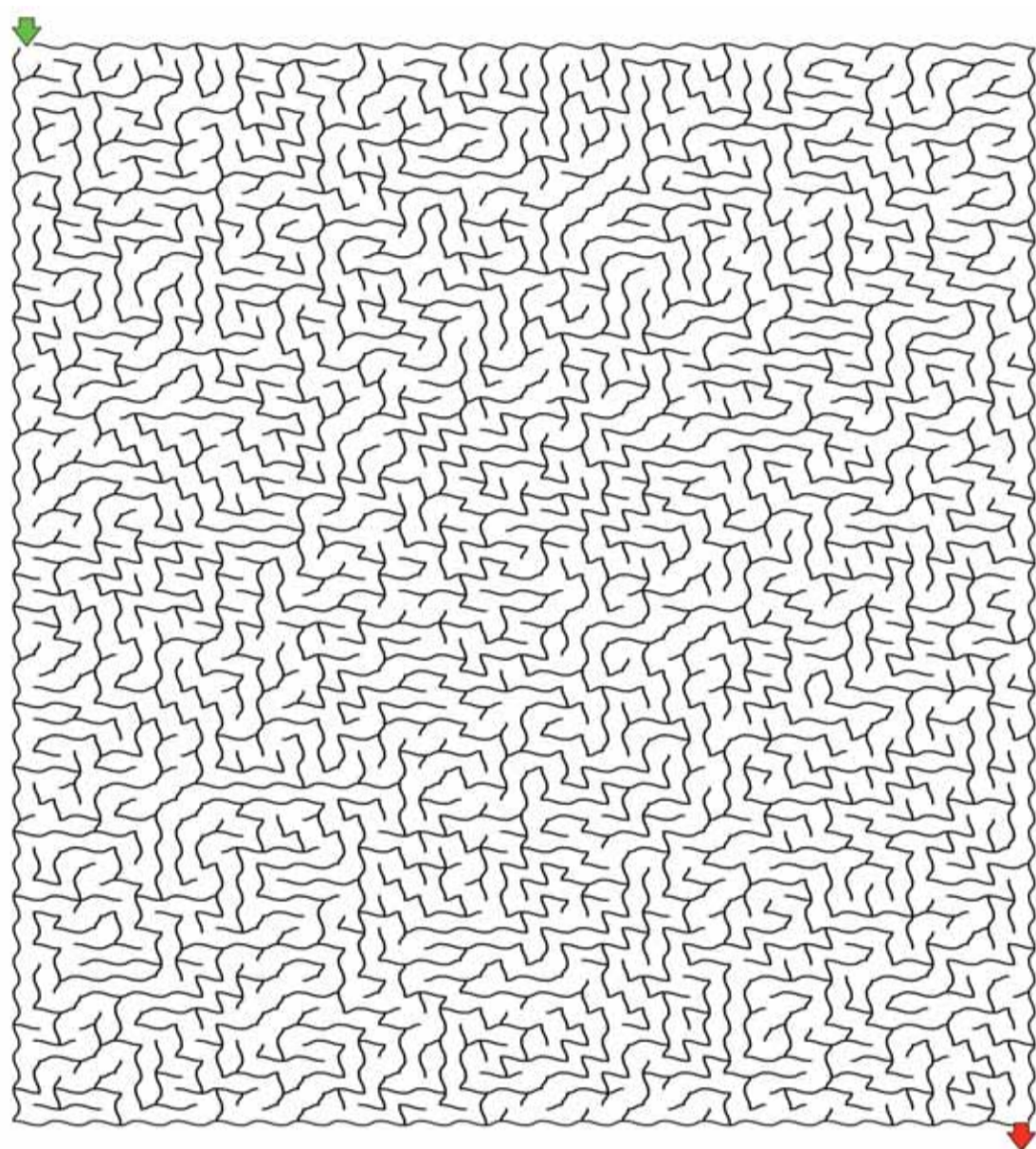
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You could find that an emotional issue rubs you the wrong way today, Virgo. Your tendency is to want to escape. Try to do so in a healthy manner. Watch your favorite movie or read a book. Don't fall prey to the temptation to indulge in more dangerous pursuits. That would only push the problems away temporarily. When they resurface again, they could be even harder to handle.

