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Panel scraps prison terms for most media offenses

Speaker denies his office worker has virus • Friday prayers resume this week

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's educational committee yesterday approved key amendments to the press and publication and audiovisual laws to scrap prison penalties for most offenses, head of the panel said. MP Awdah Al-Awdah said jail terms will however remain for insulting the Almighty and a few other issues. According to the amendment, the penalty will be only against violators and not against producers and directors of programs.

Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday denied that one of his office boys had tested positive for the coronavirus, which required Ghanem to undergo a 14-day quarantine. Ghanem was responding to MP Mohammad Al-Mutair, who made the claim on Twitter, saying that the Assembly session yesterday had been cancelled because the speaker was under quarantine, demanding that the session should have been held with the deputy speaker.

Ghanem admitted he was under quarantine but had tested negative, and that no one from his office had tested positive for the virus. But he acknowledged on Twitter that an Assembly worker in another department had tested positive. The speaker announced on Monday the cancellation of regular sessions after a number of MPs and workers tested positive for the disease, and based on a letter sent by the health minister. He declined to provide details about the number and identity of those infected, saying this should be announced by the health authorities.

MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said the people should be informed about the number of coronavirus cases reported in the Assembly, and if the number really affects convening of sessions. Azemi said the sessions should be held even if some MPs test positive, because the remaining members can attend. The Assembly was due to debate a grilling against Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan, in addition to a

number of draft laws and issues related to the coronavirus crisis.

Kuwait will lift the four-month coronavirus ban on Friday prayers at mosques nationwide this week after taking all measures to prevent the disease's spread. The decision by the ministry of awqaf and Islamic affairs includes more than 1,000 mosques across all governorates. Undersecretary Fareed Emadi said in a statement. Necessary precautionary measures have been taken to prepare the mosques, like complete sanitization, guiding signboards and measures to ensure social distancing between worshippers.

Mosque doors will open 30 minutes before the call to prayer and close 15 minutes after prayers, with the khutbah (sermon) and prayer not exceeding 15 minutes. The entry and exit of worshippers will also be organized with signs on the ground organizing the location of each worshipper during prayer. Under the decision, khatibs (preachers) have been

instructed to remind worshippers of abiding by health and safety measures like social distancing, to wear facemasks and to stay home if they experience any symptoms.

Those currently in quarantine will be denied entry, according to Emadi, who urged those with weak immune systems or with chronic illnesses to stay home. Water fountains and toilets will be shut, and seats and door handles will be routinely sanitized, he added. Therefore, worshippers are required to do their pre-prayer ablution (wudu) at home.

Worshippers are also required to bring their own prayer rug and wear a facemask, or they will be denied entry. Hand shaking and close social interactions are discouraged inside the mosque. Children under the age of 15 will be denied entry. Prayers conducted at the Grand Mosque will be televised on state TV, added the official, who warned that if rules are not observed, mosques will be closed once again.

News in brief

Immunity gone in months

PARIS: Patients who recover from coronavirus infections may lose their immunity to reinfection within months, according to research released on Monday. In the first study of its kind, a team led by researchers from King's College London examined the levels of antibodies in more than 90 confirmed virus patients and how they changed over time. Of the study group, 60 percent showed a "potent" viral response in the first few weeks after infection. However, after three months only 16.7 percent had maintained high levels of COVID-19-neutralising antibodies, and after 90 days several patients had no detectable antibodies in their bloodstream. — AFP

Worst downturn in 50 yrs

DUBAI: The IMF Monday again sharply lowered its Middle East and North Africa economic forecast, to its lowest level in 50 years, over the "twin shock" of the coronavirus pandemic and low oil prices. The region's economy will contract by 5.7 percent this year, and shrink by as much as 13 percent in countries torn by conflict, the IMF warned. The battered energy-based economies of the GCC states are forecast to shrink by a hefty 7.1 percent, 4.4 percentage points lower than April. — AFP

Iran executes 'CIA spy'

TEHRAN: Iran has executed a former defense ministry worker who sold information to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Iranian judiciary said yesterday. Reza Asgari had linked up with the CIA during his last years serving at the defense ministry's aerospace division and sold the agency information about Iran's missile program, judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili said, quoted by its Mizan website. He retired from the ministry four years ago. Esmaili said Asgari was executed last week. — Reuters

