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# Amid pandemic, Trump visits Rushmore, slams race protests

Donald Trump Jr's girlfriend tests positive for coronavirus



KEYSTONE, South Dakota: US President Donald Trump arrives for Independence Day events at Mount Rushmore National Memorial on Friday. — AFP

KEYSTONE, South Dakota: US President Donald Trump bemoaned protests demanding racial justice as "violent mayhem" Friday, but said little about an alarming resurgence of coronavirus cases as he attended a crowded, fireworks-studded Independence Day celebration beneath majestic Mount Rushmore. Trump, under fire for his response to America's spiraling coronavirus caseload four months before the presidential election, spoke on the eve of the July 4th celebrations before thousands of closely-packed people - many of whom chanted "Four more years"; few of whom were wearing masks.

In the shadow of four notable predecessors - George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, whose likenesses are carved into a granite cliff in South Dakota's Black Hills - the president called on supporters to defend America's "integrity". He accused protesters calling for racial justice of "a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children."

"The violent mayhem we have seen in the streets and cities... is the predictable results of years of extreme indoctrination and bias in education, journalism and other cultural institutions," he added. The US has been engulfed by a once-in-a-generation reckoning on racism and police brutality since George Floyd, an African American man, was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis on May 25. That has included a rethink of how America venerates symbols of the pro-slavery Civil War South, from removing statues of Confederate generals to retiring the Mississippi state flag, which featured the Confederate emblem.

Trump - who has also been criticized for his response to the protests - promised Mount Rushmore would never be defaced, and that he would never abolish the police or the right to bear arms. "They want to silence us - but we will not be silenced," he said to cheers, adding later that it was time to "speak up loudly, strongly, powerfully and defend the integrity of our country".

Continued on Page 2

## News in brief

### Israel, UAE ink virus deals

JERUSALEM: Two Israeli defense contractors will partner with Abu Dhabi-based technology company Group 42 to develop technologies to help fight the new coronavirus, the companies said. State-owned Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), which has civilian as well as defense operations, said the agreement was reached in a video call with Group 42, which deals in artificial intelligence and cloud computing. The partnership focuses on artificial intelligence, sensors and lasers. Israel's state-owned Rafael, which has been developing technologies to combat the pandemic, will also partner with Group 42. — Reuters

### India virus cases hit record

MUMBAI: India recorded its highest single-day spike of coronavirus cases yesterday, with over 22,000 new cases and 442 deaths, as infections rose in the western and southern parts of the country amid heavy monsoon rains. The western state of Maharashtra, home to the densely packed financial capital Mumbai, has the country's highest total, recording 6,364 fresh cases of the virus yesterday and 198 deaths from COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. In the southern state of Tamil Nadu, the second worst-hit state in India, the number of cases crossed 100,000. — Reuters

### Pak FM tests positive

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said on Friday he had tested positive for COVID-19, days after holding high-profile meetings including one with US special representative on Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad in Islamabad. "This afternoon I felt a slight fever and immediately quarantined myself at home," Qureshi said on Twitter. He said he felt healthy and would carry on his duties from home. In the last few days, Qureshi has had contact with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in parliament and in a cabinet meeting on Wednesday. — Reuters

### Saudi passes 200,000 cases

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia passed the grim milestone of 200,000 confirmed novel coronavirus cases, the health ministry said Friday, weeks ahead of the annual hajj pilgrimage drastically cut back because of the pandemic. The Gulf's worst-hit country has now 201,801 confirmed infections including 4,193 new cases on Friday alone, and 1,802 deaths. Over 140,000 of those infected have recovered. — AFP

## Suicides spark outrage at Lebanon govt

BEIRUT: Two suicides in Lebanon on Friday, apparently linked to the country's deepening economic downturn, have sparked a new wave of criticism over the government's mishandling of the crisis. A 61-year-old man from the eastern region of Hermel shot himself on the sidewalk of a bustling Beirut shopping street in broad daylight.

Near his body was a Lebanese flag, a copy of his clean judicial record and a note in Arabic that read: "I'm not a heretic". It was a quote from a popular song that continues with the words "but hunger is heresy". A relative of the man, who asked not to be named, accused the country's rulers for the

hardship that led to his death. "God damn them. People are suffocating." As he spoke, rescue workers carried the body away in a white coffin and a man mopped up a pool of blood.

The Lebanese pound, officially pegged at 1,507 pounds to the greenback, reached more than 9,000 to the dollar this week on the black market in a dizzying devaluation. Prices have soared almost as fast as the exchange rate has plummeted, meaning that a salary of one million pounds is now worth a little more than \$100, compared with almost \$700 last year.

The suicide sparked small protests in the Hamra district, denouncing the government for its inaction over the country's worst economic crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war. "He did not commit suicide, he was killed in cold blood," read one sign, blaming the government. Saba Mroue, a protestor, said: "the political class is responsible". — Agencies

## Modi rallies troops after border clash

SRINAGAR: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a surprise visit to rally Indian troops near a disputed frontier with China Friday, telling them the country's enemies had seen their "fire and fury" following a deadly border clash last month. The incident in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh saw 20 Indian troops killed in brutal hand-to-hand fighting and was the first time in 45 years that soldiers died in combat on the Asian giants' long-disputed Himalayan border.

China has admitted it also suffered casualties but has refused to divulge how many.

Accompanied by the head of India's military and the army chief, Modi visited an army camp about 100 km as the crow flies from the site of the battle before meeting injured soldiers in a military hospital. "In these difficult circumstances, you are the shield of the motherland," said Modi, sporting a khaki green parker jacket, aviator sunglasses and baseball cap of the "Fire and Fury" corps stationed there. "The enemies of Mother India have seen your fire and fury."

Without naming China, Modi added that the "era of expansionism is over... History has shown how expansionism pushed humanity towards destruction". — AFP

## 22 Sikhs killed as train rams van in Pakistan

SHEIKHUPURA, Pakistan: At least 22 Sikh pilgrims - 19 from the same family - were killed on Friday when a train smashed into a van in eastern Pakistan, authorities said. The vehicle

was going through an unmanned level crossing when it was hit by an oncoming train near the small city of Farooqabad. "The crossing was unmanned and the driver of the van took a hasty decision by driving onto the tracks," Pakistan Railways spokeswoman Quratul Ain told AFP, adding that the passengers were all Sikh pilgrims.

"Around 20 people lost their lives in (the) tragic collision. Two injured succumbed to injuries later, raising



BEIRUT: A demonstrator carries a placard which reads "Don't blame a sinner in the time of sin, for hunger is the father of all sin" during a gathering to denounce the death of a man who committed suicide in the capital's Hamra Street on Friday. — AFP



NIMU, India: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures as he speaks to Indian troops during his visit to the union territory of Ladakh on Friday. — AFP

the death toll to 22", Pakistan's interior ministry said in a statement. Earlier, local police spokesman Wajid Abbas confirmed that at least 19 dead were from the same family. In total, there were 30 pilgrims in the van. No train passengers were injured. Witnesses told AFP the usual rail crossing was closed so the van driver took a different route. However, the van stalled on the rail track, and the train collided with it.

"The van was filled with passengers.

When it collided with the train, the train dragged it around three to four kilometers away," one witness, Muhammad Umair, told AFP. Images broadcast on local television showed the mangled van on the tracks. The pilgrims from the north of the country were returning from a visit to Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak, near the megacity of Lahore. Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted that he was "deeply saddened" by the deaths. — AFP



## Local

# Health Ministry, volunteers continue to provide mental health help in Kuwait

## Fifteen suicides in Kuwait from mid-March to mid-May

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Thousands of people have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has destroyed many families. This tough situation has affected the psychological health of many people, and has led some to commit suicide.

Various local and international reports have shown an increased rate of suicide during this crisis, related to the bad economic situation and loss of jobs. In Kuwait too, suicide cases increased during the pandemic compared to the same period in previous years. The majority of those who commit suicide are low-paid workers who have families depending on them abroad.

Psychologists have volunteered to help people over the phone to make them overcome their psychological problems. Kuwait Times previously published an article on the Kuwait Psychology Association, which formed a special rapid intervention team providing free consultation over the phone in both Arabic and English. Doctors on this team help people with their psychological problems and pressures that may lead to suicide.

Apart from NGOs, the ministry of health through its Kuwait Center for Mental Health runs a hotline 24621770 that is available daily round the clock. According to an employee of the call center of the health ministry, doctors working the hotline provide free consultation in both Arabic and English. "The doctors are from different nationalities, so they speak English and Arabic. Moreover, if a doctor is from an Asian nationality, for instance Indian, then he or she will be able to provide consultation in their language," she told Kuwait Times.

### Mental health hotline: 24621770

This hotline provides psychological help for a range of issues. "The doctors are not just specialized in suicide prevention, but general psychological problems too, as these may lead to suicide if the patient doesn't receive mental help or support. There are no other public hotlines in Kuwait, but there may be some private ones. Also, the Kuwait Center for Mental Health is providing services for free to both citizens and expats, which includes antidrug treatment, psy-

### Mental health assistance

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

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

chiatric treatment and others," the employee explained.

From mid-March to mid-May, 15 suicide cases were reported in Kuwait - one by a bedoon and one

by an Egyptian, with the rest all Asian nationals. Experts consider this number higher than the average for the entire year in Kuwait. Suicide cases were reported in June as well.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has recorded 48,672 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 360 deaths. With the exception of 144 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 39,943 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 8,369 people receiving treatment.

### Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31 (from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am), as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The curfew hours were later reduced to start on 7:00 pm and end at 5:00 am, starting from June 21, 2020. The first phase includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, and Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier. The lockdown ended in Hawally and Khaitan on June 21, 2020, and will be lifted on Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on July 9, 2020. Activities resumed in the first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops.

Kuwait moved to the second phase starting from June 30, 2020. The second phase saw the curfew shortened to be between 8:00 pm and 5:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, pickups from restaurants, as well as reopening of commercial complexes, malls, parks, and other places of leisure between 10:00 am and 06:00 pm.

The third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. It would see increase of workforce to less than 50 percent. Visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger, and mosques would be allowed to perform Friday prayers.

Phase four would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. All activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

Mosques in the so-called 'model residential areas' reopened their doors for worshippers on June 10 amid strict health precautionary measures. Minister of Justice

and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Al-Afasi said that mosques in commercial, markets and heavily-populated areas will remain closed for the time being. Worshippers must wear face masks, keep social distancing between queues and between worshippers must be strictly observed. Worshippers must bring their own mats so they do not get in contact with mosque carpets. Mosques will reopen five minutes before prayer time and close 10 minutes after prayer.

Earlier, Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Before that, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

### Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Kuwait took all measures to test Kuwaitis repatriated from infected areas for potential infection. Kuwait had required all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28, with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before

"great news". US testing has risen sharply, but health experts say it still lags on a per capita basis behind many other countries and does not fully explain the case rise. They also note that deaths tend to increase a few weeks after cases rise. Vice President Mike Pence postponed a trip to Arizona this week after members of his Secret Service detail reportedly showed signs of COVID-19, and he and other Republican leaders have belatedly begun emphasizing the importance of wearing masks.

Former president Barack Obama weighed in

eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

### Hotlines

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

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

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

### Medicine delivery

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

## Amid pandemic, Trump visits...

Continued from Page 1

"The best is yet to come," he said, promising to establish "a vast outdoor park that will feature the statues of the greatest Americans who ever lived".

Trump did briefly thank those "working tirelessly to kill the virus" during his comments Friday. But otherwise he has had little to say about the shocking increase in US virus cases. On Friday a record 57,000 new infections were confirmed. The pandemic has claimed nearly 130,000 American lives, and the recent resurgence "puts the entire country at risk," top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci has said. The surge, especially in the south and west of the country, has cast a pall over Independence Day and seen US residents blacklisted by Britain and Europe, who have opened their borders to others.

Trump did tweet Thursday the rise was because "our testing is so massive and so good", calling that

Friday, tweeting: "This holiday weekend, let's be safe and smart. It's going to take all of us to beat this virus. So wear a mask. Wash your hands. And listen to the experts, not the folks trying to divide us." Trump, accompanied by first lady Melania, was warmly welcomed in South Dakota, a state he won easily in 2016.

But Randy Seiler, who heads the state Democratic party, told CNN the planned festivities are problematic: That they are offensive to Native Americans who consider the land sacred, that the fireworks pose a fire risk in the extremely dry area, and that the virus danger is real. The event, he told CNN, "is a recipe for disaster".

Trump announced that he would create a "National Garden of American Heroes", which he described as a large outdoor park featuring statues of "the greatest Americans who ever lived." He did not provide further details. Trump has long expressed his fascination with the imposing Mount Rushmore sculpture. In 2017, he joked about someone seeing his own face joining the Rushmore likenesses of his four predecessors - though the National Park Service says "the work is complete in its present form". — Agencies

In My View

## Reading



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Reading is the most efficient way one can enrich their knowledge and common awareness of their surroundings. It is possible to get acquainted with the cultures and customs of other people without actually visiting that country in person. Reading a book takes you in an in-depth journey to places, adventures or a pleasant trip to one of our world's corners regardless if it is fiction or non-fiction.

Your brain will crank its engine and move its wheels towards learning and understanding. I am one who still believes in books, because having a paperback or hardback in your hands gives you the privilege to read a line once, twice or three times until you really digest what is written. You can write notes on the margins too.

I know some of you may say what is this man is talking about, as technological advances brought everything to the palm of one's hand on the small screen! There may be some merit to this claim, but a book gives you the opportunity to designate a certain area of your house and allocate an hour or two to read without being interrupted to exercise your brain and engage your imagination for that period of time. It's much better for that corner to be free from phones, radios, TVs and other distractions. Reading a book can have its own rituals and sanctity.

Reading in general helps to improve writing skills and enhances the ability to analyze, including political and economic analyses. Reading gives the ability to the brain to understand events and link them together and create ideas to resolve many issues a human may go through.

Reading, as several studies have shown, works as a motivator for the brain and helps delay the onset of Alzheimer's. One will not be able to improve their speaking skills without reading, as the vocabulary can be enriched and the use of each word at its best can be learned and developed.

Reading augments the ability to concentrate, instead of having your concentration scattered between various applications, social media, TV and other distractions, because once you start reading, you will get involved with the story to understand and analyze what is in it.

It is very helpful to read various subjects to increase your knowledge and add to the subject of your interest, especially at work. Finally, it is significant that the message of Islam started with the word "Read", and this proves that reading is something of great significance to humanity.

"Recite in the name of your Lord who created • Created man from a clinging substance • Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous • Who taught by the pen • Taught man that which he knew not." — Holy Quran (96: 1-5)



Local

# Lockdown lifted on Jleeb, Mahboula, stays on Farwaniya

## Legal panel approves bill setting expat quotas

B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The council of ministers on Thursday decided to lift a lockdown on Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula residential areas more than 100 days of imposing it to combat the spread of the coronavirus. This means that the lockdown will remain on Farwaniya, the last residential area in isolation.

Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said the lockdown will be lifted on Thursday, July 9 from 5:00 am, adding that the decision was based on recommendations by the health minister.

Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, home to over half a million mostly expat workers, were the first two residential areas to be locked down in the country after the virus broke out among low-paid expat laborers residing in the two areas.

The decision was taken despite a jump in the number of coronavirus cases reported over the past 24 hours. The health ministry said 919 cases were reported yesterday compared to 745 cases the previous day. Kuwaitis continued to top the list with a big difference.

In the meantime, the national assembly legal and legislative committee Thursday decided that a draft law submitted by five MPs and proposing a quota system for expatriate communities, was found to be in line with the Kuwaiti constitution and laws.

The committee decided to refer the bill to the concerned committee that will study all legislation on expatriates in the country with the aim to cut their numbers. According to the bill, the largest foreign community in Kuwait, the Indians, must not exceed 15 percent of the Kuwaiti population who currently stand at 1.45 million. If approved, the law would require some 800,000 Indians to leave the country, which is an impossible task by all means.

The legal committee also decided to lift the immunity of two lawmakers suspected to be involved in the corruption scandal allegedly run by a Bangladeshi MP currently detained in Kuwait over the allegations.

The two MPs, Saadoun Hammad and Salah Khorshed said they asked the committee to lift their immunity so they could be interrogated by the public prosecution in order to clear their names, denying that they had anything to do with the scandal.

### Two MPs' immunity lifted



### News in brief

#### Kuwait on 'high risk' list

**KUWAIT:** Switzerland published a list of 'high risk' travel quarantine countries as part of new measures to prevent a second wave of the pandemic. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman were among 29 countries listed by the Swiss authorities as countries posing a high risk of coronavirus infection. From July 6, travellers entering Switzerland from these countries must go into quarantine for ten days.

#### 4,210 passengers

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that 25 flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 4,210 passengers. They included 13 flights to India, five flights to Egypt, two flights to Nepal, two flights to the UAE, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Lebanon, and one flight to Pakistan.

#### Production resumed

**KUWAIT:** The Al-Khafji joint oilfield resumed production on Wednesday. Acting CEO of the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOOC), Abdullah Al-Sumaiti, said Thursday. The production has been suspended for one month, since June 1st, and the joint executive committee of Al-Khafji joint operations decided to resume production on July 1st, Sumaiti said in press statement. He emphasized the company's full commitment to local authorities' directives regarding oil production rates in joint Al-Khafji and Wafra oilfields during the coming period according to the operational plans in agreement with the partners at the region.

#### Oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil dropped 13 cents to reach \$43.10 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared with \$43.23 on Thursday, according to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. In international markets, Brent crude oil went down 38 cents to stand at \$42.76 pb, while West Texas crude dropped 44 cents to reach \$40.21.

#### COVID-19 tests

**KUWAIT:** A team from the Ministry of Health, in coordination with the General Administration of the Kuwait Military Forces, conducted COVID-19 tests for members of the Interior Ministry's special forces using nasopharyngeal specimen collection.

## Kuwait urges int'l cooperation to fight COVID-19

IN MY VIEW

### Hum Hindi He (Je Suis Indian)



By Nejouad Al-Yagout

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**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has stressed the significance of cooperation and coordination via the international multilateral system and regional and international organizations to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This remark was made by Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi in a written address during a discussion on the pandemics and security. He said the world is living in unprecedented times as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses a transboundary threat and has been able to impact all aspects of our lives - health, economic, social and political - and has led to the death of half a million people and infected 10 million more all over the world.