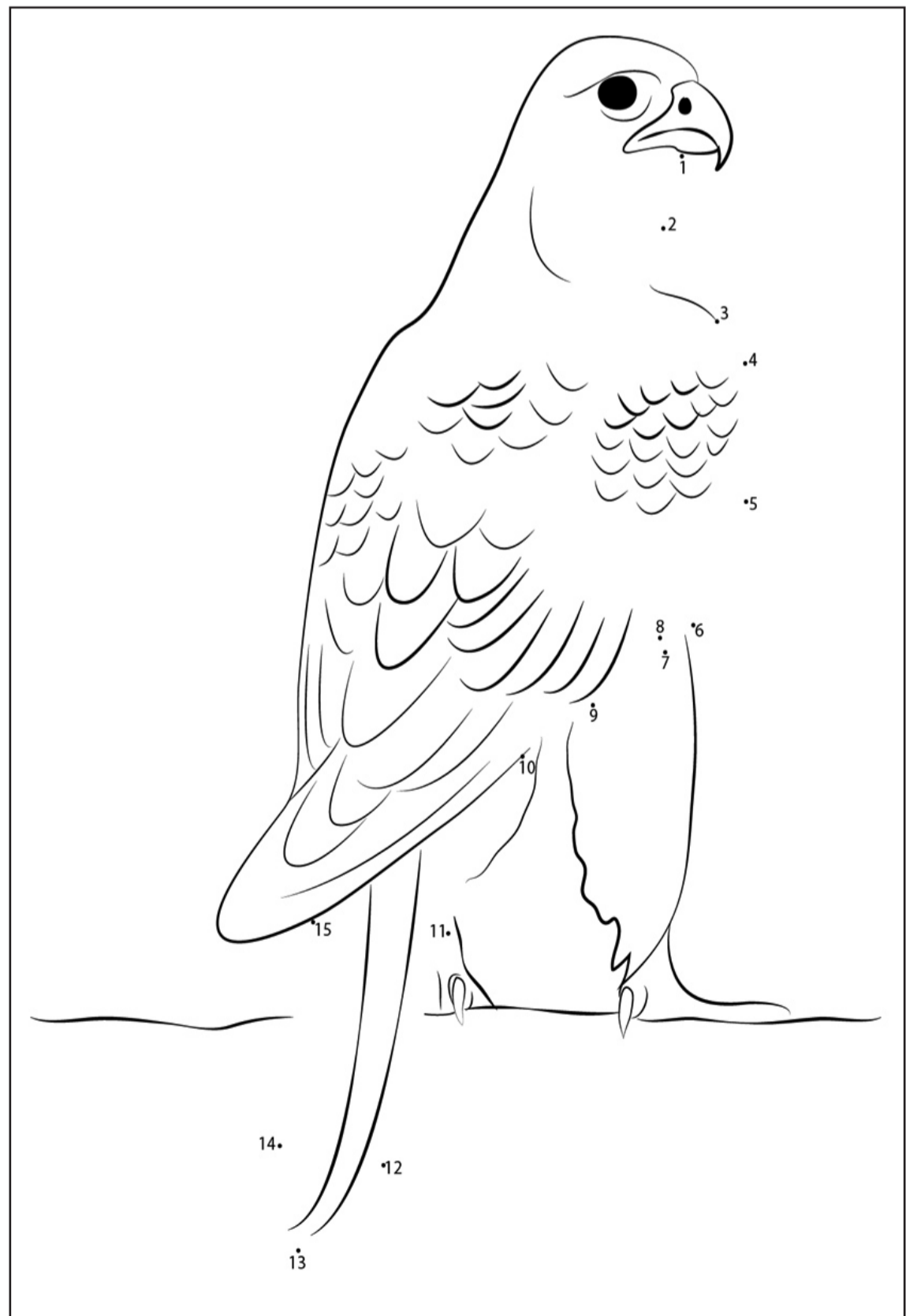
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Someone could be prodding you to take action today, Pisces. It might be best if you beat them to it and motivate yourself. Stay a step or two ahead of the herd. Lead your own stampede and go wherever you want to go. It's quite likely that you'll run into conflict regarding issues about which you feel strongly. People are likely to be stubborn, so prepare yourself for a stalemate.

Find the way



Join the dots



Word Scramble



Harry Potter
Word Scramble

Somebody has cast a Gobbledygook Spell on Harry and his words are coming out all mixed up. Can you figure out what he is saying? Watch out! Some of the words are actually two.

- DIGHAR _____
- MUEGGL _____
- DANW _____
- DLTEOVROM _____
- RDFFGRYONI _____
- LRUESYDS _____
- OEBDLDMREU _____
- ANEYWREOLS _____
- RRSKAATD _____
- LILEBEONR _____
- IQCDIDUTH _____
- TRWFCICTHA _____

- NPOTSI _____
- ENOEHIRM _____
- LAEAYNIOLGD _____
- AAOCMYRDFLO _____
- NLIGWOR _____
- ILIVSNBEI _____
- DRNOGA _____
- OCSOHL _____
- ARRHY _____
- CASR _____
- IWZRDA _____
- RWSGAOTH _____

Sports

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Mohammed Burbayea performs in Kuwait City. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

English becomes fifth PGA player with positive virus test

NEW YORK: American Harris English was named on Monday as the fifth US PGA Tour player to test positive for COVID-19 since the tour's three-month shutdown ended on June 11.