UAE delays Mars probe launch

DUBAI: The UAE said it plans to launch its "Hope" Mars probe on Friday from Japan's Tanegashima Space Center after a two-day delay due to poor weather there. A rocket is due to blast off at 5:43 am local time (2043 GMT Thursday) carrying the unmanned spacecraft that is bound to orbit the Red Planet in the Arab world's first interplanetary mission. The launch was postponed from 2051 GMT yesterday because of inclement weather at the remote Japanese launch site. — AFP

MoI busts money laundering ring

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced Monday dismantling of a money laundering ring, arresting two suspects and seizing valuable assets in a massive operation across the country. The move came after months of continuous monitoring and tracking of the criminal network as part of the ministry's efforts to counter money laundering, bribery, illicit gains and illegal acts that jeopardize public interest, the ministry said in a press statement.

It revealed that after completing relevant investigations, police forces raided the hideout of the ring's mastermind and main suspect at a chalet in Bnaider. Police also searched four other sites used by the suspect - a

house, a farm in Wafra and apartments in Kuwait City and Salmiya. The ministry added that security forces that raided these sites confiscated valuables including luxury and classic cars, motorbikes, expensive watches and jewelry, sums of money in different currencies and cartons of alcoholic drinks.

Relevant bodies arrested one suspected ring member at Kuwait International Airport prior to his departure from the country, the ministry disclosed. The ministry stressed that investigations are ongoing to apprehend all members of the network, and once all investigations are completed, the suspects will be put on trial. — KUNA

Kuwait axes solar plant; Beirut seeks fuel from Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Cabinet cancelled plans to construct the Al-Dabdaba solar plant, which would have provided 15 percent of the oil sector's needs of electrical energy, due to the coronavirus pandemic. "The Cabinet decided to cancel the decisions on the project due to the spread of coronavirus and its impacts on the global oil and financial markets," it said after meeting on Monday.

The project, which was to be carried out by Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), was supposed to start operating in Feb 2021. But the proposal was extremely delayed due to bureaucratic procedures. The lowest bid for the project was KD 439 million (\$1.4 billion), Al-Rai newspaper said on July 5. Kuwait has plans to generate 15 per-

cent of its energy via renewable sources by 2030.

The decision would contribute to the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) "focusing on its priorities for the coming stage and maintaining its position in the global oil markets", the Cabinet statement said. The project was aimed at establishing a solar power plant within the Al-Shagaya Complex for Renewable Energy, which is located 100 km west of Kuwait City, on about 32 sq km.

Meanwhile, Lebanon wants to negotiate fuel imports with Kuwait to help Beirut cope with an economic and financial crisis, Lebanon's internal security chief said in remarks published yesterday. Abbas Ibrahim told Al-Rai he had discussed the matter with Kuwaiti officials during a visit to state this week along with other "shared ideas" that could help alleviate Lebanon's crisis.

"We want to purchase 100 percent of our requirements from Kuwait without going through agents or companies looking to make a profit ... this is a purely commercial matter and I hope there will be no obstacles to it," Al-Rai quoted Ibrahim as saying.

Lebanon is suffering a dire financial crisis and

hard currency liquidity crunch. The Lebanese pound has lost some 80 percent of its value since October. There was no immediate comment from Kuwaiti officials on the request. Abbas, in the newspaper interview, declined to elaborate on what other assistance Lebanon may have sought.

Gulf states have long channeled funds into Lebanon's fragile economy but are alarmed by the rising influence of Hezbollah, a powerful group backed by their archrival Iran. They appear loath now to help ease Beirut's worst financial crisis in decades, with a senior official in the United Arab Emirates last month saying Lebanon was paying the price of deteriorating ties with wealthy Gulf Arab neighbors.

Kuwait is seeking to bolster its own finances amid low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic, and has been rapidly depleting its General Reserves Fund to plug a budget deficit. Another newspaper, Al-Qabas, quoted sources as saying it would be difficult for Kuwait at this time to consider supporting Lebanon through a central bank deposit. — Agencies

TED talks tune into big ideas in Arab world

SAN FRANCISCO: A prestigious TED group dedicated to "ideas worth spreading" on Monday set out to provide a global stage for Arab speaking thinkers, artists and change-makers. TED organizers at the US-based non-profit Sapling Foundation announced

that they teamed with the Qatar Foundation on a two-year initiative that will culminate with a flagship conference in Doha in 2022. This is the first time the TED Conference, known for an influential and accomplished community that includes founders of Amazon, Google, and Netflix, will focus on sharing "solutions, inventions, and stories" in Arabic.