This pandemic is - as described by the Secretary-General of the United Nations - the biggest challenge facing the world since World War II, he said. It is also a living example of the close links between pandemics and security. "This requires all of us to join efforts to confront epidemics and global health crises and limit their harsh impact, through cooperation and coordination via the international multilateral system and regional and international organizations. A global crisis like this requires global solutions," he added. Otaibi went on saying: "We have all witnessed the Secretary-General's historic appeal on 23 March 2020 for a global ceasefire in areas where armed conflicts are taking place in order to focus together on the real battle in our lives facing COVID-19."

#### Mobilizing efforts

"We have seen some other initiatives that were aimed at mobilizing international efforts to reduce the spread of the virus, and to reduce its effects on societies and people, especially the most vulnerable such as women, children, people with special needs, and displaced persons, but there is still more that can be done in this regard," the Kuwaiti diplomat said. "The world needs more serious and decisive stances. Here, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2532 by the Security Council on this global health crisis that we believe constitutes a threat to international peace and security, and we note that the Council has previously had clear positions on

other health crises, such as Ebola and HIV/AIDS. I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of Tunisia and France in the past few months to issue a Council resolution on COVID-19," he noted.

He emphasized that the effects of this pandemic are expected to touch many of the issues discussed in the United Nations in general, and the Security Council in particular. "On the humanitarian front, we are witnessing that the humanitarian situation has started to deteriorate in a number of conflict-stricken areas and those that suffer from fragile health systems as a result of years of wars and destruction," he said. Likewise, the spread of this virus will have economic and social effects that may reverse the development gains that some countries have achieved, which may exacerbate the root causes of armed conflicts, such as unemployment, poverty, inequality and competition for natural resources, he added.

#### Political repercussions

On the other hand, there is no doubt that this pandemic may have repercussions at the political level related to the ability and efficiency of countries and governments to respond effectively to limit its spread and provide the necessary medical care to those in need. "In addition, we see that this pandemic has complicated the way forward for political processes in some conflict areas. Faced with these impacts caused by COVID-19, we urgently need collective and joint action, to unite efforts and visions in order to overcome this deadly disease, by utilizing all the tools we have at our disposal, mobilizing the energies of experts, scientists and specialists to find a vaccine and ensure equitable distribution of it, especially in developing countries," Otaibi said. He also underlined the need to work to build the health capabilities of vulnerable countries and societies, provide medical and preventive supplies and equipment to enable the health systems around the world to face this pandemic, ensure continued delivery of humanitarian aid in light of the pandemic's spread to those in need in areas of conflict and natural disasters, and strengthen conflict-prevention measures.—KUNA

So the Kuwait National Assembly has drafted a law, or an expatriate quota law so to speak, which is currently under consideration. In layman's terms, the law, as yet a draft law, stipulates that there are too many Indians in Kuwait and that the number of Indians should stay within the range of 15 percent of the local population. What would this mean? According to news sources, this would entail 800,000 Indians being asked—nay, required—to leave our country. To say this is deplorable is an understatement. While we sit in silence as one law is proposed after the other denigrating the rights of expatriates, racism is no longer an invisible enemy but a tangible force spreading its tentacles into our political, legal, and social systems.

They say the pen (or keyboard, for that matter) is mightier than the sword; but not when the pen is in the hands of the weak. What use is it to vent when such a law has been drafted by those in power? What use is it to wonder aloud how people can sleep at night knowing their decision will create a loss of livelihood and displacement of those who call this country home?

How would a Kuwaiti feel if they were living in a country that proposed such a law? Oil wealth will not last forever. One day, we may be the migrating to other countries, not only trying to make a better life for ourselves but also contributing to the infrastructure of the country we move to. And how will we feel when the host country decides that all we worked for amounts to nothing; that we are dispensable; that what matters most is the citizens of the country in question and that immigrants are a burden to the economy?

There are Indians who were born in this country. They are loyal to Kuwait, even when they know they will never be granted citizenship. There are notable Indian businessmen and businesswomen who have lived here for decades, even though they know their business is never entirely their own, that they are required to have Kuwaiti sponsors, and only a few of them are granted 'silent partners'. There are Indians who continue to pay the rent even with the realization that because of their non-national passport they will never own land or property in our country. And yet they stay. They go to school here. They are our teachers. They are our doctors. They are our friends. They are part of our heritage. Many Kuwaiti families lived in Bombay and Pune in the 1940s and 1950s and were treated with such respect and love by the Indians. Some of us speak Hindi here. The Kuwaiti dialect includes Hindi words. Our food is a blend of Middle Eastern and Indian. We travel to India often. To cut off the Indian population from our society is to cut off a limb.

How can we tell a part of our population: You are not Kuwaiti. And you will never be. And we are driving you out in droves for the benefit of our economy. How?

This is not about demographical balances. This is about ensuring that Kuwaitis alone benefit while everyone else has no right to our wealth even when they work harder than us and give sweat, blood and tears to stay in a country that will feel no pain and no heartbreak when they leave.

I am no expert in the economy, nor am I an expert in demographics, but I know that borders are man-made. I know the economy is fickle. I know that God invites us to take care of another regardless of our nationality. I know that the greatest empires fall. And I know that even though this is a draft law that may not be passed, the fact that it was even drafted means we need to resurrect our humanity. And if we do not, then one word comes to my mind and it happens to be an Indian word: Karma.

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## Local

# Managing type 2 diabetes during COVID-19: 39 million people living with diabetes in MENA

## 40% COVID-19 deaths in Kuwait, UAE had diabetes

**KUWAIT:** Boehringer Ingelheim - one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies - held a regional media webinar titled 'Managing type 2 diabetes during COVID-19' with the participation of leading healthcare professionals who provided the latest updates on type 2 diabetes (T2D) management during the pandemic. The regional media event formed part of the 'Regional Interchange on Diabetes' (e-RID) internationally-accredited digital program, organized by Boehringer Ingelheim, targeting more than 5,000 international and regional healthcare professionals in the Middle East, Turkey and Africa region. By hosting prominent international experts from the US, Canada and UK, the scientific program aims at exchanging experiences and practices in managing type 2 diabetes and its complications during COVID-19.

Thirty-nine million people are currently living with diabetes in the Middle East and North Africa, and it is estimated that by 2045, around 82 million people will have the condition, according to the International Diabetes Federation. With diabetes being reported as a risk factor for the severity of COVID-19, patients are being encouraged to take precautions to avoid contracting the virus, such as washing hands thoroughly and regularly, cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces that are touched frequently, and avoiding contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness, such as coughing. Patients living with T2D need to pay extra attention to their glucose levels and monitor them regularly to avoid complications caused by high or low blood glucose levels. Should they display flu-like symptoms, it is vital they consult with a physician immediately for medical support.

"At a time where the world is focused on COVID-19, it is crucial to highlight the diseases affecting the lives of so many patients in our region such as Type 2 Diabetes. We felt committed to providing patients living with T2D, their caregivers and the wider healthcare community credible sources of information related to diabetes management and necessary precautions during

the pandemic," said Mohammed Al-Tawil, Regional Managing Director and Head of Human Pharma at Boehringer Ingelheim.

### 40 percent

"People with diabetes and related comorbidities are at a higher risk of complications from COVID-19. In fact, 40 percent of COVID-19 mortality cases in the UAE and Kuwait as announced had diabetes. It is therefore imperative that we educate patients on diabetes self-management and comorbidities at this time," explained Dr Mohammed Hassanein, Senior Consultant in Endocrinology and Diabetes at Dubai Hospital. "Patients living with uncontrolled T2D face a higher risk of contracting the virus than patients living with controlled T2D. Our priority is therefore to ensure effective type 2 diabetes control at this critical time."

### 82 million to have diabetes by 2045

Dr Thamer Alessa, Consultant Endocrinologist and Head of the Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism Division at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, Kuwait highlighted the availability of numerous new treatments and medical solutions in the Middle East to support patients living with T2D. "It is important that we bring awareness to the latest updates available. SGLT2 inhibitors and GLP-1 agonists have shown beneficial effects for patients with type 2 diabetes and high cardiovascular and renal impairment risk. These options have proven to help in terms of reducing cardiovascular diseases risk and also chronic kidney disease risk."

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the number one killer of people with type 2 diabetes, accounting for around 52 percent of type 2 diabetes patients worldwide. Diabetes is a known risk factor for CVD, so are conditions such as high blood pressure and obesity, all commonly seen in people with diabetes. Collectively, this means that the risk of death due to CVD is up to four times higher in people diagnosed with T2D.

Reducing cardiovascular risk is an essential component of diabetes management, therefore patients are encouraged to educate themselves on how to modify cardiovascular risk factors in order



**KUWAIT:** Participants at the 'Managing type 2 diabetes during COVID-19' webinar.

to benefit from the best chance at improving their CVD outcomes. A patient-centric and holistic approach are needed to guide the choice of pharmacologic agents used in patients diagnosed with T2D due to the chronic nature of the disease. Considerations include efficacy, hypoglycemia risk, history of CVD, impact on weight, potential side effects, renal effects, delivery method, cost, and patient preferences.

### Leading endocrinologists

The 'Managing type 2 diabetes during COVID-19' webinar session was delivered by leading endocrinologists from the Middle East; Professor Dr Yehia Ghanem, Professor of Diabetes, Lipid and Metabolism, and member of the Egyptian Diabetes National Committee in Egypt, Dr Eman Sheshah, Director of Endocrine and Diabetes Center in King Salman Hospital Riyadh in Saudi Arabia and Dr Paola Atallah, Specialist Endocrinologist at Saint George Hospital University Medical Center in Lebanon.

In April 2020, Boehringer Ingelheim launched its Global Support Program to step up its efforts in support of the fight against COVID-19 in the region. The program focuses on four areas: financial and in-kind donations for local emergency aid worth seven million euros, research for COVID-19 therapies through a team of over 100 highly engaged scientists from all areas of research and development, volunteering to bring COVID-19 relief and supporting social entrepreneurs through the 'Making More Health' relief fund.

"Our offices in the Middle East, Turkey and Africa have joined hands to bring financial relief, protective materials and donations of medicine to healthcare institutions and communities in need. So far, we have allocated funds and provided in-kind donations for local emergency aid in Jordan, Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia. We are currently gearing up to provide similar support in other countries, including Lebanon, Egypt and Algeria, where it is also much needed," Tawil added.

## Tunisia thanks Kuwait for supporting health sector

**TUNIS:** Tunisian Minister of Health Abdullatif Makki commended Thursday Kuwait's support to the Tunisian health sector during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Makki made the remarks during a meeting with Kuwait's Ambassador in Tunis

Ali Al-Dhefeeri and Director of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Office in Tunisia, to discuss projects and programs executed in collaboration with the State of Kuwait to fight COVID-19. He thanked Kuwait for its solidarity with Tunisia to confront the pandemic, offering \$5 million grant via the WHO Office to purchase medical equipment for hospitals. Dhefeeri said Kuwait was ready to keep supporting Tunisia's health sector. He said Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) was financing the construction of four hospitals, renovating two hospitals and a feasibility study for a new cancer center. — KUNA

## Customs launch new system to detect contrabands

**KUWAIT:** The Customs General Department has launched a new vehicle inspection system to help de-

tect contrabands hidden inside vehicles coming to Shuwaik Port. The CIP-300 light-vehicle low-energy inspection system by 'Smiths Detection' was also installed at both the Salmi and Nuwaiseeb border checkpoints, as it can be used to inspect vehicles and minibuses up to three meters in height. This device is considered one of the fastest and most efficient systems used globally, as the radiology scan takes 1-2 minutes while the full scan takes 2-4 minutes, the customs department said in a statement.



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# International

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Mass burial for scores killed in mine disaster

Iran vows retaliation after cyber attack on nuke site

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ISTANBUL: Hatice Cengiz (center), Jamal Khashoggi's fiancée, speaks to the press as she leaves the Istanbul courthouse on July 3, 2020 after attending the trial of 20 Saudi suspects accused of killing and dismembering her fiance in 2018. — AFP

## Turkish court tries Saudis in absentia

Khashoggi murder trial told oven was lit after killing

ISTANBUL: A Saudi consulate worker in Istanbul told a Turkish court on Friday he had been asked to light a tandoor oven less than an hour after Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi entered the building where he was killed. Zeki Demir, a local technician who worked for the consulate, was giving evidence on the first day of the trial in absentia of 20 Saudi officials over Khashoggi's killing, which sparked global outrage.

Demir said he had been called to the consul's residence after Khashoggi entered the nearby consulate to seek his papers. "There were five to six people there... They asked me to light up the tandoor (oven). There was an air of panic," he said. Khashoggi disappeared after going to the consulate to get papers for his marriage in October 2018. Some Western governments, as well as the CIA, said they believed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the hit - an accusation Saudi officials denied.

Turkish officials have said one theory police pursued was that Khashoggi's killers may have tried to dispose of his body by burning it after suffocating

him and cutting up his corpse. The indictment accuses two top Saudi officials, former deputy head of Saudi Arabia's general intelligence Ahmed Al-Asiri and former royal court adviser Saud al-Qahtani, of instigating "premeditated murder with monstrous in-



**Trial may boost case for action**

tent". It says 18 other defendants were flown to Turkey to kill Khashoggi, a prominent and well-connected journalist who had grown increasingly critical of the crown prince.

The defendants are being tried in absentia and are unlikely ever to be handed over by Saudi Arabia, which has accused Turkey of failing to cooperate with a separate, largely secretive, trial in Riyadh last year. In December a Saudi court sentenced five people to death and three to jail for the killing, but Khashoggi's family later said they forgave his murderers, effectively granting them a formal reprieve under Saudi law. A Saudi prosecutor said at the time there was no evidence connecting Qahtani to the killing and dismissed charges against Asiri.

### Basis for further trials?

According to his testimony in the indictment, Demir reported seeing many skewers of meat and a small barbecue in addition to the oven in the consul's garden. Marble slabs around the oven appeared to have changed color as if they had been cleaned with a chemical, the indictment reported him as saying. Separate witness testimony in the indictment, from the consul's driver, said the consul had ordered raw kebabs to be bought from a local restaurant.

Demir offered to help with the garage door when a car with darkened windows arrived, but he was told to leave the garden quickly, the indictment said. Rights campaigners hope that the Istanbul trial will throw a fresh spotlight on the case and reinforce the argument for sanctions against Riyadh or for legal action against the suspects when they travel abroad. "If the process works, what this trial...will strengthen is the possibility of universal jurisdiction," Agnes Callamard, UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, told Reuters on the eve of the trial.

That could give European countries, for example, the basis to launch a trial if any Saudis linked to the case travelled into their territories, she said. "Justice in these complex environments is not delivered overnight...but a good process here can build up (evidence for) what can happen in five years, in 10 years, whenever the circumstances are stronger," Callamard said. Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz, who had waited unknowing outside the consulate while he was killed, said she would continue to seek justice "not only in Turkey but everywhere possible". — Reuters

## Lebanon's poor borrow to buy bread

TRIPOLI: For Amer Al Dahn, the idea of eating meat is now a dream. Today, he can't even afford bread and depends on credit from the local grocer to feed his wife and four children in the Lebanese city of Tripoli. "We can no longer buy meat or chicken. The closest we get to them is in magazines and newspapers," said Dahn, 55, leafing through a supermarket brochure in his cramped apartment.

Living in one of the poorest streets of Lebanon's poorest city, Dahn and his family are feeling the full force of a financial meltdown that is fuelling extreme poverty and shattering lives across the country. In the capital Beirut, a 61-year-old man shot himself in the head on the busy Hamra street on Friday. Reuters could not establish his motives, but local media attributed the suicide to hunger. Struggling to walk because of diabetes, Dahn already faced a difficult life before the crisis which has sunk the Lebanese pound by 80% since October, driving up prices in the import-dependent economy.

"Life has become very difficult. The dollar is still climbing and the state is incapable of providing a solution." Even chickpeas, beans and lentils - a traditional part of the Lebanese diet - are out of reach for some. The crisis is seen as the biggest threat to stability since the 1975-90 civil war. "We are talking about hundreds of thousands of people who have fallen off the cliff," said Bojar Hoxja, country director at CARE International, an aid agency. Lebanon faces a humanitarian crisis that requires urgent international intervention, he said.



TRIPOLI: Lebanese army soldiers fire tear gas to disperse protesters in the northern port city of Tripoli, as anger over a spiraling economic crisis re-energized. — AFP

### Bread price hike

Lebanon is already a big recipient of international aid, the bulk of it directed at the 1 million Syrians who fled from the war next door. Tripoli, a predominantly Sunni Muslim city on the Mediterranean, is home to some of Lebanon's wealthiest politicians, who critics say only remember their constituents at election time. "If it was not for the neighbors here sending food to each other, people would be dying of hunger," said Omar Al-Hakim, who lives with his six children and wife in a one-room apartment. The salary of 600,000 pounds a month he makes as a security guard now lasts just six days. Before the pound's collapse, it was the equivalent of \$400 a month. Today, it is around \$60.

Basics such as sugar, rice and lentils become harder to buy, he says. This week, Hakim was hit by a one third increase in the price of state-subsidized bread. "We

used to eat meat on Sunday, or fish, or chicken ... none of that now. We can't afford an ounce of meat," Hakim said. The World Bank warned last November that the proportion of Lebanese living in poverty could rise to 50% if conditions worsened. Since then the crisis has only deepened and the economy has been further hit by a COVID-19 lockdown.

Many people depend on charity. Some are using social media to barter furniture or clothes for baby formula or diapers. Shopkeeper Kawkab Abdelrahim, 30, is struggling to keep her store open as she extends more and more credit. "Do you have the heart to turn them away if they want a bag of bread? Sometimes they ask for a tub of yoghurt or 1,000 pounds of labneh," she said, referring to a type of strained yoghurt that is a Lebanese staple. "That is one spoonful that a mother spreads on bread to feed three children." — Reuters

## Armed men kill 40 in brutal Mali village attacks

BAMAKO: Unidentified armed men massacred 31 civilians in simultaneous attacks on several Mali villages this week, then killed nine soldiers responding to the assault as violence surges in the country's conflict-racked centre. An Islamist insurgency that erupted in the north of the vast West African country in 2012 has swept to its centre, inflaming ethnic tensions along the way. Clashes between the ethnic communities of Fulani, nomadic herders, and Dogon traditional hunters have increased in recent months, with community-based militias-initially formed for defense-now launching attacks.