He became the second player in as many days to test positive after the PGA toughened coronavirus safety measures.

Two players and two caddies tested positive two weeks ago to increase concerns and prompt tighter restrictions, players having to test negative to be allowed at courses.

The tour said in a statement that English, who did not play last week in Connecticut, tested positive during the pre-tournament screening process in Detroit for the Rocket Mortgage Classic that starts Thursday.

English withdrew from the PGA's fourth comeback tournament and will begin self-isolation under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and tour protocols.

"While it's disappointing to receive this news, as I feel healthy, I'm pleased that the new safety protocols we have in place worked this week," English said in a statement.

"I fully supported the tour's new rule of not allowing anyone on the tournament grounds until testing negative, as protecting others in the field and every affiliated with the tournament and the community should be the number one priority as a result of a positive test. "I appreciate the tour's support and I look forward to competing again after I'm fully recovered." English's positive came a day after South African Dylan Frittelli tested positive for coronavirus in a test before he was to have flown on a PGA player charter to Detroit on Sunday from the Travelers Championship.—AFP

Spying claims hit America's Cup in New Zealand

A number of employees fired for leaking confidential information

WELLINGTON: Team New Zealand said it has fired a number of employees for leaking confidential information as spying claims rocked preparations for next year's America's Cup yachting regatta yesterday.

New Zealand officials said they were investigating "structural and financial matters" relating to the prestigious race in Auckland as team managing director Grant Dalton announced the sackings.

Few details were revealed but the America's Cup, the world's oldest international sporting trophy, has a history of intrigue surrounding the cutting-edge designs employed by teams.

"We're not 100 percent sure what they (wanted) or what they got," Dalton told radio station NewstalkZB. "But what I do know is that the game was up quicker than they expected." A Team New Zealand statement said those involved had also made "highly defamatory and inaccurate allegations" against the organisation and some of its personnel.

"These allegations are entirely incorrect," it said. Team New Zealand holds hosting rights for the America's Cup after winning the trophy, known as the Auld Mug, in Bermuda in 2017.

It is organising next year's event with oversight from the New Zealand government, which has poured more than NZ\$120 million (\$77 million) into infrastructure and associated costs. New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment said it

was examining claims relating to the organisation of the event.

Dalton confirmed the sacked employees were New Zealanders working for the event-planning arm of the organisation, not the yacht racing team. He refused to say how many people were involved, or speculate on their motives.

'LIKE JAMES BOND'

The yachts for next year's regatta are 23-metre (75-foot) monohulls that use a state-of-the-art foiling design, making them expensive to develop and unpredictable in the water.

Dalton said he was concerned Team New Zealand may have lost valuable intellectual property about the vessels. "Of course I'm worried, absolutely," he told RNZ. "But I know the competitors and I know their ethics and I can't imagine for one millisecond that this has gone (to them)."

The America's Cup, first contested in 1851, has often seen skulduggery as competitors seek to gain an edge in a sport where innovative design can be crucial. Members of the victorious Australia II syndicate in 1983 caught a scuba diver linked to a rival team trying to photograph the boat's revolutionary winged keel. US billionaire Bill Koch led America3 to victory in 1992 and later boasted "we were the ultimate in spying". "We hired divers and we picked up people's garbage," he told Boat International.



Prestigious race

Wimbledon grass will be greener next year: Stubley

LONDON: Neil Stubley should have been nervously appraising how the grass he and his fellow Wimbledon ground staff had nurtured was faring on the first day of the Grand Slam.

Instead, the head groundsman at the All England Club has seen the "blood, sweat and tears" spent in preparing for the tournament come to nothing.

The championships, due to start on Monday, were cancelled for the first time since World War II due to the coronavirus pandemic, meaning Novak Djokovic and Simona Halep were denied the chance to defend their titles.

Stubley said it was surreal to walk around and see his 38 "babies", as he calls the courts set in 42 acres in the leafy London suburb, not humming with action.

"A lot of blood, sweat and tears has gone in to showcase them," he told an online press conference. "But that disappointment is across the (All England) club. We are all very proud of the work we do and how well-received it is across the world." The grandly titled head of courts and horticulture at Wimbledon said the grounds felt bizarrely quiet for this time of year, similar to the atmosphere after the players had gone home.

"It is an odd time and the best way to really describe it is you kind of get a strange quiet feeling," he said. "I would equate it to having been to a concert — you get that ringing in your ears for a couple of days."

Stubley said he and his 17 staff plus three temporary workers, reduced from the usual nine, were getting on with the job despite the disappointment of the cancellation.