"We at TED have always valued the power of delivering talks in one's native language, and the nuance and richness that comes with doing so," said Chris Anderson, the head of TED. "The TEDInArabic initiative is an important

step in that journey." The intent is to share impassioned TED Talks in Arabic that can change perceptions and benefit societies, according to organizers.

"Language is more than just a means of communication; it influences the way we think and how we frame our perceptions on a subconscious level," Qatar Foundation chief executive Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani said in a release. "With TEDInArabic, I hope we can continue the process of amplifying ideas from our region to a global audience in a language that is synonymous with innovation and new thinking." — AFP



Local

Kuwait government reviews efforts to combat corruption

COVID-19 kills solar power plant project

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet held on Monday its weekly meeting via videoconference, under the auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. At the outset of the meeting, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled briefed the ministers on his recent meeting with chiefs and representatives of the government regulatory bodies that was held in line with the instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Cabinet Affairs Minister Anas Al-Saleh said. The instructions focus on protecting public funds, combating corruption, the rule of law, Saleh, also Minister of Interior, added after the Cabinet's meeting.

Scientific approach

The meeting between Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and the chiefs stressed the necessity of taking serious steps to implement His Highness the Amir's instructions through adopting a scientific approach which includes all concerted efforts and cooperation of all regulatory bodies so as to face the scourge of corruption, prevent its reasons and hold those responsible for corruption crimes whoever they are, he noted. Such steps aim at restoring public funds that were looted and stolen and taking legal measures at both local and external levels in

order to protect the status of the State of Kuwait.

His Highness the Prime Minister lauded the suggestions and notices by the officials regarding strengthening mechanisms to fight corruption and methods of coordination between the regulatory bodies, vowing to double efforts to achieve the desired goals, Saleh added. The Cabinet appealed to these bodies to expedite the preparation of the best methods to translate the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister on protecting public funds, fighting corruption and the rule of law, and working to activate the necessary coordination with other regulatory bodies to prevent the causes of corruption and promoting serious cooperation between these bodies in line with clear mechanisms.

Health conditions

Minister of Health Dr Sheikh Basel Humoud Al-Sabah informed the ministers about the latest developments on the health conditions in the country based on data and statistics regarding the novel coronavirus infections in terms of nationalities and areas as well as the deaths, recoveries and cases at intensive care unit (ICUs). The Cabinet followed up the developments on preventive and curative levels and logistic services pertaining to efforts of combating the spread of the COVID-19. The Cabinet

was briefed on the ministerial coronavirus emergency committee, and decided the following:

- The Cabinet was informed by Minister of Health's decision No. 103/2020 issued on June 6, 2020 regarding air travel regulations included in the first article of the ministerial resolution No. 98/2020 on departures and arrivals through land and sea ports.

- Assigning Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait Municipality and Public authority for Food and Nutrition to prepare a comprehensive vision so as to avoid overcrowding during slaughtering and distributing sacrifices during Eid Al-Adha, taking into account implementing health requirements.

- Asking the ministry of Social Affairs to issue a general instruction to societies, charitable committees and concerned bodies to curb distributing sacrifices outside Kuwait.

Solar power plant

Afterwards, the Cabinet was briefed on the recommendations by the economic affairs committee regarding establishing, operating and maintaining the project of Al-Dabdaba power-plant for solar PV production for the Kuwaiti oil sector. The Cabinet decided to cancel the decisions on this project due to the spread of coronavirus and its impacts on the global oil and financial markets. The ministers



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attends the Cabinet's weekly meeting via videoconference on Monday. — KUNA

discussed the affairs of the National Assembly and decided to approve a bill amending some provisions of Law No. 17/1960 on issuing the law of criminal procedures and trials, referring it to His Highness the Amir. The Cabinet focused on the political affairs in the light of the current developments on both Arab and

international arenas, expressing its condemnation and denunciation of the suicide attack that took place today at an intelligence HQ in eastern Afghanistan, killing and injuring dozens. It stressed Kuwait's stance rejecting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, whatever their motives and causes. — KUNA

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 56,174 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of yesterday, in addition to 396 deaths. With the exception of 156 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, 46,161 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,617 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 in 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.