Armed uniformed men travelling in pick-up trucks attacked four Dogon villages on Wednesday, one local official said by telephone, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons. The attack left at least 30 dead, including women, children, and the elderly, while others were missing, the official added. "From 3 to 9 pm, nobody came to our rescue," said Youssouf Tiessogoue, an elder from Gouari, one of the villages attacked. Deploring the army's "inaction," he said: "It is always late and never confronts the bandits even if we tell them where they are." A senior government official called the attacks "barbaric". Officials did not immediately blame any group.

A military unit was dispatched to the area, and helped bury 31 bodies on

Wednesday, army spokesman Colonel Diarran Kone told AFP. On Thursday, the army received information about a new attack and sent the unit to Gouari, he said. "When it arrived at around 8 pm, the village seemed deserted, there were practically no signs of life," he said. "Just at the entrance, the FAMA (Malian Armed Forces) walked into an ambush," he said, adding that nine soldiers were killed and two wounded. The attacks were not far from the village of Ogossagou, where 31 civilians were killed in February and 160 were butchered last year—all Fulani.

### Tit-for-tat killing

Unrest in central Mali has killed nearly 600 civilians this year, the United Nations said last month. Mali's war erupted in 2012 when Tuareg rebels supported by armed Islamists took over the country's desert north. The rebels were then outmanoeuvred by their Islamist allies and the French military intervened to force them back. The conflict has since travelled south, as well as spilling into neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger, igniting a tinderbox of ethnic resentment and stoking fears for the future of the fragile nation. Armed groups coming from the north found fertile soil in an area riven by long-running land disputes, often between herders and farmers.

Central Mali is now prey to tit-for-tat killings and routine jihadist attacks. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. A jihadist group active in the region led by radical Fulani preacher Amadou Koufa has also increased suspicion of his ethnic group. In response to jihadists, traditional Dogon hunters have formed so-called self-defense groups, adding to the tension. More than 5,000 French troops, a regional G5 Sahel military cooperation deal and a UN peacekeeper mission in Mali have not been enough to contain the violence. —AFP



## International

## Iran vows retaliation after cyber attack on nuke site

## Fire at Natanz plant 'caused by cyber sabotage'

DUBAI: Iran will retaliate against any country that carries out cyber attacks on its nuclear sites, the head of civilian defense said, after a fire at its Natanz plant which some Iranian officials said may have been caused by cyber sabotage. The Natanz uranium-enrichment site, much of which is underground, is one of several Iranian facilities monitored by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog. Iran's top security body said on Friday the cause of the "incident" at the nuclear site had been determined, but "due to security considerations" it would be announced at a convenient time.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization initially reported an "incident" had occurred early on Thursday at Natanz, located in the desert in the central province of Isfahan. It later published a photo of a one-storey brick building with its roof and walls partly burned. A door hanging off its hinges suggested there had been an explosion inside the building. "Responding to cyber attacks is part of the country's defense might. If it is proven that our country has been targeted by a cyber attack, we will respond," civil defense chief Gholamreza Jalali told state TV late on Thursday.

An article issued on Thursday by state news agency IRNA addressed what it called the possibility of sabotage by enemies such as Israel and the

United States, although it stopped short of accusing either directly. "So far Iran has tried to prevent intensifying crises and the formation of unpredictable conditions and situations," IRNA said. "But the crossing of red lines of the Islamic Republic of Iran by hostile countries, especially the Zionist regime and the US, means that strategy ... should be revised."



### Natanz is the centerpiece of nuke program

cite any evidence. One of the officials said the attack had targeted a centrifuge assembly building, referring to the delicate cylindrical machines that enrich uranium, and said Iran's enemies had carried out similar acts in the past. In 2010, the Stuxnet computer virus, which is widely believed to have been developed by the United States and Israel, was discovered after it was used to attack the Natanz facility. Lukasz Olejnik, a Brussels-based independent cybersecurity researcher and consultant, said that incident did not necessarily say much about what transpired on Thursday. "Events taking place more than 10 years ago, and once, in themselves cannot form any evidence about things happening today," Olejnik, who formerly worked as scientific adviser on cyberwarfare at the International Committee of

**Suspicious**  
Three Iranian officials who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity said they believed the fire was the result of a cyber attack, but did not



A handout picture shows a warehouse after it was damaged at the Natanz facility - one of Iran's main uranium enrichment plants, south of the capital Tehran. — AFP

the Red Cross, said in an email. He added that talk of a cyberattack was "way too premature" and that invoking the specter of digital sabotage "might be a convenient explanation for natural events, or incompetence." Two of the Iranian officials said Israel could have been behind the Natanz incident, but offered no evidence.

Asked on Thursday evening about recent incidents reported at strategic Iranian sites, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters: "Clearly we can't get into that." The Israeli military and Netanyahu's office, which oversees Israel's foreign intelligence service Mossad, did not immediately respond to Reuters queries on Friday. — Reuters

## News in brief

## Putin mocks US embassy

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin on Friday mocked the US embassy in Moscow for flying a rainbow flag to celebrate LGBT rights, suggesting it reflected the sexual orientation of its staff. His comments followed a nationwide vote on constitutional reforms that included an amendment enshrining the definition of marriage specifically as a union between a man and a woman. Putin said the US embassy's move to raise the LGBT pride flag "revealed something about the people that work there". "It's no big deal though. We have spoken about this many times, and our position is clear," said Putin, who has sought to distance Russia from liberal Western values and aligned himself with the Russian Orthodox Church. "Yes, we passed a law banning the propaganda of homosexuality among minors. So what? Let people grow up, become adults and then decide their own destinies." — Reuters

## Coalition destroys Houthi drones

DUBAI: The Saudi-led military coalition battling the Houthis in Yemen said on Friday it had destroyed four explosive-laden drones launched by the Iran-aligned group in the direction of Saudi Arabia, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. The drones were intercepted over territory controlled by the Houthis in Yemen, the agency said, citing a statement from the command of the coalition, made up mainly of Saudi and United Arab Emirates forces. Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria tweeted that Houthi forces had in fact hit their targets—a control room at Najran airport, weapons storages in King Khalid air base and other military targets—"with high accuracy". The Western-backed coalition on Wednesday announced the launch of a new military operation against the Houthis after they stepped up cross-border missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

## Indian policemen arrested

CHENNAI: India has arrested four policemen over the deaths of a father and son in custody, a senior investigating official said, following outrage that drew comparisons to the death of George Floyd in the United States. Last week the men, J Jayaraj, 59, and Bennicks Immanuel, 31, were allegedly subjected to a brutal thrashing that resulted in rectal bleeding and eventual death, according to a letter to government officials written by Jayaraj's wife J Selvarani. "All important police personnel involved in the incident have been arrested," K Shankar, Inspector General of Police, Crime Branch Central Investigation Department in the southern state of Tamil Nadu said. "The investigation continues," Shankar said, adding that a murder case has been filed on the arrested policemen, who include two sub-inspectors, a constable and the police station's inspector. — Reuters

## Journalist in 'terror' case

MOSCOW: Russian prosecutors on Friday demanded that a journalist be sentenced to six years in prison for allegedly justifying terrorism in a case that has drawn outrage from supporters and rights groups. Svetlana Prokopyeva is based in the northwestern city of Pskov and works for the Russian service of The US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) as a freelance contributor. She was charged with publicly justifying terrorism after she wrote a commentary about a bombing attack in 2018. — AFP

## Ethiopian singer's death 'part of plot to sow unrest'

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said Friday that the killing of a popular singer, and subsequent violence that has left nearly 100 dead this week, represented "coordinated attempts" to destabilize the country. Speaking during a meeting with high-ranking officials, Abiy did not identify who he blamed for the unrest, though he vowed to hold to account those directly involved as well as "those that are pulling the strings", according to a summary of his comments distributed by his office. Abiy added, "Those external and internal forces who were not successful with the Great Ethiopia Renaissance Dam issue have tried their utmost efforts to create chaos at this time," alluding to tensions with Egypt over the construc-



ST PAUL: Members of the Oromo community shutdown the westbound lane of Interstate 94, near Lexington Ave, during a protest after the death of musician and activist Hachalu Hundessa. — AFP

tion of a large Ethiopian hydropower dam.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize laureate, wore a military uniform during the meeting, a portion of which was broadcast on state television. Singer Hachalu Hundessa, a member of the Oromo ethnic

group, Ethiopia's largest, was shot dead in the capital Addis Ababa on Monday night. Protests immediately broke out in the city and the surrounding Oromia region. Officials said that 98 people had been killed by security forces and in inter-ethnic clashes while 1,200 had been arrested amid the unrest.

Five people have been arrested in connection with Hachalu's killing. Officials have repeatedly suggested that the Oromo Liberation Army, a rebel group, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, an opposition party, were implicated. Abiy, who won the Nobel in part for opening up Ethiopia's political space, on Friday said opposition groups that benefited from amnesties he granted when he came to power in 2018 were taking up arms "instead of making a winning case through ideas and policy options", the summary provided by his office said. "A losing mindset cannot give birth to new ideas," it quoted Abiy as saying. Three high-profile opposition leaders — including former media mogul Jawar Mohammed — have been arrested in connection with the unrest this week, though officials have provided few details about the cases against them. — AFP

## Settlers, Palestinians unite 'in opposition' to Israeli annexation



Khaled Abu Awad (left), a Palestinian from Bethlehem, and Shaul Judelman, an Israeli settler from nearby Teqoa settlement, who are both co-directors of movement of settlers and Palestinians called 'Shorashim-Judur' (Hebrew and Arabic for 'Roots') and who both published a petition against Israel's intention to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, speak during an interview. — AFP

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: Some Israeli settlers agree with their Palestinian neighbors in the occupied West Bank that the Jewish state's plan to annex part of the territory would undermine their years-long reconciliation efforts. Palestinian Khaled Abu Awad and Israeli rabbi Shaul Judelman live just a few miles away from each other in the southern West Bank, the former in Bethlehem and the latter in Tekoa, a settlement considered illegal by the international community.

The two are the joint directors of Shorashim-Judur, or Roots in Hebrew and Arabic, a movement founded in 2014 to establish dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians sharing the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967. US President Donald Trump's controversial peace plan paves the way for Israel to annex parts of the West Bank, including Jewish settlements considered illegal under international law. In a statement this week Roots said unilateral annexation would constitute an "aggression" that would "stand in opposition to the principle of mutual respect" which is "the foundation for advancing peace and security".

Roots has its headquarters in Gush Etzion, a bloc of two dozen settlements and outposts near Bethlehem that some have speculated will be among the first Israel would annex. At a recent meeting there Abu Awad and Judelman shared the concerns they have if Israel went ahead with its annexation plans. On a terrace surrounded by olive trees, Abu Awad compared annexation to a "declaration of war" that could bring violence. "Any unilateral decision cannot be a sign of reconciliation but on the contrary, raises the level of the conflict," he said.

Sitting next to him, Judelman said "it is not enough to oppose annexation, people from both societies must unite and propose something else". "But it takes political leaders with courage to break the iron wall between our two societies," said the rabbi, his head covered with a large skullcap. "We have a generation of Israelis who never met a Palestinian but only saw a terrorist on TV, and a generation of Palestinians who only saw an Israeli soldier and this is what Israelis are to him," said the rabbi, his head covered with a large skullcap. — AFP

## Cameroon govt, separatists start ceasefire talks

YAOUNDE: Cameroon's government and the leaders of English-speaking separatists have begun ceasefire talks, the rebels said Friday, an unprecedented step towards stemming near daily violence that has killed more than 3,000 people in under three years. The anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions have been gripped by conflict since the separatists declared their independence in October 2017 after decades of grievances at perceived discrimination by the francophone majority. The main separatist leader and self-proclaimed president of "Ambazonia"—the name given to the breakaway state—Julius Sissiku Ayuk Tabe said that the negotiations started with government representatives on Thursday evening.

"Nine of our leaders in detention were invited to meet with a team from the government of La Republique du Cameroun on initiating a ceasefire following the United Nation's request to bring an end to the war in Ambazonia," Ayuk Tabe, who is in jail serving a life sentence, said in a statement sent to AFP by his lawyer. "Once significant progress is made, the interim government of Ambazonia will update Ambazonians," he said, adding that he remains committed to the independence of the two regions.

The nine leaders are self-declared members of the "interim government of Ambazonia". All are in jail in the capital Yaounde, sentenced last August on "terrorism" charges. The Cameroonian government neither confirmed nor denied the meeting had been held, but a senior UN official told AFP that it took place. Despite international pressure, it is the first meeting between separatist leaders and the government since the conflict broke out in the two regions, which account for about a fifth of a population that is overwhelmingly French-speaking.

**Surprise development**  
President Paul Biya's government

has previously refused to negotiate with the separatist leaders. It held a "national dialogue" on the conflict in October, but most separatist groups refused to participate, many pointing out their leaders remained in prison. In early March, the UN called for a ceasefire in the two regions, in part to help combat the coronavirus pandemic. But the appeal went unheeded, with military operations even seeming to intensify—the army said it killed 24 separatists in two raids last month. The sudden softening towards negotiation therefore took many by surprise. In the statement sent to AFP, the separatist leaders said "no war has ever been wrapped up in the battlefield" and that "real, sustainable peace and independence are a product of the negotiation table".

The statement, which is addressed to separatist militants, said the Thursday meeting was "an initial confidence-building procedure" and that the leaders' position on a negotiated ceasefire was made "clear and unambiguous" to the government. Cameroon's anglophone protest movement is fragmented into several groups, with the most radical not recognizing the "interim government of Ambazonia" and refusing any discussion with the government. The revelation of the talks-meant to remain secret, at least at first—comes as four people were injured by a homemade bomb in the capital Yaounde, which has been mostly spared the violence of the separatist conflict.

Both English-speaking regions were once part of British colonies in West Africa called the Southern Cameroons. They joined French-speaking Cameroon after it gained independence from France in 1960. After months of protests in late 2017, decades of resentment boiled over into an armed campaign for independence that was then met with a brutal government crackdown. There has been almost constant violence in the two regions since, and more than 700,000 people have been forced to flee their homes. Rights monitors have said that abuses have been committed by both sides. The country's armed forces have become mired in a series of high-profile atrocities related to the conflict. — AFP



## International

# Fearful of new security law, Hong Kongers scramble for safe havens

## Enquiries rocket for foreign homes and visas

**SYDNEY:** Many Hong Kong residents are scouring for new jobs and homes overseas, fearful that a new national security law imposed by Beijing will crush coveted rights not enjoyed on the mainland and herald a new authoritarian era for China's freest city. Beijing bypassed the city's legislature to approve the law directly this week, heightening anxiety over its impact on the former British colony of 7.4 million people that is a global financial hub and gateway for capital flows in-and-out of China.

Immigration lawyers and consultants, property agents and recruitment groups from Australia to Canada all told Reuters they were inundated with enquiries from Hong Kong residents. "Hong Kong demand for international real estate and residency programs has rocketed over the past few weeks," said Georg Chmiel, executive chairman of international property portal Juwai IQI, in a statement to Reuters.

"We see it in Malaysia, Australia, the UK, Thailand, Canada, Vietnam and the Philippines." Juwai does not disclose numbers of enquiries, but did say Australia was the top foreign real estate investment location for Hong Kong buyers in the first half of 2020. While leaving Hong Kong has traditionally been an alternative for the wealthy and foreign passport-holders, more middle- and working-class people are now also seeking options, especially where visas come cheaper.

Lily Chong, a real estate agent in Western Australia who markets developments to investors in Asia, said enquiries from Hong Kong shot up more than 40% since mid-June and more than 140 potential buyers took part in an online forum last weekend. "After just a few days we have already closed one sale sight-unseen," added Chong, managing director of IQI Western Australia. After weathering often violent, mass anti-Beijing protests since last year, China says the new law is aimed at a small minority of troublemakers and will not erode the

legal rights making Hong Kong such a popular financial centre.

### Echoes of 1997 exodus

But critics believe it is aimed at quashing dissent and will inevitably erode freedoms under the "one country, two systems" formula agreed when Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997, an event that also sparked an exodus. The law punishes crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with



## New security law scares Hong Kongers

foreign forces with up to life in prison, and already within hours of its implementation, 10 people were arrested on Wednesday during disturbances.

After a first rush of enquiries about overseas possibilities when China proposed the law on May 21, the volume has surged again over the past 10 days as its implementation happened. As well as Australia and former colonial ruler Britain, residents are seeking a new life in cheaper countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines. Hong Kong's financial rival Singapore is generating high interest too.

Andrew McNeilis, managing director for Asia at recruitment firm Phaidon International, said his firm had seen strong demand from Hong Kongers for Singapore, while it was becoming harder to convince people to go the Chinese city. "The new security law may result in an exodus of local tal-



**HONG KONG:** A woman sticks a blank note onto a 'Lennon Wall' outside a pro-democracy restaurant in Hong Kong in response to a new national security law introduced in the city which makes political views, slogans and signs advocating Hong Kong's independence or liberation illegal. — AFP

ent," agreed Victor Filamor, partner at executive search firm Stones International in Hong Kong, though he stressed it was too early to know the law's effects. Fuelling the scramble, Britain, Australia, the United States and Taiwan have all proposed measures to help accommodate Hong Kongers looking to resettle.

The day the law came into force, Taiwan opened an office to help Hong Kongers who may wish to go there. Those looking to relocate to

Canada are finding that Ottawa's strict coronavirus controls are making it particularly hard to get in, immigration lawyers told Reuters.

Refugee claims from Hong Kong in the first three months of 2020 did, however, nearly triple to 25 compared to all of 2019, Canadian government data shows. Stung by the offers of help for Hong Kong's people, China has warned foreign governments against meddling. — Reuters

## Two feared dead, 13 missing as heavy rain lashes western Japan

**TOKYO:** At least two people were feared dead and 13 others went missing in western Japan yesterday as record heavy rain triggered massive floods and landslides, forcing authorities to issue evacuation orders for more than 76,000 residents. The nation's weather agency downgraded rain warnings by one notch from the highest emergency level in Kumamoto and Kagoshima on Kyushu island, but Prime Minister Shinzo Abe urged local people to be "on maximum alert".