"Pride pushes you that way to carry on working," he said. "Of course it is disappointing not to be playing but the bigger picture puts that into perspective." "As much as we love our job it has to sit in the real world."

Stubley defended the decision in April to cancel the championships even though other sports have returned, saying it was about much more than the playing surface.

"The grass courts were fine when it was cancelled," he said. "It is the infrastructure that takes time. It is not a case of saying two weeks out we can play them." "There is eight to 10-week spell to get it ready. Come early April in the midst of the pandemic it was untenable. "Even now with the restrictions in place it would be impossible to hold them." Stubley said the groundstaff would follow their usual routines and instead aim for next season. "I always try and get across to people you are not repairing the courts, you are preparing for next season," he said.

"Come August early September it will be the same process — rip the courts up, re-seed them, grow through autumn and winter and the same prep work for the 2021 championships."—AFP

DJ rocks, Ryder Cup wobbles as Daniel Summerhays dreams

HONG KONG: One player's amazing streak continued, Ryder Cup speculation grew and a player retired with an almost perfect finale — here are this week's AFP Sport talking points in golf.

DUSTIN TIME

Dustin Johnson is back up to third in the world rankings after recording his 21st PGA Tour win since turning pro in 2008, a tally matched only by Tiger Woods over the same period.

World number one Rory McIlroy — who also began his pro career in 2008 — is next on the list with 18 PGA Tour titles in that time, but he has four majors and eight European Tour trophies whereas Johnson has only one of each.

Johnson, however, kept up his incredible streak of winning at least once in each of his 13 seasons on the PGA Tour with victory at the Travelers Championship last weekend.

At the age of 36, the victory puts Johnson three PGA Tour wins behind Gary Player, but with only one major to his name — the 2016 US Open — opinion is split as to whether he can yet be ranked among the all-time greats.

But consider this: only Arnold Palmer (17), Jack Nicklaus (17) and Tiger Woods (14) started their careers with wins in more consecutive seasons. Exalted company indeed.

Surely the laid-back, big-hitting "DJ" is only a couple more major wins from being recognised as truly one of the game's greatest.

RYDER DOUBTS

Speculation has been growing that this year's Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits will be postponed until 2021 — with an announcement likely as



HAMILTON: File photo taken on June 26, 2017 Emirates Team New Zealand CEO Grant Dalton (L) and Team Principal Matteo de Nora at the final press conference as winners of the America's Cup, 2017 in Hamilton, Bermuda. Team New Zealand have fired a number of employees for leaking confidential information about next year's America's Cup defence, Dalton said yesterday. —AFP

"We did everything we could within the rules and the law but we pushed it to the edge."

In 2003, US challenger OneWorld was docked points for breaching race rules because it had Team New Zealand's boat data, apparently obtained from a Kiwi designer who had switched teams.

Before the 2017 regatta, the then-defending champion Jimmy Spithill of Oracle Team USA admitted all

teams engaged in spying. "The level of reconnaissance is right up there," he said. "It is like James Bond or the CIA. We all have teams based where the other teams are, watching them all the time."

"You can learn a lot from the competition. That is what it is about in this game. You can look at your competitors and not only take their lessons but improve on it." —AFP

Three hours later he found himself in a playoff with Paul Haley II and Kyle Jones but agonisingly the fairytale ending did not materialise as Summerhays bogeyed the first playoff hole. Jones won a hole later.

But a beaming Summerhays was still grateful for the chance. "Oh man, to be in that position, to be able to have a little bit of extra golf was spectacular," he told the Golf Channel.

And the performance had not changed his mind about retirement. "When it comes time for school in August, that's where I'll be," he added.

Top 20

Updated Official World Golf Rankings after the Travelers Championship:

1. Rory McIlroy (NIR) 9.04
2. Jon Rahm (ESP) 8.03
3. Dustin Johnson (USA) 7.59 (+3)
4. Justin Thomas (USA) 7.29 (-1)
5. Brooks Koepka (USA) 7.22 (-1)
6. Webb Simpson (USA) 7.18 (-1)
7. Patrick Reed (USA) 5.95
8. Adam Scott (AUS) 5.86
9. Patrick Cantlay (USA) 5.85
10. Bryson DeChambeau (USA) 5.53 (+1)
11. Xander Schauffele (USA) 5.44 (-1)
12. Tommy Fleetwood (ENG) 5.31
13. Justin Rose (ENG) 5.11
14. Tiger Woods (USA) 5.09
15. Tyrrell Hatton (ENG) 4.68 (+1)
16. Marc Leishman (AUS) 4.60 (-1)
17. Tony Finau (USA) 4.49
18. Gary Woodland (USA) 4.28
19. Matt Kuchar (USA) 4.27
20. Louis Oosthuizen (RSA) 4.10 (+1). —AFP

Sports

Porto win away to open up six point lead in league race

Maritimo upset Benfica as title hopes slide even further away

LISBON: Chancel Mbemba's early goal proved enough to hand Porto a 1-0 away win over Pacos Ferreira on Monday and extend their lead at the top of Portugal's Primeira Liga. Mbemba snapped up a chance after just seven minutes to hand Porto a vital win in the title race that puts them six points clear of defending champions Benfica with five matches remaining.