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 starting from March 12, 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 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 facemasks, 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:

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 976332660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-health.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Center for Mental Health provides help through its suicide hotline: 24621770 (8 am - 5 pm). Meanwhile, the Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

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

In My View

Parents know better



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

This is a phrase I heard so much when I was in my teens. I had many ideas and things I wanted to do - many of them influenced by friends and others - and because of adolescent stubbornness, ignorance and selfishness.

Barely 18, my late father decided to send me to Britain for university and I obliged, although deep in my heart I did not want to go, because I wanted to be around my "friends". So without my father's knowledge I applied to some universities, and luckily enough, all applications were rejected because I was late in applying or because of no available spots. So a simple 'no' kept me in Britain, and it took me some time to settle down and accept the fact that my studies will be in the place where my father sent me. Later, while I was doing my A levels, I had an opportunity to go to the US, and I did not look back since.

My father's insistence proved fruitful, as he believed that being around some of the guys will not take me anywhere, and I must be as far as possible from them. And for sure I was far - very far. At that time communications were not as easy as now - almost next to zero - and that was a blessing.

Yes, parents know better! Believe me they have that instinct, and everything they do comes from the bottom of their hearts, out of love and care for you. They are ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of your comfort and happiness. Parents are the closest persons to their children. They are the most deserving people for companionship, love and gratitude. Whatever children do for their parents, they will never be able to pay back even a very small portion of what they deserve. Parents have countless rights that we should always embrace and keep in mind. One should never disobey them or be rough with them and should always be respectful in their presence.

I am proud of what my parents have done to me. They taught me how to be secure and have a peaceful state of mind. I am writing this to remind every single person out there to give their parents all they deserve and more, because once we miss them, regret for not fulfilling our duties towards them will be deep and painful. If you cannot visit your parents daily, please pick the phone and call them mornings and evenings, because the hello will make and keep them happy, and it is all what they ask for from you.

Almighty Allah says in the Holy Quran: "And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as] "uff": do not repel them but speak to them a noble word". (17:23)

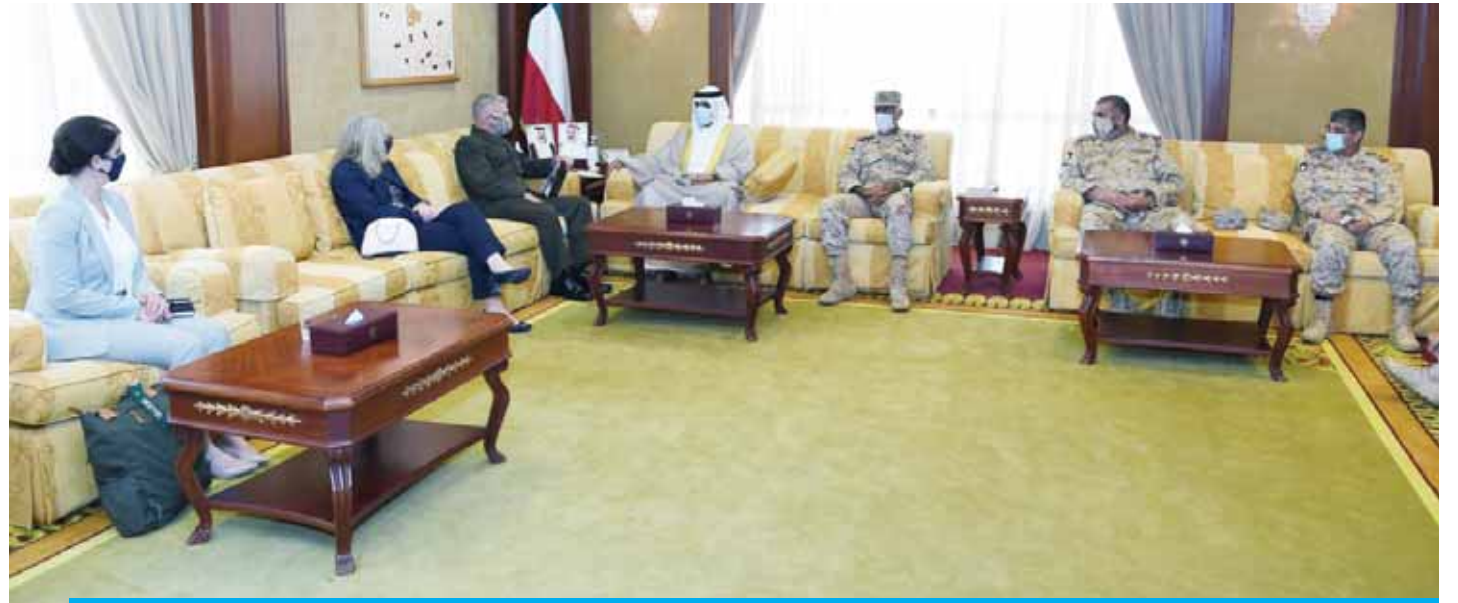
Local

Kuwait Prime Minister receives American military delegation

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled meets Lebanon's general security chief