Abe ordered 10,000 troops on stand-by for immediate deployment to join rescue and recovery operations, pledging the central government would "do its best to take emergency measures, prioritizing people's lives". Two people were found "in cardio-respiratory arrest" and another was missing in landslides in Kumamoto, said Naosaka Miyahara, a disaster management official for the prefecture, using a term often used in Japan before a doctor certifies death. "At one point in the morning, 13 people were unaccounted for but the figures are changing as we are still struggling to sort out the situation," Miyahara told AFP.

Public broadcaster NHK said about 100 people had been stranded as roads were cut off by floods and landslides. Television footage showed vehicles swamped at car parks near a flooding river, while several bridges were washed away. "I can't evacuate

as a road turned into a river. It's so scary," a female resident told NHK. Aerial footage showed a resident being lifted with a rope from a roof to a military helicopter as an entire town was awash with muddy water. A massive landslide destroyed several houses with rescuers searching for missing people through half-buried windows.

"We have issued evacuation orders after record heavy rain," said Toshiaki Mizukami, another official for Kumamoto prefecture. "We strongly urge people to take action to protect their lives as it's still raining quite heavily," he told AFP. Kyodo News said 76,600 residents in Kumamoto and Kagoshima were ordered to evacuate their homes. Some train services have been suspended in the region, while more than 8,000 households lost power. Japan is currently in its rainy season, which often causes floods and landslides and prompts local authorities to issue evacuation orders. — AFP

## Sea turtles find protection from Senegal fishermen

**JOAL-FADIOUTH, Senegal:** In a classic case of "poacher turning gamekeeper", the fishermen of Senegal have joined forces to protect one of the ocean's most endangered species - the sea turtle. Three species can be found on the Senegal coast in west Africa. The most populous is the green turtle and they are joined by the loggerhead and leatherhead which can weigh over 600 kg. They are all beautiful creatures but each is threatened by pollution, poaching and, even now, the fishing net.

"Once we were the biggest eaters of turtles, now we have become their biggest protectors," says Abdou Karim Sall, a fisherman who is now the manager of a protected marine zone through which the turtles pass. Some 30 years ago, turtle meat was sold in the streets of Joal, one of the most important fishing ports in Senegal, and in Fadiouth, the port's sister village built on an artificial island made from heaps of shells.

"We ate them in the street, we cooked them at home," says the 56-year-old Sall who leads the management committee for the Marine Protected Area (MPA) of Joal-Fadiouth, two hours south of Dakar. Founded in 2004, and backed by the government, local authorities and several associations, the MPA stretches over 147 sq km and is made up of sandy beaches along a marine strip eight kilometers wide, as well as a network of mangroves and an area of savannah.

It is an area for the protection of endangered migratory species, such as the sea turtle. Its objectives are the conservation of biodiversity, as well as the improvement of fishing yields and socio-economic benefits for the local population. The sea turtles navigate their way along this tropical stretch of the Atlantic during their migration of more than a thousand kilometers between the volcanic archipelago of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, just south of Senegal, where they return to lay eggs when they reach sexual maturity.

The green turtles are predominantly herbivorous while the other species like to snack on crab and sea urchin. They all graze on the sea grass beds that grow abundantly in the shallow waters of the Senegalese "Petite cote" (small coast), especially in front of Joal. Through their presence the turtles help maintain a fragile biotope, a breeding ground and nursery for many species of fish and this, in turns, boosts the economy - the fishing sector directly or indirectly supports about 500,000 Senegalese. — AFP



**JOAL-FADIOUTH, Senegal:** Senegalese fishermen put a sea turtle back into the sea after rescuing it from their fishing nets on June 16, 2020. — AFP



**HPAKANT:** Volunteers bury bodies of miners in a mass grave while relatives look on during a funeral ceremony near Hpakant in Kachin state. — AFP

## Mass burial for scores killed in mine disaster

**HPAKANT:** Dozens of jade miners were buried Friday in a mass grave after a landslide in northern Myanmar killed over 170, most of them migrant workers seeking their fortune in treacherous open-cast mines near the China border. Women wept by the open plywood caskets, some marked with just a name, a few with a solitary photo, before the bodies were carried into a huge grave gouged from the red earth by a mechanical digger near the scene of the landslide. It was the worst accident in memory to befall Myanmar's notoriously dangerous jade mines.

The tragedy occurred on Thursday when a hillside collapsed in heavy monsoon rains, sending a deluge of smothering mud over the workers who were scouring the land for fragments of jade. "The search and rescue missions continued today... 172 bodies were found by midday," the Myanmar Fire Services Department said in a Facebook post, raising the overnight toll by 10. They join scores killed each year in Hpakant, an area is close to the Chinese border in Kachin state, where billions of dollars of the precious stone is believed to be scoured each year from bare hillsides by poor migrant workers seeking to strike it rich.

As photos of the dead circulated on social media Facebook users began to identify workers hundreds of miles from home, leaving moving tributes to

friends and family members. "Please bring my father back," said Hnin Wati. "A daughter's heart is breaking." Another, from a former miner, affectionately remembered one of the dead for his "kind-heart" and generosity with his food during tough shared times on the mountainside. The mechanical digger sealed the grave, several meters deep, with earth late Friday. The bloody bodies-stripped by the force of the sea of mud which entombed them-were yet to be identified.

Myanmar is one of the world's biggest sources of jadeite and the industry is supercharged by demand for the green gem from neighboring China. Some jade brokers suspended online auctions on Thursday, and promised to donate money to their friends who were killed. Scores of miners die every year in landslides and other accidents on unstable, over-excavated mountainsides. They are often from impoverished ethnic minority communities, looking for scraps left behind by big firms. Low-quality stones can be exchanged for food or sold for \$20 to waiting brokers. "Many of them (the dead) are Rakhine," Phon Graing, a Hpakant township official told AFP, referring to the ethnic group who live hundreds of kilometers away at the other end of the country, and who are among Myanmar's poorest communities. "But we don't have specific numbers yet." Police say victims had apparently defied a warning not to work the mines during the monsoon, which loosens the bare hillsides. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply saddened" by the deaths, as environmental groups called for an end to an illegal trade dynamised by Chinese demand. — AFP

## China plans reforms to organ donation rules

**PEKING:** China is planning changes in its organ donation rules to tackle a shortage of donors and curb illicit harvesting after it stopped taking tissue from executed prisoners five years ago. The draft rules published Wednesday by the National Health Commission allow people to donate the organs of relatives who have died. They also make it illegal to take organs from living minors as China tries to stamp out child trafficking for harvesting. China has been grappling with a massive dearth of donors after it ended the controversial practice of harvesting organs from executed prisoners in 2015.

The reforms focus on protecting the legal rights of donors but are unlikely to boost donations given the cultural sensitivities in China of "mutilating a body" after death, said Wang Bing, a Beijing-based lawyer who specializes in medical disputes. "The number of organ donors is very low and the law falls short of creating an opt-out system, which is the only way to tackle social taboos around the topic," he said. The draft law is available for public comment until the end of the month and no timeline has been set for debate or adoption by China's parliament.

Beijing first passed laws to regulate organ donations in 2007 but a lack of clear punishments and enforcement led to a black market where a kidney could be bought for about \$50,000 (350,000 yuan), according to a report last July by China Tribunal, a Britain-based NGO that carries out independent investigations into forced organ harvesting. The report also said the number of transplants in China far outnumbered official donors, and organs harvested from prisoners of conscience-including practitioners of the banned Falungong spiritual movement-accounted for the difference.

Beijing has long denied such claims. The amendments include fines and other punishments for individuals and institutions involved in organ trafficking or illegal transplants. Violators will face a fine "worth eight to 10 times the illegal gains plus doctors will have their medical licence suspended", the draft says. "There have been punishments on the books for a long time, but transplant hospitals continue to... do large numbers of transplants with no accounted source of organs," Matthew Robertson, a researcher at the Australian National University specializing in medical malpractices in China, told AFP. China has engaged in "systemic falsification" of voluntary organ donation data, according to a study published in November by the peer-reviewed journal BMC Medical Ethics, which also said official national and provincial transplant figures were likely "man-made" based on a "mathematical model". — AFP



## Business

SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2020



DAMASCUS: A farmer pours a bucket of wheat kernels into a sack during the harvest season, in a field in the countryside of al-Kaswa, south of Syria's capital Damascus. —AFP

# Syria harvest boom brings hope amid hunger

## Tanking economy leaves millions hungry across war-torn Syria

**DAMASCUS:** Watching a combine harvester grind through his golden wheat, farmer Yahya Mahmoud is relieved the yield looks good this year, even as a tanking economy leaves millions hungry across war-torn Syria. Before the war erupted in 2011, Syria produced enough wheat to feed its entire population but harvests then plunged to record lows, boosting reliance on imports, mainly from regime ally Russia. Heavy rains and reduced violence in parts of the country this year have led to a much improved harvest, one that farmers and officials hope will soften the blow of an economic crunch that has plunged millions into food insecurity. In the Al-Kaswa region near the capital Damascus, Mahmoud eyed yellow wheat stalks, their ribbed tips shining under the strong June sun.

"I rushed to harvest my wheat crop this year...to feed myself and my family," said the 61-year-old farmer, fearing crop fires as summer temperatures soar. "Those who grow wheat don't go hungry," he added, a brown hat covering his head. More than nine years into a conflict that has killed over 380,000 people and displaced nearly half of the country's pre-war population, a staggering 9.3 million Syrians face food insecurity, the United Nations says. The value of the Syrian pound has reached unprecedented lows against the dollar on the black market, sending prices soaring in a country where the UN says nine out of 10 people now live in poverty. The crisis has been compounded by a COVID-19 outbreak and new US sanctions against Syria.

### 'A blessed year'

In a bid to ease the crisis, many are looking towards the agriculture sector, which the UN says forms the largest part of the Syrian economy and contributes to

the livelihoods of millions in rural areas. Farmers across the country this year were able to use 70 percent of the land allocated for cereal production, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

Mahmoud cultivated four hectares (almost 10 acres) of land with wheat instead of one in previous years, he told AFP. "It was a blessed year, with plentiful rain, so we had to make use of it," said the farmer, who returned to his plot two years ago after the government recaptured areas around Damascus from rebels.

Inspecting fields nearby, Hisham Al-Sayyad, a local



**9.3m Syrians  
face food  
insecurity: UN**

agricultural official, said farmers in Al-Kaswa have cultivated 3,000 hectares of land this year, which is 1,000 more than the year before.

"Syria is an agricultural country," said Sayyad. "Despite sanctions and an economic siege, agriculture can help us achieve self-sufficiency." Bigger harvests alone do not guarantee better lives for Syrians, however. Price hikes fuelled by the Syrian pound's tumble have made it more

costly for farmers to purchase water, pesticides, seeds and fuel. Imports of key agricultural equipment has become very expensive, said Taleb Khalifa, a 51-year-old crop grower. "We are facing a serious challenge," he said, inspecting the engine of a combine harvester.

### Self-sufficiency

To make matters worse, fresh US sanctions came into force mid-June, exposing anyone doing business with President Bashar al-Assad's government to travel restrictions and financial penalties. This has spurred fears that foreign companies may be liable if they do business in government-held parts of the country. Khalifa's combine is the only functional one in all of Al-Kaswa and is used to harvest several plots. He feared US sanctions could hamper the import of spare parts if it broke down. "The sanctions, in general, are adding to our woes." Earlier in June, Foreign Minister Walid Muallem said Syrians should wean themselves off imports and rely on local products to combat the effects of sanctions. Haytham Haydar, the director of agricultural planning in the Syrian government, echoed this view.

"We hope to return to large pre-war production levels" of wheat, which stood at around 4.1 million tonnes, he said from his Damascus office. He said wheat production this year reached 3 million tons, up from around 2.2 million tons last year. Haydar acknowledged "rising production costs" but blamed it solely on Western sanctions he described as a "war" on food security. He said the "economic blockade" on Syria would only boost agricultural production. "Syrians will rely on their own production capacities to weaken reliance on imports as much as possible," he said. —AFP

## China aims to phase out sale of live poultry at markets

**BEIJING:** China on Friday vowed to gradually phase out the slaughter and sale of live poultry at food markets, in a move welcomed by animal rights activists amid the coronavirus pandemic. The announcement came as China stepped up inspections of wholesale food markets and outlawed the sale and consumption of wildlife, after a recent COVID-19 outbreak in Beijing was traced to a major agricultural wholesale market.

The virus is believed to have emerged at a market that sold live animals in the central city of Wuhan late last year. "China will restrict the trading and slaughter of live poultry, encourage the mass slaughter of live poultry in places with certain conditions, and gradually close live poultry markets," said Chen Xu, an official at the State Administration of Market Regulation, at a press briefing.

Live poultry kept in cages is a common sight in agricultural wholesale food markets and "wet markets"—smaller-scale fresh food markets—across China. The poultry is traditionally butchered on the spot by stallholders, or buyers can opt to slaughter the live animal at home. Some Chinese people traditionally believe that this allows for maximum freshness. Live seafood, amphibians and other creatures are also commonly sold at wet markets. Scientists believe the pathogen originated in bats before jumping to humans through a yet-unknown animal intermediary.

Chen urged local governments across China to "strengthen supervision of food safety at agricultural wholesale markets" and "investigate hidden safety risks", taking the Beijing Xinfadi market virus hotspot as an example. "It is understood that more than 70 percent of meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables enter the market through wholesale agricultural markets," he said.

There are more than 4,100 wholesale markets nationwide, a commerce ministry official told the briefing. The announcement was welcomed by animal rights groups. "We are happy to see that live-poultry markets are on their way out in China," said Jason

the matter said on Friday, confirming a report by LPC, a fixed income news service owned by Refinitiv. The Gulf state was in talks with banks earlier this year about funding options, including a loan of about \$2 billion, but discussions were put on hold due to the coronavirus crisis and plunging oil prices, sources previously said.

Discussions had now resumed, sources said on Friday. Oman sent a

request for proposals to banks in June for a \$2 billion loan with a one-year maturity, which would be replaced by a bond issue, one source familiar with the matter said, confirming the LPC report.

Banks were expected to submit proposals this week, the source added. A second source said loan talks had resumed without giving details. Oman's Finance Ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters

request for comment. Oman, a relatively small crude producer and burdened by high levels of debt, is more vulnerable to oil price swings than most of its wealthier Gulf neighbors. It was downgraded in June by Moody's further into junk territory to Ba3 from Ba2, with the ratings agency citing risks related to Oman's financing needs and its diminishing buffers. —Reuters

## Air France, Hop! to shed 7,580 jobs

**PARIS:** Air France management said Friday it planned to eliminate 7,580 jobs at the airline and its regional unit Hop! by the end of 2022 because of the coronavirus crisis. The carrier wants to get rid of 6,560 positions of the 41,000 at Air France, and 1,020 positions of the 2,420 at Hop!, according to a statement issued after meetings between managers and staff representatives.

"For three months, Air France's activity and turnover have plummeted 95 percent, and at the height of the crisis, the company lost 15 million euros a day," said the group, which anticipated a "very slow" recovery. The aviation industry has been hammered by the travel restrictions imposed to contain the virus outbreak, with firms worldwide still uncertain when they will be able to get grounded planes back into the air.

Air France said it wanted to begin a "transformation that rests mainly on changing the model of its domestic activity, reorganizing its support functions and pursuing the reduction of its external and internal costs". The planned job cuts amount to 16 percent of Air France's staff and 40 percent of those at Hop! With the focus on short-haul flights, management is counting mainly on the non-replacement of retiring workers or voluntary departures and increasing geographic mobility. However, unions warn that Air France may resort to layoffs for the first time, if not enough staff agree to leave or move to other locations.

### 'Crisis is brutal'

Shaken heavily by the coronavirus crisis, like the entire aviation sector, the Air France group launched a reconstruction plan aiming to reduce its loss-making French network by 40 percent through the end of 2021. "The crisis is brutal and these measures are on an unprecedented scale," CEO Anne Rigail conceded in a message to employees, a copy of which AFP obtained.

They also include, she said, "salary curbs with a freeze on general and individual increases (outside seniority and promotions) for all in 2021 and 2022," including executives of Air France. The airline told AFP earlier this week that: "The lasting drop in activity and the economic context due to the COVID-19 crisis require the acceleration of Air France's transformation." —AFP



Airline staff members and unionists of the French regional low cost airline, branch of Air France, HOP! demonstrate on Friday at the entrance of the airport in Morlaix, western France. —AFP

## Oman seeks \$2 billion bridge loan

**DUBAI:** Oman is seeking a \$2 billion bridge loan from international and regional banks, a source familiar with



Business

# Markaz: Global and GCC equities continue their recovery in June

## S&P GCC composite index rose by 1.6% in June

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" recently released its monthly markets review report for the month of June 2020. Markaz report stated that, GCC markets extend their recovery, registering gains for the third straight month in June. Undervalued Dubai equities topped gainers among the GCC while oil prices breached the \$40/bbl level.

Markaz report stated that Kuwait markets were positive, with the Kuwait All Share index registering gains of 2.7 percent in June. Relaxation of curfew regulations and the rebound in oil prices contributed to the positive sentiment of investors. Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) announced that they would implement the reclassification of Kuwait indices from frontier market status to emerging market in November 2020 along with the semi-annual index review.

Meanwhile, Kuwait cabinet agreed to cut the government entities' budget for fiscal year 2020-2021 by at least 20 percent to soften the deficit caused by COVID-19 outbreak. Agility was the top gainer for the month of June among Kuwaiti Blue Chips, gaining 11.2 percent. During the month, Agility signed a mega agreement with the Kuwaiti Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) to develop industrial and storage zones in Sabah Al Ahmed residential city. Basic materials and Industrials were the top performing sectors in Kuwait during the month, with their indices rising 9.2 percent and 7.8 percent respectively.

Regionally, the S&P GCC composite index rose by 1.6 percent in June, with all GCC markets barring

Oman registering gains. Dubai was the top gainer among GCC markets, rising 6.2 percent for the month, followed by Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which gained 3.5 percent, 2.7 percent, 1.7 percent, and 0.2 percent respectively. The World Bank in its recent report stated that GCC economies will contract 4.1 percent in 2020 but will bounce back in 2021 with 2.2 percent growth. Saudi Arabia turned to their mining industry to supplement its economic recovery. The country's cabinet approved a new mining law that facilitates investor access to financing and supports exploration and geological survey activities. The law falls in line with Saudi Arabia aims to diversify away from hydrocarbons by increasing foreign investment in the mining sector.

Markaz report also stated that among GCC Blue Chip companies outside Kuwait, Etisalat and International holding company were the top gainer for the month, increasing 5.0 percent and 4.9 percent respectively.