Benfica lost 2-0 earlier on Monday at Maritimo to continue a horror series of recent results and offer Porto a clear path to the title after finishing two points behind their rivals last season.

Mbemba was quickest to react when Pacos Ferreira goalkeeper Ricardo Ribeiro flapped at an in-swinging corner, pushing the ball a few metres forward where the former Newcastle United midfielder was waiting to snap up the opportunity. But the league leaders were far from convincing and had some stout defending to thank for a full haul of points.



Full haul of points

Pacos Ferreira midfielder Luiz Carlos had two good chances to equalise — the first headed narrowly wide four minutes into the second half. He then saw his acrobatic bicycle kick saved by Porto goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin in the 67th minute.

Meanwhile, struggling Maritimo scored twice in the space of four second-half minutes to register a shock 2-0 home victory over Benfica on Monday and hand the Por-

tuguese champions another setback in their bid to defend their league title.

The pace of home right back Nanu proved the difference as he raced away on the counterattack to square for Jorge Correa to score the first goal in the 74th minute. He then repeated the feat to set up Rodrigo Pinho for a second in the 78th minute.

On both occasions, he outspurred the Benfica defenders, squared the ball to the back post to allow his team mates to score. It might have been even more emphatic when a long ball in the last minute set Joel Tagueu away on another Maritimo counterattack, but his goal was ruled out by VAR as he was inches offside as he set off on his run.

The result continued Benfica's horrid post-lockdown form. They remain three points behind league leaders and rivals FC Porto, who can go further ahead later on Monday when they take on Pacos Ferreira.

It was a boost to Maritimo's fight for survival, moving them from 16th to 12th place and seven points clear of the bottom two places in the Primeira Liga.

Monday's match in Madeira was a fifth for Benfica since the Portuguese league returned after the COVID-19 lockdown. They drew their first two, then came from behind to edge Rio Ave 2-1 at home before last Thursday suffering a shock 4-3 home defeat by Santa Clara. — Reuters



PACOS DE FERREIRA: FC Porto's Portuguese midfielder Danilo Pereira (L) challenges Pacos Ferreira's Portuguese midfielder Pedrinho (R) during the Portuguese League football match between Pacos Ferreira and Porto at the Capital Do Movel stadium in Pacos de Ferreira. — AFP

Barca and Juventus confirm Arthur, Pjanic swap deal

MADRID: Barcelona midfielder Arthur Melo will join Juventus at the end of the current season, with Miralem Pjanic moving in the opposite direction, the two clubs announced on Monday.

Barcelona said they had paid 60 million euros (\$67.4m) plus a potential five million euros more in bonuses for Bosnian playmaker Pjanic after earlier confirming Juventus would pay 72 million euros plus 10 million in variables for Arthur.

The two deals have gone through separately, allowing both clubs to boost their profit figures ahead of the end of the financial year on June 30.

Pjanic's four-year contract includes a release clause of 400 million euros while Juventus said Arthur's contract will run for five years, until June 2025. Arthur and Pjanic will remain with their current teams until the end of the 2019/20 campaign, which will include the latter stages of the Champions League in August.

It raises the possibility that Arthur and Pjanic

could yet face each other, and their future clubs, in the Champions League final eight in Portugal, should both sides win their outstanding last 16, second leg matches. In a statement, Juventus said they had signed Arthur for "72 million euros payable in four years. The purchase value may increase by a maximum of 10 million euros on the fulfillment of certain conditions during the contractual term."

Arthur, a Brazilian international, only joined Barca from Gremio in 2018 and was hailed as a future star for the club, with many tipping him as the long-term successor to Xavi Hernandez in central midfield.

After an encouraging start, the 23-year-old has been one of several players to stagnate this season but the primary motivation for his sale is thought to be financial. Arthur's departure puts more scrutiny on Barcelona's board and president Josep Maria Bartomeu. They have overseen a number of haphazard moves in the transfer market and have been accused of failing to implement any clear sense of direction for the club.

Barcelona have been hit hard by the three-month suspension due to the coronavirus pandemic and they needed to bring in around 70 million euros to satisfy their budget for the current season.

By selling Arthur, the board can register the profits from the transfer immediately before spreading the payments for Pjanic over the length of the 30-year-old's contract.

Pjanic joined Juventus from Roma in 2016. He was brought up in Luxembourg and initially made his name in French football with Metz and then Lyon.