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Commander of the US Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie. — KUNA photos



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Commander of the US Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Monday, in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace, the visiting Commander of the US Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie and his delegation. During the meeting, they discussed ways of strengthening the solid strategic relations that link Kuwait and the US, in addition to reviewing regional issues and international efforts aimed at finding a solution to crises in the region. Chief of the General Staff of



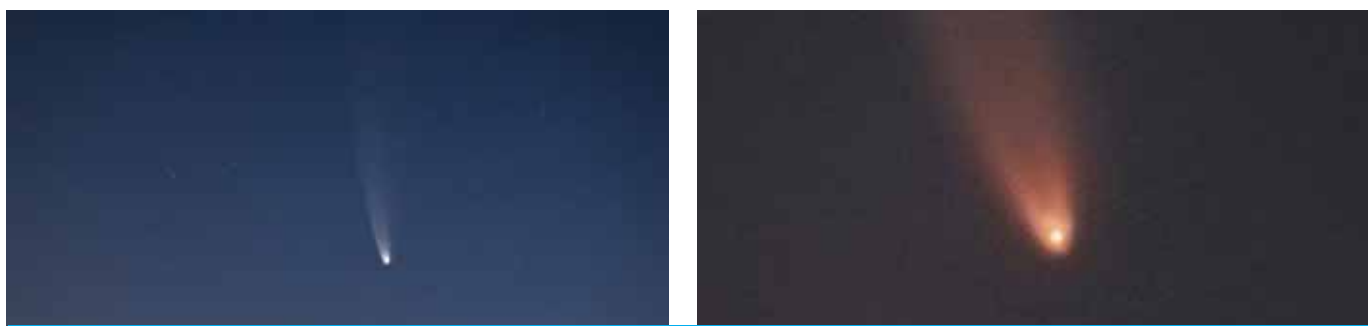
Defense Minister meets General McKenzie

Kuwait Armed Forces Lieutenant General Mohammad Khaled Al-Khudhr, and Deputy Chief of the Army's General Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah attended the meeting. Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Sabah had earlier received General McKenzie and his accompanying delegation to discuss issues of common concern. Sheikh Ahmad praised the depth of relations between the two friendly countries and cooperation at various levels, especially military affairs, the Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations of the Kuwaiti Army said in a statement.

The meeting was also attended by Lieutenant General Khudhr, Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Sabah, US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski, Head of the US Military Cooperation Office Major General Randolph Staudenraus and a number of Kuwaiti Army senior officers. In other news, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Monday, with the attendance Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Lebanon's visiting general security chief Abbas Ibrahim and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Undersecretary of Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Essam Salem Al-Naham and Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Fahad Al-Awadhi. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Lebanon's general security chief Abbas Ibrahim.



KUWAIT: These photos taken by astrophotographers Mohammad Awad Al-Obaidi (left) and Abdullah Ahmad Al-Harbi show the comet C/2020 F3 (NEOWISE), as seen in Kuwait City earlier this month.

MILSET Asia holds virtual conference

KUWAIT: The International Movement for Leisure activities in Science and technology (MILSET) announced Monday the launching of a youth conference entitled "How to build a better future for the post-coronavirus period," with participation of Kuwait. The conference aims to discuss youths' points of view on how to build a better scientific, technical, and medical future to better serve the humanity and assures the sustainable developments and protect global environment. In a statement to the press, Vice President of MILSET Asia and head of its regional office for Asia, Adnan Al-Meer said that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference's workshops and the closing session will be held online in November. "The conference is an activity organized by MILSET Headquarter, with participation of member states by holding online workshops and seminars from their own countries, to submit their papers when they meet in November," Meer added. —KUNA

News in brief

Kuwait, Iran discuss regional issues

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah discussed with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif Monday regional and international issues. The foreign ministry said in a statement the two top diplomats discussed in a videoconference call bilateral relations and issues of mutual interest.