The performance of Global equity markets was positive for the third consecutive month, with the MSCI World Index gaining 2.5 percent in June. US equities (S&P 500) gained 1.8 percent despite the second wave of cases starting to spike in several states. The Federal Reserve decided to keep interest rates unchanged during its June meeting and indicated that they would maintain rates at near zero levels until the economy recovers. The US Fed expects the US GDP to decline by 6.5 percent in 2020 before bouncing back in 2021 by 5 percent. In

Equity	Last close	June %	2020 %
S&P GCC	96	1.6	-18.4
Saudi Arabia (TASI)	7,213	0.2	-15.2
Qatar (QE Index)	8,845	1.7	-15.9
Abu Dhabi (ADI)	4,142	3.5	-16.7
Kuwait (All Share PR Index)	4,996	2.7	-20.8
Dubai (DFMGI)	1,945	6.2	-26.7
Bahrain (BAX)	1,270	0.6	-18.6
Oman (Muscat SM)	3,545	-0.8	-11.1
<b>Commodities</b>			
IPE Brent(\$)	41	16.5	-37.7
Gold(\$)	1,781	3.1	17.4

Source: Refinitiv

addition, the apex bank affirmed its commitment to keep buying bonds, targeting \$80 billion a month in Treasury securities and \$40 billion in mortgage-backed securities. The UK (FTSE 100 index) markets stayed positive, gaining 1.5 percent for the month. The Bank of England (BoE) during its June announcement said that it would expand its bond-buying program by \$123 billion and keep its key interest rate at a record low of 0.1 percent.

Emerging markets were buoyant for the month, with the MSCI EM increasing by 7.0 percent.

Oil prices closed at \$41 per barrel at the end of June 2020, up by 16.5 percent as OPEC members and allies tightened output while the outlook for energy demand rose due to easing of restrictions on lockdowns. Gold prices continued to rise steadily, increasing 3.1 percent in June as fears over a second wave increased the demand for the safe haven asset.



### Kuwait to cut govt entities' budget for 2020-21

## Al Mulla Automobiles wins first place at Mercedes-Benz Awards

**KUWAIT:** Al Mulla Automobiles Co, the sole authorized distributor and exclusive service partner for Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, has been awarded first place in the Mercedes-Benz Overseas General Distributor Awards for Sales and Customer Services 2019. The award aims to recognize the distributors that are performing the strongest, each year.

The criteria for the award selection process is based on sales, customer service, as well as, operational and strategic key performance. Al Mulla Automobiles was awarded first place due to strong performance in 2019, exceeding sales targets, as well as ranking the highest in customer service.

Commenting on the award, Talal Al Mulla, Chief Executive Officer of Al Mulla Group, said: "On behalf of all our colleagues and associates at Al Mulla Automobiles, we are delighted to receive this



award in the Mercedes-Benz General Distributor Awards 2019 for Sales and Customer Services. This is testament to the dedication, outstanding effort and excellent performance of our team, as well as their commitment to always delivering the best in class service to our clients and customers."

"Since we started our operations in the beginning of 2019, we promised to elevate the brand's presence in Kuwait and offer the best customer experience. We believe we have fulfilled our promise, and will continue to enhance our overall performance and services," added Al Mulla.

## Boubyan Bank launches appointment booking at its website

**KUWAIT:** Within its efforts to develop its services to cope with the current situations caused by COVID-19 and provide the highest levels of services while fully observing health precautions, Boubyan Bank announced providing a service at its website to book appointments to visit the bank's various branches.

In this regard, Boubyan Bank's AGM for personal banking services, Bashar Mohamed Al-Doub said that appointment can be booked at the bank's website: [www.bankboubyan.com](http://www.bankboubyan.com) where visitors can select suitable appointments, branch and enter their basic data including name, civil ID

number and mobile number on which they will receive an SMS confirming the booking data.

Al-Doub added that the service is optional but still provides many privileges such as cutting short waiting time as well as the time they will have to spend at the branch. Further, Al-Doub pointed that all Boubyan bank branches are currently highly equipped to ensure everybody's health and safety. "It is of great importance that all visitors respect precautionary measures recommended by health authorities and wear facemasks during the visit", he underlined.

### Investing in digital services

Meanwhile, Al-Doub said that the new service is part of the digital services Boubyan bank always provides its customers with. He also explained that Boubyan bank has been adapting the strategy of investing in and expanding its digital services for years during which those services

proved successful and highly significant under the circumstances Kuwait and the entire world are currently experiencing and in view of the growing reliance on banking services provided via e-banking channels.

He added: "Ever since the beginning of COVID-19 crisis months ago, there has been a growing demand from clients on using digital banking services through the bank's website at: [www.boubyanbank.com](http://www.boubyanbank.com) or through Boubyan bank's apps on smart mobile phones, which means that the bank has never lost contact with its clients despite the crisis and its impact on various economic sectors worldwide".



Bashar Al-Doub

## Gulf Air resumes direct flights to and from Athens and Cairo

**MANAMA:** Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, will resume its direct Athens and Cairo flights with scheduled operations starting from 01 July 2020. Gulf Air has been operating direct flights between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Hellenic Republic since 1974 and 1980 respectively. Both destinations are key within the Gulf Air's network and are popular

amongst the airline's points in the Mediterranean and North African region. The airline currently flies to and from London, Paris, Frankfurt, Manila and Pakistan.

Being one of the few airlines that continued operations in the last 3 months, Gulf Air continuously works closely with the governments authorities throughout the destinations on its network to resume operations as soon as airports open. Gulf Air boasts a flexible and agile network by immediately adapting to government orders and civil aviation directives around its network and has been responsive to continuous changes and updates regarding operations to and from its network destinations. Updates are constantly added on [gulfair.com/covid19](http://gulfair.com/covid19) including travel advice, network and new health and safety procedures.



## Stocks touch near 4-month high on upbeat data

**NEW YORK:** Emerging market stocks rose on Friday and were set to end the week higher on upbeat data from China and the United States, while currencies lagged as growing coronavirus cases dampened optimism about a swift global economic recovery. The MSCI's index of developing world stocks rose 0.9 percent to its highest level since March 6, but

still trading about 10 percent below a pre-pandemic peak. The index was on track to add more than 3 percent for the week, driven by strong economic readings across the globe, with Chinese factory activity and US payroll data being particular highlights. However, a spike in US COVID-19 infections on Thursday undercut risk appetite. Emerging market currencies bore a measure of this caution, given that recent monetary easing in the space has made them less attractive than stocks.

"Markets may be trading in consolidating patterns due to the ongoing battle between those who see a faster-than-previously-thought economic recovery and those who are concerned over a second round of restrictions due to the re-acceleration of global infections," Charalambos Pissouras, senior market analyst at JFD Group, wrote in a note. South African and Hungarian stocks led gains in the

EMEA region. Turkish stocks traded sideways, while the lira edged lower after inflation in the country climbed more than expected in June.

Turkey's central bank had cited increased inflation when it unexpectedly halted a policy easing cycle last week. "If inflation were not to cool down, the FX market would switch to discounting a much more deeply negative real interest rate than it is doing now - and this would imply more selling pressure on the lira," Tatha Ghose, FX & EM Analyst at Commerzbank, wrote in a note.

South Africa's rand rose about 0.3 percent, and was set to outperform its EMEA peers for the week after the country recorded its first current account surplus in 17 years. Russia's ruble was steady to the dollar, while the Hungarian forint and the Czech koruna both edged lower to the euro. —Reuters

## Burgan Bank enhances e-learning through its online portal



Halah El-Sherbini

Ghada El-Kadi

**KUWAIT:** Driven by progress and fostering continuous transformative growth, Burgan Bank employees are experiencing focused online learning through the dedicated Burgan Learning Digital platform. Led by the Learning and Development Department in the Human Resources and Development Group, the portal offers staff a wide variety of learning solutions covering both soft and hard skills through modern technological practices and operations as part of the Bank's ongoing digital transformation strategy.

The dedicated learning portal was adopted with the main objective to continue to enhance and solidify employee engagement and development through diversified learning programs, while supporting individual wellbeing during these challenging times. Burgan Bank maintained its collaboration with IQad learning solutions and their partner, Cross Knowledge, a highly acclaimed global award-winning learning solutions provider, to enable continued knowledge-building in a rapidly changing business environment. Adapting to current circumstances faced regionally and globally due to the spread of COVID-19, the Bank responded swiftly, and strategically invested in the transformation of the Learning & Development Center into a Learning & Development portal readily available for its staff to benefit from. Burgan Bank Group Chief Human Resources & Development Officer Halah El-Sherbini Stated, "As part of Burgan Bank's focused digital strategy, the HRD team has been readily preparing for the digital transformation required in the learning and development solutions offered to all staff. This proactive approach allowed us to solidly take the leap and to ensure the continuity of education as well as engagement during this challenging period. Our success stems mainly from our agility and strong belief in empowering and nurturing our staff through continuously providing innovative means to create a learning driven culture."

Senior Manager, Learning & Development at Burgan Bank Ghada El-Kadi said, "We have managed to seamlessly integrate the e-learning portal in such a challenging period in our effort to meeting the evolving organization's learning needs through applying our acquired digital capabilities and putting them into immediate practice. More than 80 percent of the bank employees have demonstrated high levels of interaction, learning agility and improvement in digital literacy to cater to evolving skills demands. In addition, our main goal from creating the digital portal is to continuously undergo re-skilling and up-skilling of staff and remain fully connected." Several new programs are initiated and other existing intensive programs were transformed into e-learning solutions. Additionally, staff can enroll for hybrid learning models such as both synchronous and asynchronous learning, alongside the Bank's online social activities such as themed Book, Film and Knowledge-Sharing Clubs. Committed to excellence through innovative learning opportunities, Burgan Bank continues to partner with local and international knowledge facilitators to develop and elevate internal skills, standards of operations and practices to deliver optimal services to its customers.



# Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons unveils stunning all-new C-HR

## Toyota redefines the crossover segment



**KUWAIT:** Changing the rules of the crossover game in one bold stroke, Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Toyota launched the all-new Toyota C-HR. The daringly innovative crossover combines adventurous design with a responsive drive and class-leading eco-friendly technology to bring the future of the crossover to customers in the region.

In view of the current circumstances and complying with guidelines of Kuwait authorities, Al-Sayer held a digital premier, live streaming the event in Toyota Kuwait YouTube and Facebook accounts for valued partners of Toyota as well as distinguished members of the press and media. Martin Aherne Business Director and Bader Faisal Al-Sayer Deputy Marketing Manager representing Toyota Kuwait.

"The designs I'm sure you'll agree are head turning. The technology and performance is simply amazing. The car acts like a normal petrol car however they have the added advantage of a 2nd power source. This 2nd power source is self-charging requiring no plug in. The hybrid cars are serviced like normal cars," commented Martin.

Designed to stand out both within the Toyota line-up and the crossover segment, the all-new C-HR - or Coupé High-Rider - embodies company President Akio Toyoda's commitment to promoting stylistic freedom and engineering creativity. The pioneering crossover remains remarkably true to the spirit of the concept cars that drew global attention in Paris, in 2014 and Frankfurt, in 2015. Now, the Toyota development team's bold vision is brought to life in a head-turning vehicle that pairs a coupe-like upper body with the powerful underpinnings of an SUV for enhanced driving pleasure.

Inspired by what he learned from meeting with potential customers, C-HR Chief Engineer Hiroyuki Koba focused persistently on their requirements throughout the development process, setting the highest demands for design and quality. Koba commented, "The Toyota C-HR's unique character demonstrates the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA) platform's flexibility in three key areas: design, powertrain, and dynamics. This adaptability provided us with the freedom to deliver a fresh take on the increasingly commoditized crossover segment."

"We are excited to launch the all-new Toyota C-HR in the Middle East, a completely new breed of car that will change people's perceptions of what a crossover should be like to drive and to look at. Designed to reflect the aspirations of adventurous young motorists, the vehicle represents the next step in the segment's evolution," said Kei Fujita, Chief Representative of Middle East & Central



Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation.

The all-new C-HR Hybrid-Electric Vehicle (HEV) also reflects Toyota's long-standing drive for sustainability. The company has harnessed the power of innovation to emerge as a leader in the development of environmentally friendly automotive technologies. Offering the lowest fuel consumption value in its category at 23.9 km/L, the class-leading C-HR enables customers to contribute to a greener future while enjoying the increased driving satisfaction provided by its advanced technologies. The new model also offers exceptional cabin quietness and smooth acceleration, especially when accelerating from a stand-still.

Fujita continued: "Distilling decades of engineering expertise has resulted in a highly refined vehicle that is stylish, fun to drive and embodies Toyota's commitment to safeguarding the future of our planet through its groundbreaking eco-friendly technologies. I'd like to thank our loyal customers in the region for their continuous support, which serves as a constant source of inspiration in our drive to create 'ever-better' cars."

The all-new C-HR is built on the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA) platform, which guarantees a more rewarding driving experience. A low center of gravity and double-wishbone rear suspension contribute to outstanding stability and handling with exceptional ride comfort. The vehicle comes with a 1.8-liter VVT-i full-hybrid powertrain and automatic ECVT transmission, meeting all the requirements of daily commutes and weekend leisure journeys while offering peace of mind through its comprehensive array of safety features.

### C-HR: USP

- 7 SRS airbags
- Bi-Tone body color
- Power back door
- LED headlights + DRL (Daytime Running Lights) + AFS (Advanced Front Lighting System)
- 8-inch high definition front display + Apple Car Play & Android Auto System
- Rear camera
- Power driver seat + heater seats
- Leather seats
- Drive Mode Select (Eco, Normal, EV)

With its head-turning looks and energetic performance, the all-new C-HR is poised to win the hearts of adventurous motorists in Kuwait.

The C-HR has been grabbing attention globally and is now about to turn heads in Kuwait. The all new C-HR, with its cool and funky styling, innovative features and state-of-the-art engine technology, will turn what you think about crossover SUVs on its head.

dual-mode air conditioning system to ensure the utmost comfort and convenience for drivers and their passengers.

The all-new C-HR HEV comes with all the benefits expected of the world's most proven and advanced hybrid-electric technology, yet drives like any other conventional car, offering remarkable fuel efficiency at 23.9 km/L with zero compromise on performance. It is powered by a petrol engine that delivers 97 hp and a peak torque of 142 Nm, working in tandem with an electric motor that churns out 71 hp of power and 163 Nm of torque. The hybrid-electric powertrain is equipped with a small, light, and powerful lithium-ion battery pack that can efficiently absorb and deliver current, enhancing the electric motive force delivery.

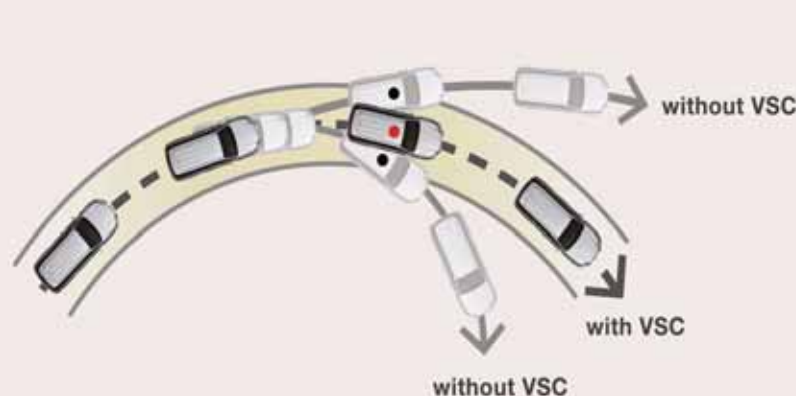
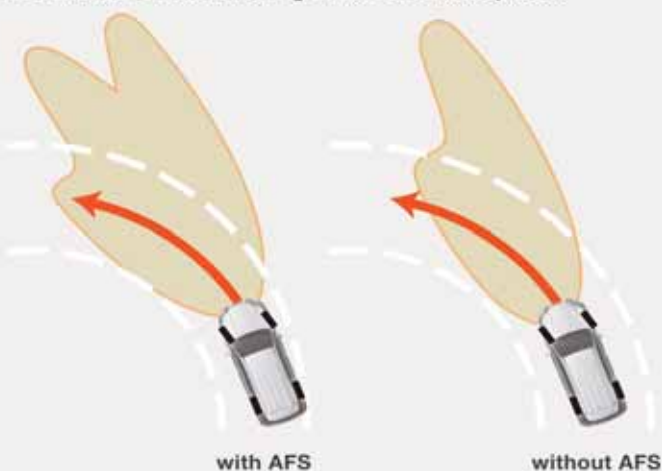
Toyota has more than two decades of technical leadership in electrified vehicles and has amassed over 15 million environmentally friendly vehicle sales globally since 1997. The all-new C-HR can run entirely on electrical power with zero-fuel consumption and tailpipe emissions or through the combined power of its petrol engine and two electric motors, subject to the vehicle's speed and driver behavior. Its hybrid-electric batteries are continuously charged by the petrol engine and when decelerating and braking, meaning there is no need to plug in a power cord. The all-new C-HR features a host of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional vehicle and does not require special fuel.

As with any Toyota model, the safety of occupants is paramount and is assured through several superior technologies. The TNGA-based chassis has been optimized for outstanding impact performance and is complemented by an impressive array of active and passive safety features including Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Tire Pressure Warning System (TPWS), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC) and many others.

A choice of 10 exciting exterior hues add to the all-new C-HR's striking visual appeal, including Super White 2, White Pearl CS, Celestite Gray ME, Gray ME, Metal Stream ME, Black MC, Emotion Red 2, Orange ME, Oxide Bronze ME, and Nebula Blue ME. Further personalization is made possible with the addition of two bi-tone variants; where you can combine Gloss Black and the iconic Metal Stream with all the available colors. The vehicle's eye-catching exterior is accentuated by sporty 17-inch alloy wheels. Customers can also tailor the interior color scheme according to their preferences with two distinctive options; Black and Orchid Brown, as well as go for the optional leather package.