Last year, Barcelona carried out a similar transaction by exchanging goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen for Valencia's Neto, in deals worth around 30 million euros each.

While Pjanic will cost around 10 million euros less than the amount Juventus pay for Arthur, the Italians might feel they have the better deal given the Brazilian is seven years younger.

Arthur had been reluctant to leave the Camp Nou and even released a statement in April, insisting his "idea was clear" and that he wanted to play at Barcelona "for many years".

But he was persuaded to change his mind after being given limited game time under Quique Setien while Juve coach Maurizio Sarri had reportedly made it clear he would be a key figure in his side in Turin.

Setien said in a press conference on Monday the playmaker had promised to give his all for the rest of the season as Barcelona look to make up a two-point gap on Real Madrid at the top of the table.

"We expect the greatest commitment from him until the last day he is here," Setien said.

"He is still a Barcelona player until the end of the season and has promised that he will give everything to achieve the goals we have set. He is a guy who will be committed until the last day." — AFP

Stokes 'proud' as England captaincy looms into view

LONDON: Ben Stokes said he was "proud" to be in a position where he might replace Joe Root as England skipper against the West Indies, even though he has not captained a side since he was a teenager.

Vice-captain Stokes could find himself leading out the team for next week's first Test at Southampton — or later in the three-match series — should Root be absent attending the birth of his second child.

But the powerful all-rounder said he would accept the "huge honour" if it came his way.

"Even if it's only the once you can still say 'yeah, I've captained England'," he told a conference call on Monday.

Stokes was restored to his position as Test vice-captain in July 2019, nearly a year after being found not guilty of affray following an incident outside a nightclub.

"After that happened it was 'right, what am I going to do from this point forward?'" Stokes told Sky in a separate interview as he recalled the incident. "How am I going to carry and conduct myself?"

"I'm quite proud to say I'm in this situation through hard work and determination. I wanted to get better and it's been no fluke."

But Stokes, who last led a cricket team aged 16 for Durham Academy, insisted captaincy had never been on his list of priorities. "I've never set a goal to want to be a captain," explained the 29-year-old.

"Alastair Cook was always destined to be England captain after Andrew Strauss. Joe Root was always destined to be captain after Alastair Cook. "If I'm being honest, I'm not one of those that people would necessarily associate (as) the next England captain."

'NINE SLIPS AND A GULLY'

With Stokes already England's star all-rounder, pundits including former captain Kevin Pietersen have said he does not need the extra responsibility of captaincy as well.

But Stokes, who jokingly said he would have "nine slips and a gully" as captain, insisted leadership would not dull his attacking approach. Last year he played a key role in England's World Cup triumph before scoring a stunning century at Headingley to win an astounding Test victory over Australia.

"Even if I am in charge that's not going to change the way that I go about things, in terms of how I want to influence the game, which is try to make a positive effect with the ball or bat in my hand," he said.

One problem for Stokes, as fellow pace-bowling all-rounders Ian Botham and Andrew Flintoff discovered when they were England captain, could be deciding on when to bowl himself.

"It depends if it is a flat wicket or not. If it is flat I will throw the ball to Jofra (Archer), Jimmy (Anderson) and Broady (Stuart Broad) and say 'here you go'," he joked.

"I guess I will have to be a bit more mindful if I am the one making that decision." England will select a side from a 30-man squad currently training at a bio-secure Southampton, with a three-day intra-squad match — their lone warm-up fixture — starting today.

National selector Ed Smith and his panel will pick the team but England captains, however, traditionally have an influence upon the final XI and Stokes admitted: "I might not have as many friends after this Test match." — AFP

Menon, youngest elite umpire at 36

NEW DELHI: India's Nitin Menon, 36, on Monday became the youngest member of the International Cricket Council's elite umpire list.

Menon gave up playing cricket when he was 22 to start umpiring and has gradually moved up the rankings, officiating in three Tests, 24 one-day internationals and 16 Twenty20 matches.

"My priority was to play for the country rather than umpiring," said Menon, who played two matches for Madhya Pradesh state in 2004 before taking up umpiring.

"I quit playing at 22 and I became a senior umpire at the age of 23. It wasn't worth trying to play and umpire so I decided to focus on umpiring alone," added Menon, who replaced England's Nigel Long on the 2020-21 season list.

"I'm feeling very confident by the fact that age is on my side, but the performance is what ultimately matters. Whether I do well or not, age has little to do with performance."

Menon is only the third Indian after Srinivas Venkatraghavan and Sundaram Ravi — who was dropped from the list last year — to join the elite group of 12 umpires who take charge at top matches and tournaments. — AFP



LONDON: Burnley's Dutch defender Erik Pieters (C) and Crystal Palace's English defender Joel Ward compete for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Burnley at Selhurst Park in south London. — AFP

Mee heads Burnley up to eighth with win at Palace

LONDON: Burnley moved up to eighth in the Premier League after a header from captain Ben Mee earned them a 1-0 win at Crystal Palace on Monday.