Meat distribution campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday announced the launch of a donation campaign to buy and distribute meat for families inside Kuwait during Eid Al-Adha, expected end of this month. Persons wishing to donate could do so through the KRCS's website or come in person to the society's headquarters in Administrative Shuwaikh. A team from KRCS would be supervising slaughter of livestock ahead of distribution. KRCS attaches great importance to this campaign "because it brings joy amongst needy families during the Eid Al-Adha holiday," society's Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said.

Seventeen flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that 17 flights were scheduled to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 3,025 passengers. They included six flights to Egypt, six flights to India, two flights to the UAE, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Bangladesh, and one to Afghanistan.

Oil price down

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil barrel dropped 28 cents during trading Monday to close at \$43.62 per barrel (pb) compared with \$43.90 pb last Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Across global markets, the price of Brent crude oil futures shed 52 cents to \$42.72 pb as with West Texas Intermediate futures decreased by 45 cents to close at \$41.10 pb. — KUNA

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Local

Idle businesses watch carefully for good news to get back to work

Risk rises as workers deliver services to clients' homes

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: A Western woman taking a private car "taxi" in Salwa to drive her to her destination is just one example of some businesses practiced unofficially due to the long coronavirus closure. According to the government's plan for returning to normal life, resumption of taxi services is listed in the third phase - but it is not clear yet when exactly will it start.

Over 12,000 taxis in Kuwait are sitting idle, their drivers without income for more than three months. According to one report, taxi company owners in June claimed losses exceeding KD 32 million for the past three months. An estimated 250,000 people have lost their income or had their income slashed during the height of the lockdown, and only now are many returning to work. Thousands of small business owners continue to face uncertainty - their businesses remain closed with no idea when they might reopen.

Fortunately, some important businesses reopened with the beginning of phase two (June 30), including industrial and construction, maintenance, shipping and delivery, laundry, restaurants and cafe drive-thru, telecommunication companies, private clinics, retail stores and shopping malls, and car showrooms. Yet many other services are still waiting for the next phases to get back to work, and these include salons, health clubs, tailors, hotels, cinemas, taxis, public transportation, theatres, exhibitions, social occasions and restaurants and cafes for dine-in.

Many taxi drivers got paid only half their salaries

or were not paid at all. "It's been almost four months since I stopped working due to the pandemic. I'm staying at home and the taxi office is closed and all vehicles are parked there. I can't risk working in my private car - because if I get caught by the police, I may get deported for the violation of transporting passengers. I thank God that the landlord waived half of my rent for the past three months, as I only received half my wage. At least my son received his

only way to resist the economic crisis. Manayir, a salon owner, complained of having some of her clients telling her that a medical clinic is providing hair coloring, massage and even manicure and pedicure services. "I wonder how can a clinic practice these beautician services, while I have closed my salon respecting legal regulations. Also, another client told me that she went to a salon and had her hair done, despite the salon being closed," she added.

Salons face more losses. "When I had to shut the salon in the beginning of March due to the pandemic precautions, I still had to pay my staff. The second month I was not able to pay them the full amount, so I paid them half the salary. Last month, one of the staff told me she wants to quit as she received an offer from another salon that offered her full salary to work in their salon, which has home service. My business is ruined and I think the government should review the opening of salons as all other countries did," said Huda, a salon owner.

The government announced that the back to normal plan is based on the health situation in the country, as people's health comes first. The COVID-19 pandemic in Kuwait is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus (COVID-19) caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The first confirmed case in Kuwait was announced on Feb 24, 2020.

As of July 13, there were 55,508 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 45,356 recoveries and 393 deaths. As a precautionary measure to control the spread of the virus, the government implemented strict measures including a total lockdown of the

country, partial and total curfews, complete isolation of some areas and closing all businesses, apart from hospitals, pharmacies and supermarkets.

Installments' payment

As part of the economic support was delaying the payment of installments by local banks, which helped many businesses but not all, as some businesses had loans with financing companies and not banks, such as taxi agencies. Also, the government issued a law to waive the rent for all businesses that were not being able to operate due to the pandemic.

Tailors were not mentioned specifically in the list of businesses and in which phase they should return to work. But all tailor shops are still closed, although textile shops are open. The closure affected most of these shops, while their customers depend on the tailors for their outfits. A municipal inspector told Kuwait Times that tailors are listed in the same category as salons, health clubs and personal care stores. So they will have to wait for the fifth phase, which is the last.