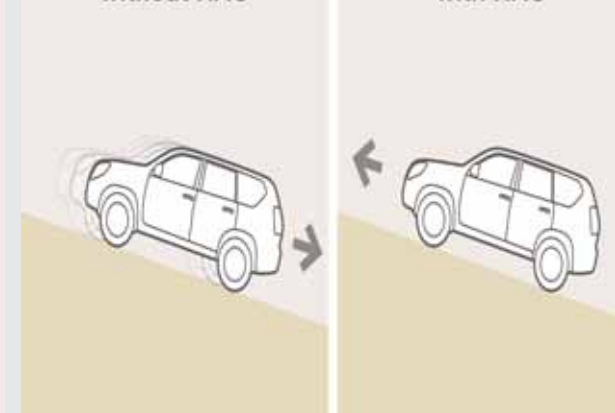


AFS function (When cornering to the left at low speeds)



without HAC

with HAC





# Classifieds

Sunday, July 5, 2020

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## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Very hot with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 45 km/h causing rising dust.

**BY NIGHT:** Hot to rather hot with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 38 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 04/07/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	48 °C	35 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	49 °C	29 °C		
ABDALY	47 °C	30 °C		
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C		
JAHRA	49 °C	33 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	47 °C	34 °C		
SALMIYAH	40 °C	34 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	46 °C	29 °C		
WAFRA	47 °C	29 °C		
SALMY	49 °C	30 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	07/05	Very hot with a chance for rising dust	50 °C	32 °C	NW	20 - 45 km/h
Monday	07/06	Very hot	49 °C	32 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	07/07	Hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	46 °C	31 °C	SE	12 - 40 km/h
Wednesday	07/08	Hot and Relatively humid	45 °C	33 °C	SE	20 - 42 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:19
Sunrise	04:53
Zuhr	11:52
Asr	15:26
Sunset	18:51
Isha	20:23

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	46 °C
MIN. Temp.	28 °C
MAX. RH	35 %
MIN. RH	09 %
MAX. Wind	NE 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

**EMBASSY OF INDIA**

INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR THE POST OF CHAUFFEUR:  
**Minimum Qualifications : School Certificate.**  
**Age limit : 35 years on 01.06.2020**  
 Minimum five years driving experience and knowledge of various roads in Kuwait  
 Valid residency (transferable) and driving license of Kuwait  
 Knowledge of Arabic language essential.

Interested candidates may send their applications by e-mail with bio-data by 15th July 2020 to Second Secretary(HOC), Embassy of India, P.O. Box No.1450 Safat 13015, Kuwait.

**E-mail: recruitmentchauffer@gmail.com**

Hospitals	
Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

**Daily SuDoku**

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

medium

**Friday's Solution**

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

easy

**Join the dots**

## STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**  
 Mix your reality with a bit of fantasy today, Aries. Allow your feet to come off the ground for a little while. Give yourself a rest. Take some time to meditate and clear your mind of your daily worries. Calming, relaxing activities are the best way to spend the day. Spend time communicating with friends and feel free to go deep into conversations regarding outlandish subjects. Allow yourself to dream.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**  
 When faced with ten entrees on the menu, it might be hard for you to choose just one. Feel free to order two or more, Cancer. Don't let indecisiveness slow you down. At the same time, don't view it as something negative. The key for today is to go with the flow. Expand your dreams as far and wide as you wish. Have fun as long as you're willing to take full responsibility for your actions.

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**  
 Reach for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, Libra. It's closer than you think. Indeed, your dreams are completely within your reach, and there are huge forces at work helping you achieve your goals. You should find yourself in a favorable mood all day. People will be more sensitive than usual to your emotions. Let your fantasies lead the way.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**  
 Your mind may seem rather cloudy today, Capricorn, but don't let this hinder you. In fact, you'll find that you can use this feeling of fantasy to your advantage. Try to bring more magic into your life. You'll discover that the more you accept your bizarre feelings and ideas, the more things will fall into place. Don't think that everything in life has to be completely rational.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**  
 Let yourself go into high creative mode and drift into a whole other world, Taurus. Escape your present reality and explore your fantasies through any sort of artistic endeavor. Dream as big as your mind allows. There's no limit to the things that can manifest on a day like today. Push your limits and test your boundaries. You may be able to soar much higher than you think.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**  
 Your dreams won't come true unless you believe in and act on them, Leo. No one else is going to do it for you. Unless you have a fairy godmother, you need to take matters into your own hands. Realize, however, that you can get there many different ways. The first step is to believe in yourself. Anything is possible. Today is a great day to let your imagination call the shots.

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**  
 Today is your day to dream and dream big, Scorpio. Think about what it is that you want most out of life. Aim your arrow to the stars and pull back your bow as far as possible. There's no limit to how far you can go. Your only limitation is your imagination. Don't worry if your plan doesn't seem to make any rational sense. Worry more about what you want and less about how you're going to get it.

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**  
 Today is an excellent day for you, one in which you'll find a great deal of strength in your emotions, Aquarius. Trust that your instincts are serving you well. You have nothing to lose by following your heart. This is an important time for you to rekindle the dreams that you've let smolder. Bring more of your fantasy world into your everyday life.

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**  
 You'll find that things are slipping nicely into place for you today, Gemini. Your persuasive manner and gentle nudges are just enough to get people where you want them. Control is all yours if you want it. Remember that you need to be willing to accept the blame for failure as well as praise for success. Any risks you take today, however, are likely to work out in your favor.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**  
 If people hassle you or give you a hard time about your appearance today, pay them no mind, Virgo. You have the right to live your life any way you want to. If that means you want to go around the house in a grubby T-shirt and tattered sweatpants that haven't been washed in months, then so be it. Feel free to be whoever you want to be.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**  
 Expand your mind to its furthest reaches today, Sagittarius. There's an incredible opportunity opening up for you in which you can make great strides in a creative realm. Follow the music. Pick up an instrument, browse an online music store, or listen to your favorite playlist. Let the artist within have room to play. Shoot for a goal and don't stop until you reach it.

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**  
 Things might get a bit confusing for you today, Pisces. Don't feel like you need to make sense of it all. In fact, this task may be impossible. Just be yourself. Let your creative nature shine through. Other people are quite malleable, and you should feel free to take the lead in just about any situation. Make sure, however, that you consider other people's needs.





Guests pose for selfies at the infinity pool of the newly-inaugurated Dolce Hanoi Golden Lake hotel, the world's first gold-plated hotel, in Hanoi.—AFP photos



Hotel staff wait to welcome guests in the lobby of the newly-inaugurated Dolce Hanoi Golden Lake hotel.



A placard hangs on a room's doorknob.



A staff member poses for a photograph inside the 1,000 USD per night executive two bedroom suite of the newly-inaugurated Dolce Hanoi Golden Lake hotel.



The sink and toilet bowl are seen in one of the rooms.

## Guilty pleasure: Vietnam opens world's 'first' gold-plated hotel

For guests at the "Dolce Hanoi Golden Lake" coffee comes in a gold cup and bath time is taken in gilded splendour. The world's first self-proclaimed gold-plated hotel is open for business—and the Vietnamese owners insist they have the Midas touch despite the cramping of global travel during the coronavirus pandemic. The hotel cost \$200 million to construct with a 24-carat plating across lobbies, an infinity pool and rooms with even cutlery, cups, shower heads and toilet seats receiving the golden treatment. While expensive for Vietnam, at \$250 a night it is not prohibitive for wealthy locals craving a few nights living like Donald Trump, the US President renowned for his love of all things that glitter.

The hotel wants "ordinary people to the super rich... to check-in" both physically and on social media, said Nguyen Huu Duong, chairman of Hoa Binh group that owns the hotel. A gold-plated infinity pool overlooks the city, while meals at the 25-storey hotel in downtown Hanoi may be mixed with a mysterious "gold substance", according to the owners. So far, the smattering of customers appear to be delighted with Hanoi's flashiest new digs. "When I arrived here... I felt like a king, you know, the Pharaoh... the king of Egypt," joked Phillip Park, a South Korean guest. "I really enjoyed the luxury atmosphere," added Vietnamese guest Luong Van Thuan, saying he felt his status had automatically been "raised".

The relatively modest construction price tag was achieved by sourcing the gold plating locally—significantly reducing costs. "Our group has a factory that



A staff member stands near the lifts in the lobby of the newly-inaugurated Dolce Hanoi Golden Lake hotel.

can do gold-plated stuff, so the cost for our equipment and furniture here is quite cheap," Duong said. And the pandemic which has strayed global tourism has not put him off opening, with Vietnam winning praise for its swift lockdown which has contained the coronavirus spread. "For sure next year, we will make money," he added.—AFP



A staff member stands near the lifts in the lobby.



Staff wait to welcome guests in the lobby.

## Going viral: Why Canadian sparrows have changed their tune

Members of a Canadian sparrow species famous for their jaunty signature song are changing their tune, a curious example of a "viral phenomenon" in the animal kingdom, a study showed Thursday. Bird enthusiasts first recorded the white-throated sparrow's original song, with its distinctive triplet hook, in the 1950s. Canadians even invented lyrics to accompany the ditty: "Oh my sweet, Ca-na-da, Ca-na-da, Ca-na-da." But starting from the late 20th century, biologists began noticing that members of the species in western Canada were innovating.

Instead of a triplet, the new song ended in a doublet and a new syncopation pattern. The new ending sounded like "Ca-na, Ca-na, Ca-na." Over the course of the next two decades, this new cadence became a big hit, moving eastward and conquering Alberta, then Ontario. It began entering Quebec last year. It's now the dominant version across more than 2,000 miles (3,000 kilometers) of territory, in an extremely rare

example of the total replacement of historic bird dialect by another. Scientist Ken Otter at the University of Northern British Columbia, and his colleague Scott Ramsay from Wilfrid Laurier University, described the dizzying pace of this transformation in the journal *Current Biology*.

"What we're seeing is like somebody moving from Quebec to Paris, and all the people around them saying, 'Wow, that's a cool accent' and start adopting a Quebec accent," Otter told AFP. Their work was based on 1,785 recordings between 2000 and 2019, the majority made by them but with contributions from citizen-scientists, who posted the files on specialist sites like *xeno-canto.org*. In the western province of Alberta, about half of the recorded songs ended with the triplet in 2004; ten years later, all the males had adopted the doublet. In 2015, half of western Canada had converted to the doublet version, and by last year, the new song had been well established on the western tip of eastern Quebec province. At this rate, the his-

toric triplet version may soon exist only in tape recordings.

### Bird influencers

The males of the species sing to mark their territory, and their songs all share a common structure. Usually, if a variation appears, it remains regional and doesn't make headway in neighbouring territories. The study represents the first time scientists have been able to show this kind spread at huge geographic scale, said Otter. So how did it happen? Probably in the same way that children return from summer camp humming new tunes: songbirds from different parts of Canada winter in the same parts of the United States, then return to their own homes in spring.

The researchers verified this theory by tagging a few of the birds. So it was that in the plains of Texas and Kansas, the new song's first adopters from western Canada—avian influencers, if you will—popularized the trend among their eastern brethren. Previous

work has shown that young birds can pick up a foreign song after listening to a recording. But to truly understand why the males were willing to abandon the old song that had once served them well, the scientists have to rely on theories. Otter believes it may be because females were more attracted to the new song, so young males rushed to adopt it.

"There seems to be some advantage to adding novel elements into your song that make the song, not necessarily more attractive, but increases people's attention to it," said Otter. Going back to the human example, it would be akin to "if all the French women in Paris thought that a Quebec accent sounded much more interesting than a Parisian accent, and so everybody starts adopting a Quebec accent." The hypothesis remains unverified.—AFP



Lifestyle | Music & Movies

# Saroj Khan, choreographer of over 2,000 Bollywood songs, dies at 71



In this file photo Bollywood choreographer Saroj Khan (left) hugs actress Madhuri Dixit after receiving a special award for Best Choreographer in Last 20 Years, during the 20th International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards at NSCI Dome in Mumbai. — AFP photos

**B**ollywood's first female choreographer Saroj Khan, whose sizzling dance routines breathed life into hundreds of films, died Friday, triggering further heartbreak in an industry already reeling from a string of recent deaths. Khan choreographed more than 2,000 numbers during a 40-year career that saw her work with superstars like Madhuri Dixit and Anil Kapoor to create dazzling song-and-dance routines that are a distinctive feature of Hindi films. A spokeswoman for Guru Nanak hospital in Mumbai told AFP that Khan, 71, was admitted to the facility on Thursday evening after complaining of respiratory problems. She "was declared dead at approximately 2:30 am" after suffering cardiac arrest, the spokeswoman said.

Born Nirmala Nagpal, she joined the industry as a child actor aged just three but soon took to dancing instead, starting out as a backup dancer before becoming an assistant choreographer at 13. She reportedly changed her name to Saroj to avoid the censure of conservative relatives who did not approve of her career choice.

She also fell in love with B. Sohanlal, her much older mentor who was a married

father of four. Stung by his refusal to leave his first wife, Khan, who had converted to Islam, became a single mother to their two children while still in her teens and walked out of the relationship to start working on her own.

### 'Amazingly talented'

She got her break in 1974 with "Geeta Mera Naam" ("Geeta Is My Name"), becoming the first female choreographer in Bollywood. She had no formal training in classical dance, but learnt on the job and hit the big time in the 1980s when her collaborations with two of Bollywood's top stars, Dixit and Sridevi, became chart-toppers. The 1988 number "Ek Do Teen" ("One Two Three"), choreographed by Khan, made Dixit a star overnight, and the actress was among the first to pay tribute to the woman she called her teacher. "I'm devastated by the loss of my friend and guru, Saroj Khan. Will always be grateful for her work in helping me reach my full potential in dance. The world has lost an amazingly talented person," Dixit tweeted.

Khan dominated Bollywood's dance floors over the next decade, churning out



In this file photo Indian Bollywood dance choreographer Saroj Khan attends the Dadasaheb Phalke Excellence Awards 2019 in Mumbai.

hits such as 1987's "Hawa Hawaii", 1993's "Choli ke Peeche" ("Behind the Blouse") and 2002's "Dola re Dola" ("I Swayed"). "You gave us and the industry, rhythm, style, grace of movement", Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan wrote on Instagram.

"When she danced it was like watching a whole book! Everything that she wanted to say was there so clearly on her face and in her body language," actress Kajol wrote. "She made dance look easy almost like anybody can dance, a huge loss for the industry," tweeted superstar Akshay Kumar.

She won three National Awards for her choreography in the Bollywood movies "Devdas" and "Jab We Met" ("When We Met") and for the Tamil film "Srīgaram: Dance of Love". Actress Kareena Kapoor, who starred in "Jab We Met", said Khan taught her "to enjoy dancing, smile and smile through the eyes". "There can never be another," she wrote on Instagram. Her last film was 2019's "Kalank" ("Blemish") starring Dixit. She was also a popular presence on television, hosting an instructional dance show called "Nachle Ve" ("Dance") from 2008 to 2011. In her introduction to the programme, she said: "Dance is my life. If there is no dance, there is no Saroj Khan."—AFP

## Johnny Depp libel case in UK can go ahead: judge

**A** British news group on Thursday failed in its bid to have a libel case brought by Hollywood actor Johnny Depp thrown out, paving the way for a full court hearing. Depp, 57, is suing News Group Newspapers (NGN) over an April 2018 article in The Sun tabloid that claimed he had been violent to his former wife, the actress Amber Heard. He has strenuously denied the claims. NGN tried to have the case dismissed, arguing Depp was in breach of a court order because he had failed to disclose documents from a separate libel case in the United States. Judge Andrew Nicol on Monday agreed the "Pirates of the

Caribbean" star had failed to hand over details of text messages, which allegedly referred to drugs.

But on Thursday he said he would grant Depp's application for "relief from sanctions", which means the trial will go ahead next week. The text messages were sent in late February and early March 2015, shortly before what Heard, 34, claimed was a "three-day ordeal of physical assaults" in Australia, the judge was told. Lawyers for the news group have argued the texts were "profoundly damaging to his (Depp's) case." The alleged incident in Australia is one of 14 separate claims of domestic violence between early 2013 and May 2016 that NGN is relying on in its defence.

The judge has previously refused an application by Depp's legal team to require Heard to disclose evidence, including a secret recording of a conversation with the actor. He also asked for all communications between Heard and "Rocketman", a contact saved in her phone who Depp claims is the SpaceX and Tesla founder Elon Musk, as well as with actor James Franco. Lawyer David Sherborne told the court Heard had affairs with Musk and Franco while she was going out with or married to Depp.

He said it was relevant because it has been claimed Depp's "supposed paranoia and mistaken belief that she was having affairs that caused him to be violent". But judge Nicol dismissed the application. "The central issue for the defence of truth is whether Mr Depp assaulted Ms Heard," he said. "Even if she had been unfaithful to him, that would be irrelevant on that central issue." The case, which was delayed because of the coronavirus outbreak, is due to start next Tuesday at the High Court of England and Wales in central London. Depp's former partners, the French singer Vanessa Paradis, and the Hollywood actress Winona Ryder, are due to give evidence. The actor himself is also expected to attend, as is Heard.—AFP



In this file photo US actor Johnny Depp arrives on the red carpet for the premiere of the film "Minamata" screened in the Berlinale Special Gala at the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin.—AFP

## Children of French rocker Hallyday bury hatchet with widow over inheritance

**T**he two oldest children of French rock legend Johnny Hallyday have agreed to settle a long-running legal battle over claims they were unlawfully written out of their father's will, depriving them of an inheritance worth millions of euros, lawyers said Friday. Laura Smet and David Hallyday filed lawsuits after Hallyday's death from lung cancer in December 2017, when it emerged that a will drawn up in California had disinherited them in favour of the singer's widow and two Vietnamese girls the couple had adopted.

Under French law, children are entitled to at least part of their parents' estate, but Hallyday, despite being considered one of France's cultural treasures, had lived in the United States with his wife Laeticia for years. "Laeticia wanted to reach an agreement with her husband's oldest children," the widow's lawyer Gilles Gauer said in a statement. No details of the accord were disclosed, and neither Smet nor her lawyer responded to requests for comment. "We welcome this settlement," David Hallyday's lawyer Pierre-Jean Douvier told AFP. "With this agreement we are dropping all legal action."—AFP



In this file photo Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex looks on from a balcony as she attends the Remembrance Sunday ceremony at the Cenotaph on Whitehall in central London.—AFP

## Meghan left 'unprotected' by British royal family

**T**he Duchess of Sussex has claimed she was left "unprotected" by the royal family from "false and damaging" media articles when she was pregnant, according to leaked documents published on Thursday. The claims were made in submissions as part of her high-profile case against the Mail on Sunday, website Mail Online and its owner Associated Newspapers. The duchess, former American actress Meghan Markle, is claiming breach of privacy, data protection rights and copyright over the publication of extracts of correspondence to her estranged father, Thomas, after her wedding to Prince Harry. In the papers, she submitted she had become "the subject of a large number of false and damaging articles by the UK tabloid media, specifically by the defendant, which caused tremendous emotional distress and damage to her mental health".