Sean Dyche's side move above Arsenal and Sheffield United and on to 45 points, level on points with Tottenham Hotspur, who have played a game less.

Despite being depleted by injuries and with another incomplete and inexperienced substitute bench, Burnley were well on top in the first half with Dwight McNeil influential in a central role.

Palace were stronger after the break but fell behind shortly after the hour mark when Mee launched himself at an Ashley Westwood free-kick and Palace keeper Vicente Guaita could only push the ball in off the post.

Roy Hodgson's team piled on the pressure in the final minutes but Burnley, who have lost just once in the last ten games, hung on to secure the three points which will give them hope of a push towards possible Europa League qualification.

"There's a long way to go because of how thin our squad is. There are no excuses though and the mentality is good, the physicality has to remain strong," said Dyche.

The win was particularly impressive for Burnley who had one fit striker in Matej Vydra and had to bring on reserve centre half Kevin Long when midfielder Jack Cork went down injured.

Dyche has been critical of the club's chairman Mike Garlick after three players left the club last week when their contracts ran out but he brushed off a question about his future.

"Everyone keeps talking about my future apart from me, I'm getting on with my job as I always do - I'm still here," he said.

"We have a group that give everything and we saw that again tonight. When you think before lockdown, in the 100 days, the fabric of the club has changed somewhat. We have a group here who will never go under and we have some youngsters here who can see that." — Reuters

Buffon, Chiellini extend Juve deals until 2021

ROME: Gianluigi Buffon and Giorgio Chiellini have extended their Juventus contracts until 2021, the Serie A leaders announced on Monday.

The new deals, long expected to be confirmed by Juve, mean that former Italy captain Buffon will stay with the Turin-based club beyond his 43rd birthday.

"Bianconeri since the beginning. Bianconeri forever. And to confirm it, in case there is a need, today their contract renewals have become official, for another: 2021!," Juve said in a statement.

Buffon returned to Juve last summer after a disappointing season at Paris Saint-Germain and is the club's all-time record Serie A appearance maker, turning out 479 times in the league since arriving in 2001.—AFP

18 Spying claims hit America's Cup in New Zealand



19 Porto win away to open up six point lead in league race



19 Menon, youngest elite umpire at 36



MELBOURNE: Carlton Aussie Rules player Eddie Betts (2/L) trains with teammates in Melbourne yesterday. Australian Rules teams came together to take a knee in support of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, but ongoing racist attacks show there's still work to do. This month veteran Eddie Betts, in his 16th season, was depicted as a monkey in a Twitter post on the very weekend all teams united in support of Black Lives Matter. — AFP

Australian Rules teams take a knee

Racism and Aussie Rules: 'Why do I keep playing?'

SYDNEY: Australian Rules teams came together to take a knee in support of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, but ongoing racist attacks show there's still work to do.

Australia's most popular spectator sport, which is similar to Ireland's Gaelic football, has long featured indigenous stars but many have been the target of racism, both on-field and off.

This month veteran Eddie Betts, in his 16th season, was depicted as a monkey in a Twitter post on the very weekend all teams united in support of Black Lives Matter. That gesture coincided with a wave of protests and renewed awareness around Aboriginal affairs in Australia following the death of African American George Floyd in police custody in the United States.

Carlton star Betts, who once had a banana thrown at him by a spectator, said the persistent attacks took their toll, but he was prepared to meet them head-on if it led to change. "It deeply hurts, and you think to yourself, 'Why do I keep playing footy if I keep copping this?' But I want to make a change," he told reporters.

"The way to hurt these guys is keep playing great footy and keep smiling and that's what I love doing."

Melbourne Demons defender Neville Jetta was another on the receiving end of abuse last week, with a so-

cial media user posting a monkey emoji in the comment section of his Instagram page.

"This is racism. This needs to stop," his club said, and players' association boss Paul Walsh added: "Another week, another gutless, racist attack on one of our indigenous players. When is enough enough?"

Aussie Rules, which first became a mass-spectator sport in the late 1800s, has long had raucous crowds known for taunting players. Such behaviour was considered part and parcel of the game, but attitudes began changing in the 1990s.