The "institution" of the monarchy failed to protect her from the accusations and she was "prohibited from defending herself", they added. The documents also refer to an article published in People, a US magazine, where five unnamed friends claim they were "rightly concerned for her welfare" following the reports. The papers, widely cited in the British media on Thursday, add that Markle was not involved with the interview. They also claim that her May 2018 wedding to Harry, grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, helped generate £1 billion \$1.3 billion, 1.1 billion euros) in tourism revenue.—AFP



This file photo shows Laeticia Hallyday, (left), wife of late French singer Johnny Hallyday, and Johnny Hallyday's daughter Laura Smet standing during the funeral ceremony for Johnny Hallyday at the Eglise de la Madeleine (La Madeleine Church) in Paris.—AFP



Bollywood actors (top left to right) Abhishek Bachchan, Ajay Devgn, Akshay Kumar and Varun Dhawan and (bottom L to R) Alia Bhatt, Disney India Chairman Uday Shankar and Akshay Kumar are seen on a screen during the live virtual press conference of the launch of 'Multiplex' on the video on demand platform Disney+Hotstar, in Mumbai.



In this picture a security guard sits at the entrance of a closed movie theatre complex due to a COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown in Mumbai.



In this picture empty poster display cases at a closed movie theatre complex due to a COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown in Mumbai.—AFP photos

## The battle for Bollywood: Virus, streaming apps spark fears for cinemas

**A** Bollywood actor's face tattooed on his arm, Sandeep Bacche's devotion shocks few in India where stars enjoy semi-divine status. But even here the hallowed silver screen may be losing its shine to streaming services and pandemic fears. "Whenever things get better and theatres begin operations, I will watch three movies a day for sure just as a way to celebrate," said the Mumbai rickshaw driver, who is recovering from the virus himself. But others may not join the party. With cinemas shut for months due to a coronavirus lockdown, and little prospect they will reopen soon, frustrated Bollywood producers have turned to the likes of Amazon, Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar to release films online. "Gulabo Sitabo", starring Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan, premiered on Amazon Prime last month. Other Hindi movies have followed a similar route, as have the huge Telugu-, Tamil- and Malayalam-language film industries.

This has sparked fury from cinema operators. INOX Leisure Ltd, India's second-largest multiplex operator, warned producers of possible "retributive measures". "Movie stars are not made on the small screen but on the silver screen," Siddharth Jain, INOX executive director, told AFP. But, noting the financial might of the competition, he said: "No business model in the world can compete with free money and Netflix is nothing but free money." Shoojit Sircar, who directed "Gulabo Sitabo", told AFP that "a digital release was a tough decision" but financial constraints pushed him to do it. "A lot of technicians are dependent on me," Sircar said. "Cinema magic cannot be replaced by TV, iPad or laptop experience. But I needed to move on."

### Affordable entertainment

India has the world's most prolific film industry, churning out nearly 1,800 releases in 2018. Stars are worshipped like gods, with fans building temples and making pilgrimages to their homes. Going to the cinema also remains a hugely popular and affordable pursuit, with 75 rupees (\$1) buying three hours of entertainment in an air-conditioned movie theatre. Some of the higher-end multiplex cinemas have menus that include biryani being delivered to your recliner, and blankets to snuggle under if the air conditioning is too cold. But with more than half of India's population under 30, and many of them con-

suming entertainment on mobile phones, the likes of Netflix were starting to make inroads even before the coronavirus.

Hotstar, the market leader now owned by Disney, boasted 300 million active monthly users in 2018 — offering some content for free and other shows only to subscribers. The shutdown has only accelerated the shift. For years Mumbai-based teacher Nigel D'Souza, 27, was one of the holdouts, preferring to watch films in cinemas. But when India went into lockdown in late March, he bit the bullet and subscribed to both Amazon Prime—aggressively priced in India at just 129 rupees per month—and Netflix. He is now hooked. "It was very cheap... as we don't spend money on expensive popcorn or travel," he said. Furthermore, he found he "could binge-watch any number of movies... without worrying about the virus".

### Virus measures

Vijay Subramaniam, Amazon Prime's director of content for India, insisted the company was not looking to put cinemas out of business. "Theatres play an important role in film distribution and we aren't looking to change that," he told AFP. But he added: "As technology continues to change that landscape, customers' preferences of what to watch and where will continue to evolve."

Cinemas meanwhile are getting ready for the end of lockdown, which will come with strict rules that will further eat away at their profit margins. Some seats will have to be left empty and cinema halls will have to be thoroughly disinfected after every show. The lavish menus and blankets will probably have to go. But it is not all doom and gloom. "The cinema experience is ingrained in our blood... (it) will never go out of fashion," Mumbai-based film trade analyst Girish Johar told AFP.

For diehard fans like Bacche, the heady pleasures of the silver screen are simply too irresistible. Even in the coronavirus treatment facility, the 41-year-old still needed his daily fix of Bollywood, he said. He found it on the YouTube app on his phone, which he still uses—a sign that the pandemic's impact on viewing habits may linger for a while longer.—AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the Day



CAIRO: Dominic Di Tommaso performs in Cairo, Egypt. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Thiem to donate prize money from Djokovic's event

VIENNA: World number three Dominic Thiem will donate the prize money that he won in Belgrade during the ill-fated Adria Tour, where Novak Djokovic and three other participants tested positive for coronavirus, his father was quoted by Austrian media on Friday.

Thiem took part in the Belgrade leg of the exhibition event organised by Djokovic, where social distancing was minimal and matches were played in front of thousands of fans, earning a storm of criticism.

Thiem's father, Wolfgang, who also trains the 26-year-old, defended Djokovic, telling Austria's Presse daily that the world number one had not broken any of Serbia's and Croatia's coronavirus rules and the tour had aimed to collect money for charity.

"Of course the dancing in the nightclub (during the tour) was not ideal, but Djokovic did nothing bad in principle," he was quoted as saying.

"...a few thousand euros (dollars) are collected for a clinic treating children with cancer." He did not say to whom Thiem would donate his prize money. The 33-year-old Djokovic donated more than 40,000 euros (\$45,000) to the Serbian town of Novi Pazar, badly affected by the pandemic to help it fight a growing outbreak of the disease, Serbian media reported Wednesday.

Thiem has acknowledged tennis players at the Adria Tour made "a mistake" after Djokovic, Grigor Dimitrov, Borna Coric and Viktor Troicki all tested positive to COVID-19. Djokovic and his wife Jelena, who had been self isolating since returning from the tour, have now tested negative. —AFP

# Kirk, Simpson share US PGA lead at Rocket Mortgage Classic in Detroit

## Simpson hit 13 of 14 fairways and 17 of 18 greens in regulation

WASHINGTON: Chris Kirk, seeking his first USPGA Tour title since 2015, and recent winner Webb Simpson shared the lead Friday after the second round of the Rocket Mortgage Classic in Detroit, Michigan. Kirk, 35, walked away from golf last year, sidelining himself for seven months to address depression and alcohol abuse.

He grabbed a share of the halfway lead at Detroit Golf Club with a seven-under par 65 that included a birdie hole out from a bunker at the 11th and a chip-in for birdie at the 12th. He had opened his round with three straight birdies and was 13 under for the tournament before a bogey at 18 capped his seven-under 65 for a 12-under total of 132.

Simpson, a former US Open champion who won the Heritage two weeks ago, had eight birdies in his eight-under 64. The world number six Simpson stuck his approach within two feet of the pin for birdie at the ninth and holed out from a bunker for birdie at 16 on his way to the top of a jam-packed leaderboard.

World number 10 Bryson DeChambeau headlined a group of six players sharing third on 133 that also included Ireland's Seamus Power and Americans Matthew Wolff, Mark Hubbard, Ryan Armour and Richy Werenski.

It was a further stroke back to American Kevin Kisner and Austrian Sepp Straka — whose brother, Sam, is on the bag for Kirk this week. Although the most recent of his four US PGA Tour titles was at Colonial five years ago, Kirk said a new found perspective since his self-imposed hiatus — and a recent

win on the developmental Korn Ferry Tour — have buoyed him. "I'm very thankful to be out here playing again and I'm really enjoying competing," he said. "But at the same time I realize there are things that are a lot bigger than this ... I'm just happy to be in a really good place."

He said his Korn Ferry victory had showed him he could put together solid rounds, and his faith in that wasn't shaken by a tough finish that saw him have to sink a testing six-footer to save par at 17 before a bogey at the 18th — where his four-footer for par lipped out.

"I didn't quite do as good a job of (maintaining momentum) late in the round today," he said. "But at



### Staying aggressive

the same time I felt I was in the right place mentally. "I was trying to stay aggressive and trying to just keep making birdies. It didn't quite work out, but I'm proud of the way I played."



DETROIT: Webb Simpson of the United States talks with his caddy Paul Tesori during the second round of the Rocket Mortgage Classic at the Detroit Golf Club in Detroit, Michigan. — AFP

Simpson hit 13 of 14 fairways and 17 of 18 greens in regulation, and at the only green he missed — at 16 — he made birdie from a greenside bunker. DeChambeau, who was frustrated after four bogeys in his first-round 66, minimized his mistakes in his second-round 67 that included five birdies without a bogey. "Making those mistakes was getting on me," DeChambeau said. "Coming off with a clean card today makes me feel really good and finishing up

with a birdie gives me some inspiration for tomorrow to play well."

Wolff, a second-year tour player seeking his second tour title, got to 11-under with an eight-under par 64, teeing off on 10 and stringing together six straight birdies from the 14th through the first to climb the leaderboard. Armour also signed for a 64 that included a hole in one at the par-three fifth. Ireland's Power, Hubbard and Werenski all signed for 66. —AFP

## NFL's Redskins to review name after sponsor threat

WASHINGTON: The Washington Redskins have launched a "thorough review" of the team's name, the NFL franchise said Friday, as sponsors stepped up pressure to scrap the moniker long criticized as racist.

"In light of recent events around our country and feedback from our community, the Washington Redskins are announcing the team will undergo a thorough review of the team's name," the team said in a statement just 24 hours after stadium sponsor FedEx demanded a name change.

"This review formalizes the initial discussions the team has been having with the league in recent weeks."

Redskins owner Dan Snyder had long been resistant to changing the team's name — a term for Native Americans that is seen as a slur.

"We'll never change the name," Snyder said in 2018. "It's that simple. NEVER — you can use caps."

However, nationwide protests over racial injustice — sparked by the death of unarmed black man George Floyd at the hands of police on May 25 — have brought the Redskins tag under renewed scrutiny.

On Thursday, US delivery giant FedEx Corp — which paid \$205 million to the Redskins in 1998 for the naming rights to the team's suburban stadium — confirmed it had sought a change.

"We have communicated to the team in Washington our request that they change the team name," FedEx said in a one-sentence statement.

Reports this week said that FedEx, Nike and PepsiCo all received letters from 87 investment firms asking the companies and others to sever ties with the Redskins over the name.

Nike did not immediately make a public statement, but the sporting goods giant removed Redskins merchandise from its online store on Thursday.

Food and beverage corporation PepsiCo said in a statement Friday the company had been in conversation with the league and Washington management "for a few weeks" about the issue. "We believe it is time for a change," the company said.

### 'THE R-WORD'

Later Friday, Major League Baseball's Cleveland Indians announced they will "determine the best path forward" regarding their nickname. The corporate pressure on the Redskins was welcomed by Change the Mascot, a coalition of Native American groups that has campaigned to get rid of the nickname.

"Change the Mascot praises FedEx and fully supports its historic request for Washington's NFL team to stop using the R-word racial slur as its name and mascot," coalition leader Ray Halbritter said. Another sticking point for the Redskins — Snyder has long hoped to move the team back to the site of its former stadium within Washington proper. Officials say a name change is needed for that to happen.

"It's an obstacle for us locally, but it's also an obstacle for the federal government who leases the land to us," Wash-

ington Mayor Muriel Bowser said last month of the Redskins name.

This week, her deputy John Falcichio was more categorical, telling The Washington Post: "There is no viable path, locally or federally, for the Washington football team to return to Washington, DC, without first changing the team name."

Snyder said Friday the team planned to canvass opinion from across the community in its name change review. "This process allows the team to take into account not only the proud tradition and history of the franchise but also input from our alumni, the organization, sponsors, the NFL and the local community it is proud to represent on and off the field," Snyder said.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell welcomed the move. "In the last few weeks we have had ongoing discussions with Dan and we are supportive of this important step," Goodell said in a statement. While some hardcore Washington fans have previously joined with Snyder in resisting a name change, a smattering of people jogging and exercising near FedEx Field in Landover, Maryland, voiced support for the move.

"Just like black people stood up, I feel like Native Americans, they should have the same rights to do the same," said Chuky Torley. The team has already responded to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement by removing a monument to former owner George Preston Marshall, the last NFL team owner to resist signing black players.

"I think with the way times are going on right now, I think it'd be smart to change the name to respect the people who are offended by it," said local resident Kyle Jones. —AFP

## NHL eyes Aug 1 return-to-play date

LOS ANGELES: The NHL is targeting July 13 for a return to training camp, with the league's 24-team playoff beginning on Aug. 1. That's according to hockey insider Bob McKenzie of TSN, who also said that, under the plan, teams would report to their assigned hub cities on July 26. While the NHL has not made an official announcement, McKenzie said that those cities are expected to be Edmonton and Toronto.

While several U.S. cities were in the mix to be a hub, the Canadian cities are the likely choice, in part because of the low rate

of coronavirus cases in Canada compared to the United States. Play in the NHL was halted on March 12 because of the pandemic. McKenzie said the play-in qualifying series, which will be a best-of-five event, should end in the second week of August, with a Stanley Cup champion crowned in early October.

As for the NHL draft, McKenzie said the second part of the NHL draft lottery — when the team with the No. 1 overall pick will be announced — would occur after the qualifying series. The draft would follow soon after the conclusion of the playoffs.

Before any of these dates can be locked in, the league and the NHL Players' Association must reach an agreement on several key issues, including additional return-to-play protocols and an extension of the collective bargaining agreement. Once that is reached, the board of governors and players must ratify the deal. — Reuters

## All Blacks legend Carter returns

CHRISTCHURCH: All Blacks legend Dan Carter turned out for his childhood rugby club in rural New Zealand yesterday to test his fitness ahead of a hoped-for return to Super Rugby. The double World Cup winner and three times world player of the year played the full 80 minutes for the grassroots Southbridge side and contributed 12 points in their convincing 54-14 win over West Melton.

Played in front of around 1,000 spectators, it was Carter's first game since playing for the Kobe Steelers in Japan in February before the coronavirus pandemic forced a

global sport shutdown.

The 38-year-old surprised the rugby world last month when he signed on with the Auckland Blues as injury cover when New Zealand launched its domestic Super Rugby competition. He said at the time he was far from match fit and saw his role with the Blues more as a mentor rather than a player.

But after training through the first three rounds when Super Rugby resumed in New Zealand, Carter felt the urge for much-needed game time and returned to Southbridge where he played all his childhood rugby in a village about 50 kilometres (30 miles) from Christchurch. "The last three weeks have been pretty intense training... gradually building up my contact and getting my confidence back for playing again, so a bit of club rugby would be good," Carter said before the game. —AFP



## Sports

# Leroy Sane targets Champions League glory after signing for Bayern Munich

## 'Bayern is a very big club and has big goals'

**BERLIN:** Leroy Sane has targeted Champions League glory with Bayern Munich after joining the Bundesliga giants from Manchester City for a fee of around 50 million euros (\$56 million) on Friday. The Germany winger has returned to his home country on a five-year contract after receiving the blessing of City coach Pep Guardiola.

"Bayern is a very big club and has big goals — these goals suit me as well," said the 24-year-old Sane. "I want to win as many titles as possible with Bayern, and the Champions League is at the top." The Bundesliga champions did not give the transfer fee, but Sky Sports and the BBC have reported that Bayern and City agreed a fee of £54.8 million (60.8m euros, \$68.2m). German daily Bild claim the fee is around 50 million euros.

Sane said he is looking forward to linking up again with Bayern head coach Hansi Flick, who has just steered the club to an eighth straight league title in his first season in charge. "I know Hansi Flick from the under-21 national team. We had a very good relationship there," added Sane.

His transfer became an open secret as Guardiola revealed earlier this week that Sane was likely to leave after rejecting a new contract offer with a year left on his existing deal at City. The 24-year-old spent four years at City, winning two Premier League titles, an FA Cup, two League Cups and two Community Shields, but European success eluded him.

"We wish Leroy all the best in this new chapter of his career," said Guardiola in a statement on Friday. "Leroy has been part of one of the most special periods in this club's history and he leaves with the best wishes of everyone here at Manchester City."

Sane scored 39 goals in 135 appearances in all competitions for City after joining from Bundesliga club Schalke in 2016. His arrival on



Transfer became an open secret

Wednesday in Bavaria was much hyped with reporters at Munich airport using smartphones to film the landing of a private jet from England before Sane was whisked away for his medical.

Bayern were slightly red-faced on Thursday night when the Arabic version of their website jumped the gun before the official announcement by posting pictures of Sane already wearing the club's famous red shirt.

### 'NOT (YET) A WORLD STAR'

However, despite the high-profile move, German media have already warned that Sane still needs to prove himself. "It is now up to Sane to justify the hype with goals and assists. For all his talent, he is not (yet) a world star," commented magazine Kicker.

Sane has 21 caps and five goals for Germany, but was a shock omission from the squad for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, when the holders bowed out in the group stage. He will start preparing for the 2020/21 season next week, the club has said. He is not eligible to feature in this Saturday's German Cup final against Bayer Leverkusen in Berlin. "We are happy that we can welcome Leroy Sane to Bayern," said club chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"Our goal is to gather the best German players at Bayern and Leroy's commitment confirms that." Last year, Sane had reportedly been on the verge of a big-money transfer to Bayern before suffering a serious knee injury in August which sidelined him until February.

After rebuilding his fitness, Sane made his first Premier League appearance of the season as a substitute against Burnley last week. Sane is Bayern's third new signing for next season alongside French teenage defender Tanguy Nianzou Kouassi from Paris Saint-Germain and goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel from Schalke, both of which were free transfers. —AFP



Leroy Sane

## Rodgers has faith in Vardy despite goal drought

**LONDON:** Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers says he is not concerned about Jamie Vardy's goal drought, as he searches for a win to reignite the Foxes' challenge for a Champions League spot. The 33-year-old's only goals of 2020 came in the final match before the lockdown — Leicester's 4-0 home win against Aston Villa in March.

That double took Vardy to 99 Premier League goals and, despite the barren run, he remains the division's joint-top scorer this season on 19 alongside Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang. Leicester have collected just two points in three matches since the restart following the coronavirus shutdown.

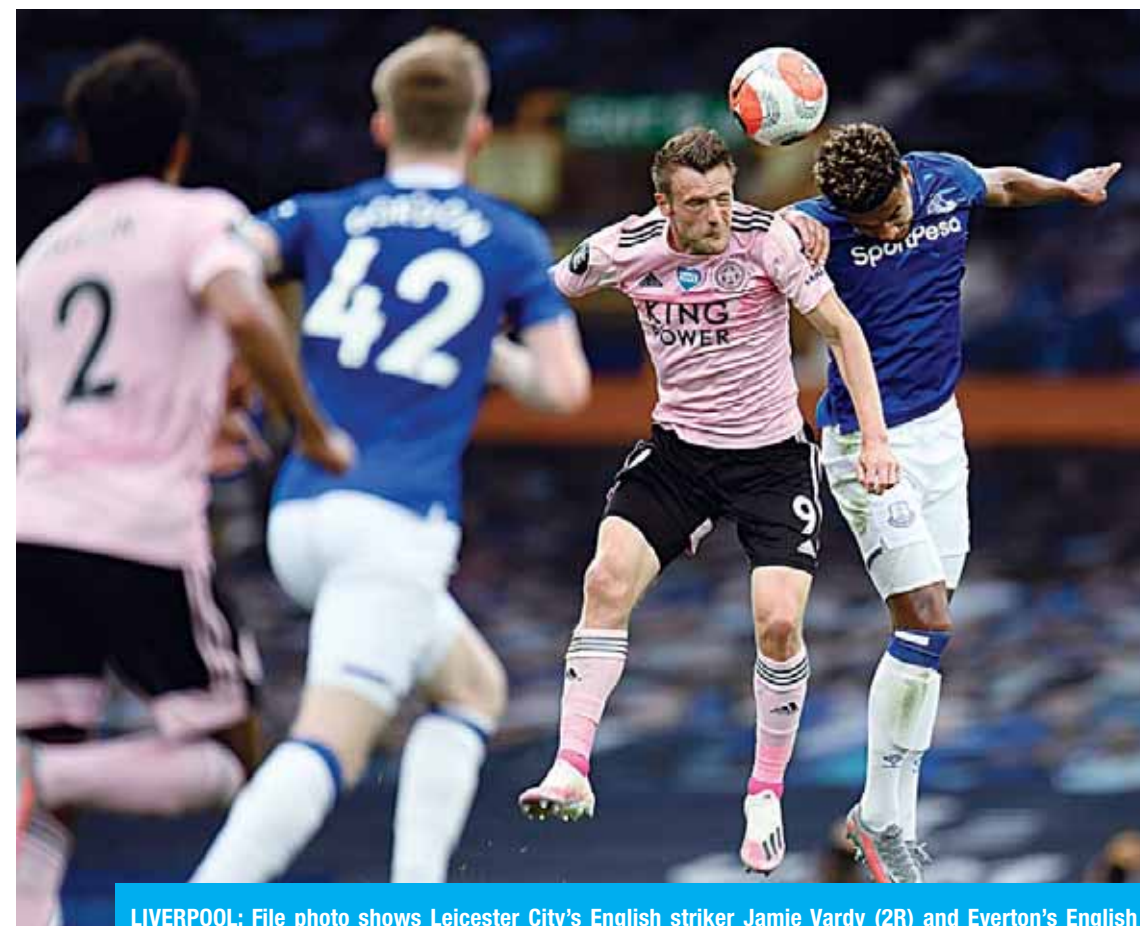
Asked if he was worried about Vardy's lack of goals, Rodgers told reporters on Friday: "No, I think Jamie is proven and since I came into here he has been a breath of fresh air. "His talent and his goalscoring ability has been right up there for the whole period I have been here. I think when he gets the opportunities he will take them and I think over the course of these games he hasn't had many."

Rodgers added: "Sometimes these milestones when they are so close can take that bit longer to achieve, but he is still such a real catalyst for us and a very important player for us." Leicester are still third in the Premier League, but are just a point clear of Chelsea and three ahead of Manchester United and Wolves. Rodgers said he never had any reservations about Leicester's game against Crystal Palace going ahead on Saturday despite lockdown measures being re-imposed on the Midlands city.

"We are in a bubble here in terms of our training facility, and obviously the games, and we get regularly tested so nothing really has changed on that front," he said.

Aston Villa manager Dean Smith has backed his struggling team to pull off "Mission Impossible" by getting a result at champions Liverpool on Sunday and boost their hopes of staying in the Premier League.

"People will see our game at Liverpool as



**LIVERPOOL:** File photo shows Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (2R) and Everton's English defender Mason Holgate jump for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Leicester City at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England. —AFP

Mission Impossible - unfortunately we haven't got Tom Cruise with us but I've got 11 players and I've seen a desire in their eyes," Smith told reporters ahead of the clash at Anfield.

Villa are 18th in the league with 27 points from 32 matches, having won only seven matches in the current campaign despite spending close to 150 million pounds (\$187.25 million) to overhaul their squad during the close season.

The 1-0 loss at Wolverhampton Wanderers last week was their 19th of the campaign, with Villa seeking their first win since the league restarted following the COVID-19 stoppage.

in professional cricket can overturn decisions made by either of the two on-field match officials.

"The 'third umpire' has been invoked, and what I can say is that we do want to work as fast as possible to get cricket back, and we will be publishing guidelines in the next few days so that cricket can resume in time for next weekend," said Johnson. Chief medical officer Chris Whitty, speaking alongside Johnson, added that one problem for cricket was that it brings together far more people than the six deemed the maximum number who should be meeting outdoors now. "But it is perfectly possible to have cricket where people do keep their distance," he added.

### 'FINALLY SENSE'

England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive Tom Harrison, who insisted the government had been "supportive" in wanting to see recreational cricket return, welcomed the change of heart by saying: "It will come as great news to our nation of recreational cricketers that the UK Government has given the green light for the game to return from next weekend.

"They now agree that with appropriate measures in place to mitigate the risk, it is safe." Meanwhile a delighted Vaughan tweeted: "Finally sense ... GET IN NETS all you recreational players." International cricket is set to resume for the first time since lockdown on Wednesday, with the opening day of the first Test between England and the West Indies at Southampton. —AFP

"They feel stung by criticism, you're going to get criticism when you're in a position we're in. Their job is to prove people wrong. Without a doubt, we've seen a better Villa after the break," Smith added.

"The points tally hasn't shown that, we played Wolves last week and they're pushing for the Champions League... there was nothing between the two teams. The only quality on show was the goal.

"If we manage to stay up this season, which I believe we will, there'll be a better Villa next year. I've still not been relegated as a manager and don't expect to be this season." —Agencies

## Pope confident England can thrive without fans

**LONDON:** England batsman Ollie Pope is adamant the absence of fans will have no bearing on England's intensity when they face the West Indies in next week's first Test. The Ageas Bowl will be devoid of any spectators on health grounds when international cricket returns for the first time since the global coronavirus pandemic on Wednesday's opening day of a three-match series.

England got a taste of what to expect while playing a three-day intra-squad practice match at Hampshire's headquarters, between a side led by Jos Buttler and one captained by stand-in Test skipper Ben Stokes, that ended on Friday in a draw.

There have been suggestions the silence could be broken by piping in crowd noise or having music play between overs, as can happen in one-day games. But Pope, who made an unbeaten 55 on Friday, said the fundamentals that come with representing your country had not altered.

### 'REALLY UP FOR IT'

"When we have big crowds in and the Barmy Army are here it is amazing but we'll still be playing Test cricket and it's still the pinnacle," he said. "Even if there's not a single person in the crowd it's still what we all dreamt of doing. There will

## Messi unwilling to renew Barca contract

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona captain Lionel Messi has called off negotiations over renewing his contract with the club and is ready to leave the Catalans when his current deal expires in 2021, according to a report by Spanish radio station Cadena Ser on Friday.

The report said Messi and his father Jorge had begun discussing renewing his last deal with the club, which was signed in 2017, but that he no longer wishes to stay at the Camp Nou. The report added that Messi is angry about leaked media reports that appeared to make him seem responsible for events at the club, such as the January sacking of coach Ernesto Valverde, and that he is frustrated about the squad's lack of quality.

The Argentine's representatives and Barcelona did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Messi, who turned 33 last month, scored his 700th career goal on Tuesday against Atletico Madrid, but the milestone strike ended in disappointment as Barca drew the game 2-2 in the latest blow to their bid to retain the Spanish title.

Barca trail Real Madrid by four points in the title race with five games remaining after Real beat Getafe 1-0 on Thursday. Previously known for his shy personality off the pitch, Messi has become more vocal in his criticism of the club in the last year.

In January he hit out at sporting director Eric Abidal, who he said had implied players had led to Valverde being sacked.

In a February interview with newspaper Mundo Deportivo, he declared the team were not good enough to win this season's Champions League.

Then in April he criticised the board for implying players were not willing to accept a pay-cut to help the team's financial difficulties during the coronavirus pandemic. —Reuters

still be the same nerves in the morning because so much rides on it," added the 22-year-old.

"When that Test match starts up, crowd or no crowd, you are going to be really up for it." England fast bowler Mark Wood tried to compensate for the absence of any fans at one point during the warm-up game with a solo rendition of 'Jerusalem', the team's theme song, while waving a flag as the teams walked out to play.

"I hope he does it again, it was outstanding. He's got the voice of an angel," said Pope. Pope's 50 was one of several promising innings on Friday, with seven more players passing 30. Fellow specialist batsmen Rory Burns, Dom Sibley and Zak Crawley all spent time at the crease while all-rounder Stokes hit three sixes in a Matt Parkinson over during his 33 not out before a draw was agreed.

Perhaps the most encouraging news for England on Friday came from off the field when Pope's Surrey colleague Tom Curran tested negative for COVID-19. Curran had spent Thursday's play self-isolating in his on-site hotel room after feeling unwell the previous night.

But the all-rounder was able to watch Friday's final session from pitch-side. "I think we were trying to focus on the cricket but I don't know how you deal with those situations," Pope said of Curran's health scare.

"It's good he tested negative for the virus and he's feeling a lot better and ready to go. It was nice to see him back out there today." England are set to reduce their training group from 29 to a Test squad of 22 on Saturday, with regular captain Joe Root having already left camp to attend the birth of his second child. —AFP

## UK PM Johnson makes rapid virus cricket ban U-turn

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday he had called in the "third umpire" as he announced that recreational cricket would be allowed to resume on the weekend of July 11-12. In a radio interview earlier Friday, Johnson angered thousands of club cricketers by saying the amateur game was still not safe to play amid the coronavirus pandemic because of issues surrounding communal teas and dressing rooms.

"It's the teas, it's the changing rooms and so on and so forth. There are other factors involved that generate proximity which you might not get in a game of tennis," he said. Johnson had already provoked a furious response from the likes of former England captain Michael Vaughan by saying last month a cricket ball was a "vector of disease" despite recreational tennis and golf having already resumed amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

But Johnson, at a Downing Street briefing on Friday that took place several hours after his radio interview, used cricket terminology in a U-turn that signalled the club and youth game was on its way back. Johnson explained the reversal of his position by saying he'd called in "the third umpire", who



**14** Kirk, Simpson share US PGA lead at Rocket Mortgage Classic in Detroit



**15** Leroy Sane targets Champions League glory after signing for Bayern Munich



**15** Rodgers has faith in Vardy despite goal drought



**SPIELBERG:** Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton steers his car during the second practice session at the Austrian Formula One Grand Prix on July 3, 2020 in Spielberg, Austria. Seven months after they last competed in earnest, the Formula One circus will push a post-lockdown 're-set' button to open the 2020 season in Austria today. —AFP

## Hamilton on top in Austrian Grand Prix

### Formula One roar back with a full day's practice

**SPIELBERG:** Lewis Hamilton began his quest for a record-equalling seventh world title by topping the times Friday as Formula One roared back with a full day's practice and an official technical protest of his Mercedes car at the belated season-opening Austrian Grand Prix.

Three months after the cancelled traditional curtain-raiser in Australia, and six months on from the last race, it was business as usual from the dominant newly-repainted 'black arrows' Mercedes men with Valtteri Bottas completing a familiar one-two as the sport re-ignited after its longest off-season.

"It's great to be back," said Hamilton, who is seeking to draw level with seven-time champion Michael Schumacher in the record books.

"It's been a long time coming, so it feels great to feel the new car for the first time since February. "It's quite a big difference to the one we got to test at Silverstone and I don't remember what I was like in February, to be honest. It was so long ago."

Hamilton said he would take his initial supremacy over his competitors "with a pinch of salt" after a performance that appeared to send a message to his rivals and a power boost to the Black Lives Matter movement that he and his team have embraced and

supported.

"What's positive is the car felt good today," he said. "It definitely feels like in general, compared to last year, we have continued to improve it and that is a positive."

Speaking before rivals Red Bull protested officially at Mercedes' innovative new steering system, he added that it was difficult to say if he had an edge over his rivals after just one day.

"That's difficult to say — it's definitely looking good, but you can never take too much from practice and, if you look at some of the other teams, they were maybe down on power modes or up on power modes or fuel or whatever it may be.

"So we'll take it with a pinch of salt, try to improve the car tonight and come back with it tomorrow."

Hamilton, in commanding form in both the morning and afternoon sessions, was quickest in one minute and 4.304 seconds to lead Bottas by 0.197 seconds and third-placed Sergio Perez, in Racing Point's 'pink

Mercedes', by 0.657.

Sebastian Vettel, in his last season with Ferrari, was fourth for the Italian outfit ahead of McLaren-bound Daniel Ricciardo of Renault and Lando Norris of McLaren.

Lance Stroll, in the second Racing Point, modelled on the hugely-successful 2019 title-winning Mercedes, was seventh ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari and his future teammate Carlos Sainz of McLaren.

Verstappen revealed afterwards that his performance was heavily curtailed by running with a broken front wing shortly before his Red Bull team confirmed, on a day of hectic action, that they had lodged an official protest over Mercedes' controversial dual-axis steering (DAS) system.

The system allows drivers to adjust the toe angle of the car by pushing or pulling the steering wheel in the cockpit.

It was used by both Mercedes drivers on Friday

when the teams all carried the sport's 'We Race As One' pro-diversity message on their cars.

In the early hours of yesterday, race stewards threw out the protest, declaring DAS to be "a legitimate part of the steering system".

The long-awaited track action brought an end to Formula One's longest break following the lifting of lockdown restrictions in Europe caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hamilton, who has been an outspoken supporter of the campaign for equality and diversity since the death of American George Floyd last month, revealed a statement Black Lives Matter helmet before climbing into his Mercedes.

His Mercedes W11 car was also running in revised new black livery, instead of the team's traditional silver, with a message to 'End Racism' on the halo.

"For a long time, we've been planning for the livery change for the car, for the (driver) suit change and I have also designed my helmet in black," said Hamilton, speaking on a video released on social media.

"Normally, my helmet is white, my suit is white and obviously the car is in silver. This is why — it's the whole reason that the helmet has changed its colour and the suit and the car." — AFP

## Chinese badminton superstar Lin Dan retires at 36

**SHANGHAI:** China's two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan, arguably the greatest badminton player of all time, announced his retirement yesterday aged 36.

It means that Lin, who won gold at the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Games, will not compete at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which have been pushed back to next summer because of coronavirus.

The end of Lin's glorious career comes just over a year after the retirement of his great rival and friend, the Malaysian star Lee Chong Wei.

The duo reigned over badminton for more than a

decade and have only relinquished that hold in recent years as their powers waned. Lin, who had something of a "bad boy" reputation during his younger days and has several tattoos — unusual for Chinese athletes — ends with 666 singles wins and a glut of medals.

"My family, coaches, team-mates and fans have accompanied me through many peaks and difficult troughs," he said in a post on China's Twitter-like Weibo that quickly went viral.

"Every forceful jump was a desire for victory. "I have dedicated everything to this sport I love." Lee called his nemesis Lin "my greatest opponent".

"Please believe that the laughter, tears and all the promises are unforgettable diary entries," the 37-year-old Lee wrote on Weibo.

"Proud of you," he added. As well as the Olympic golds, Lin was also a five-time world champion and long-time world number one. He earned the nickname "Super Dan" at the peak of his career.

However, the left-hander's career has tailed off in recent years as age and injuries took their toll. Just last year he rebuffed claims that he was about to retire following a series of first-round exits at tournaments.

Lin always said he was determined to reach the Tokyo Olympics, but his ranking of 19 in the world and the postponement of the Games made that dream unlikely.

At Rio 2016 Lin lost in the semi-finals to Lee in what was a rare victory for the Malaysian on the biggest stage of all. Lin said yesterday his body would not allow him to plough on in the unlikely pursuit of a third Games gold.

"Persevere', I said to myself in every moment of suffering, so that my sporting career could be prolonged," he wrote on Weibo. "Rather than simply pursuing rankings as I did when I was younger, in these years, I have been wanting to challenge the physical limits of an 'old' athlete and practise the sporting

spirit that I will never give up.

"(But) my physical abilities and pain no longer allow me to fight alongside my team-mates."

Praise As of yesterday afternoon, a hashtag on Weibo about Lin's retirement had been read at least 51 million times and praise for him poured in.

Bao Chunlai, who formerly represented China in badminton, said Lin's retirement took him by surprise. "It's somewhat sudden, but understandable," he wrote on Weibo.

"The last person of that generation who persevered has also walked to the 'end'. "My feelings are mixed. All the best, brother. The future will be better."

Lin's wife Xie Xingfang, also a former badminton world champion, wrote online: "The 20 years we have walked with each other... will continue. "Let us work hard together." Lin's reputation was badly tainted in China in 2016 after it emerged he had an affair while Xie was pregnant. He apologised. — AFP