One of the most powerful images associated with racism in Australia is of indigenous St Kilda player Nicky Winmar, who in 1993 responded to abuse from Collingwood supporters by lifting his shirt while facing the crowd and pointing to his skin. That gesture is often credited as the catalyst to addressing racial vilification in Australian Rules. Then came Essendon's Michael Long, who in 1995 complained about on-field racial abuse during a clash, also involving



AFL is leading that change

Collingwood. Long received hate mail for speaking up, but his actions sparked change with the AFL adopting a ground-breaking policy — rule 30 — that made it an offence for players or officials to insult someone due to their race, religion, ethnicity, colour, nationality or background. The stance was widely lauded, with other sports following suit. The AFL, which attracts crowds of up to 100,000, has since broadened its 'Vilification Framework' to include sexual orientation, while setting out a clearer complaints processes. But underlying problems persist.

Adam Goodes, one of Australia's most high-profile indigenous sportsmen, retired from the AFL in 2015 after being subjected to repeated booing. Many believed it was racially motivated and stemmed from him taking exception to being called an "ape" by a young spectator two years earlier.

The AFL formally apologised last year for not doing more to defend him, on the eve of the release of a powerful documentary that charted his final years in

the sport. And this month, former player Heritier Lumumba went public with claims that he was routinely called "chimp" by teammates at his club Collingwood during a 10-year stint that ended in 2014.

"When I got into the football club at Collingwood in 2004, it had not updated its definitions of racism. It had not continued on that journey and found ways to prevent the racial discrimination that I faced," he told broadcaster ABC.

Collingwood last week pledged an independent investigation "in an effort to search for the truth". Paul Briggs, chairman of the AFL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council, a body set up to provide advice to the league on issues impacting indigenous players, admitted "there is much work left to do".

But in a statement he also praised the AFL, which last year appointed its first Aboriginal as commissioner while five clubs now have indigenous board members.

"What was the acceptable norm of ignorance and overt racist attitudes in the game is changing fast. The AFL is leading that change," Briggs said. "Incidents still happen but the racism is identified and addressed by the industry, clubs and the fans much faster and to better effect in the last five years." —AFP

NBA to paint 'Black Lives Matter' on Disney courts

LOS ANGELES: The NBA's plan to highlight social-justice issues when play restarts reportedly will start from the ground up. The courts that will be used for games at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex near Orlando, Fla., will have "Black Lives Matter" painted on them, ESPN reported Monday.

The NBA will use three arenas at the Disney site as 22 of the league's 30 teams conclude the regular season beginning July 30.

The National Basketball Players Association and the league have discussed methods to promote messages of equality and police reform since the death of George Floyd prompted nationwide and worldwide protests.

NBPA president Chris Paul, an Oklahoma City Thunder guard, recently told ESPN that the players got permission from the league to wear words promoting social justice in place of their names on uniforms.

"We're just trying to continue to shed light on the different social justice issues that guys around our league continue to talk about day in and day out," Paul said. "People are saying that social justice will be off of everybody's mind in Orlando. With these jerseys, it doesn't go away."

According to Paul, phrases such as "Black Lives Matter" or "I Can't Breathe" or the names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor or Ahmaud Arbery could be seen on uniforms. Taylor and Arbery were also killed in shootings this year.

The WNBA also might follow the NBA's lead and put "Black Lives Matter" on its courts at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla., for its 2020 season, according to ESPN. The report added that WNBA players might wear pregame shirts with the phrase, "Say Her Name," seeking to keep the focus on Taylor and other women who are victims of alleged police brutality. — Reuters

Chaos at Valencia as coach sacked, sporting director quits

VALENCIA: Valencia have sacked coach Albert Celades and appointed long-standing club servant Voro until the end of the season, the La Liga club said in a statement on Monday. Sporting director Cesar Sanchez then announced his resignation shortly after Celades was dismissed, deepening the institutional crisis at one of Spain's most prestigious clubs.

According to Spanish media reports, Sanchez decided to resign after telling the squad earlier on Monday that Celades would remain in charge for Wednesday's game against Athletic Bilbao, only for him to be sacked hours later.

Celades is the sixth manager Valencia have sacked since the club was bought by Singaporean billionaire

Peter Lim in 2014 while Sanchez, who was appointed in January, is the sixth sporting director to have left the role in the same period.

Valencia appointed Celades last September after taking the surprising decision to dispense with Marcelino, who had led the club to successive top-four finishes and ended an 11-year wait for a major trophy by guiding them to win the Copa del Rey.

Celades had never previously been a first team coach at club level, building his reputation as Spain's under-21 coach and as an assistant to Julen Lopetegui with the Spain side and Real Madrid.

He made a difficult start in losing his first game in charge 5-2 to Barcelona but improved his reputation by taking the team into the last 16 of the Champions League.

But they were comprehensively beaten 8-4 on aggregate by Atalanta and pressure mounted on Celades as the team's domestic form continued to decline.

He was let go after Sunday's 2-0 loss at Villarreal, which followed defeat by struggling Eibar and left the team eighth in the standings on 46 points, eight behind fourth-placed Sevilla with six games remaining. —Reuters