All businesses included in the future phases of the government's plan to return to normal life are carefully watching any positive news of reopening earlier than what was set in the previously-prepared plan. Jobless expats face a hard situation, especially with landlords who haven't waived or at least discounted the rent. Many are not paying the rent as the landlord cannot evict them due to the closure of the courts, but now with the courts open, landlords can file a case and make the tenant vacant his property.



Installments delay helped some businesses

full salary, so we could survive this crisis," taxi driver Abu Mohammed told Kuwait Times.

Home service

This very long period of closure, as Kuwait is still in phase 2, forced many businesses to get around the rules and practice their business unofficially, although it is risky. Many salon staff including hairdressers, nail technicians, and others started delivering their services to the homes of their clients. Although this activity is illegal, they found it was the



KUWAIT: Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Pete Herbert meets with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) officials, led by Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. — KUNA

Belgian envoy praises KRCS activities

KUWAIT: Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Pete Herbert on Monday praised Kuwait Red Crescent Society's (KRCS) relief and humanitarian efforts, especially in combating the coronavirus COVID-19 all over the world. In a statement to the press following his meeting with the KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Herbert applauded KRCS' quick response to affect-

ed people to provide necessary assistance. The ambassador added that he was notified by the size of the humanitarian programs implemented by KRCS at both international and local levels in facing the virus based on the directives of Kuwaiti leadership in providing aid.

Both officials discussed several issues related to humanitarian and voluntary work and ways to enhance them in both countries. In a similar statement, Dr Sayer stressed that KRCS continues humanitarian role in assisting afflicted people and alleviating their sufferings. What Kuwait provides through the association to combat COVID-19 embodies the concept of humanity, Dr Sayer said. During the meeting with Belgian ambassador, Dr Sayer discussed KRCS' most important work and relief activities in all fields. — KUNA

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KNPC opens petrol station in Jaber Al-Ahmad

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) opened a new fuel station in Jaber Al-Ahmad City on Monday, making it the third in the area, while work is underway to open a fourth sta-

tion in the city soon. The company said in a press statement that this opening comes within the plan to establish stations nationwide, especially in new residential areas, keeping pace with the urbanization of the country. The plan will be implemented despite the repercussions of COVID-19, since four new stations opened during this crisis, KNPC mentioned. The 148th station uses advanced solar energy technology through solar panels that produce clean energy, providing 30 percent of its need for electricity. Additional services at the station include a convenience store and ATM machine, they indicated. — KUNA



KUWAIT: KNPC's new fuel station in Jaber Al-Ahmad City. — KUNA

Railway project tender prepared for bidding: Report

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects has finished procedures to offer the highly-anticipated railway project tender for bidding with a maximum total cost of KD 856 million. Al-Qabas reported recently quoting sources familiar with the process. The project includes building the infrastructure, terminals, control systems and trains of the railway line, which is due to extend from the southern borders with Saudi Arabia to a terminal in Kuwait City, then to Boubyan Port via the projected Silk City.

A study prepared by the project's consultant pointed out that the project would be executed according to the public-private-partnership (PPP) model in order to achieve greater economic feasibility and save around 28 percent of the cost (around KD 400 million). "Forty four percent of the project's investment will be allocated to the private sector, six percent for government investment bodies and 50 percent for citizens through an IPO," the sources explained.

The sources added that according to the project's feasibility study, returns are estimated at 12 percent, while the nominal cost of both partnership contracts are estimated at KD 4.8 billion, including both companies' paid capital for 30 years; that is KD 160 million annual payments. The sources also explained that the nominal cost of the services contracts will be KD 395.5 to be paid as KD 13.2 million annual payments for 30 years. Moreover, the study, which cost KD 1.5 million, said that a company for infrastructure and another for the lines, terminals and train systems would be offered for bidding.

The study also noted that Kuwaiti shareholding companies would be founded to execute the project, and thus creating more job opportunities for citizens. The project will also help boost stock exchange trading and help train national manpower on the knowhow of running the project by international private sector experts.

Notably, the planned grid will be 574 kilometers long extending from north to south and east to west connecting Kuwait to Saudi Arabia and Iraq. It will include 317 kilometers as main lines serving short term needs and 257 kilometers long secondary lines serving long term needs. The project will serve passengers at 220 kph speed and cargo at 120 kph speed, as regulated by the GCC railways network.

International

WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2020

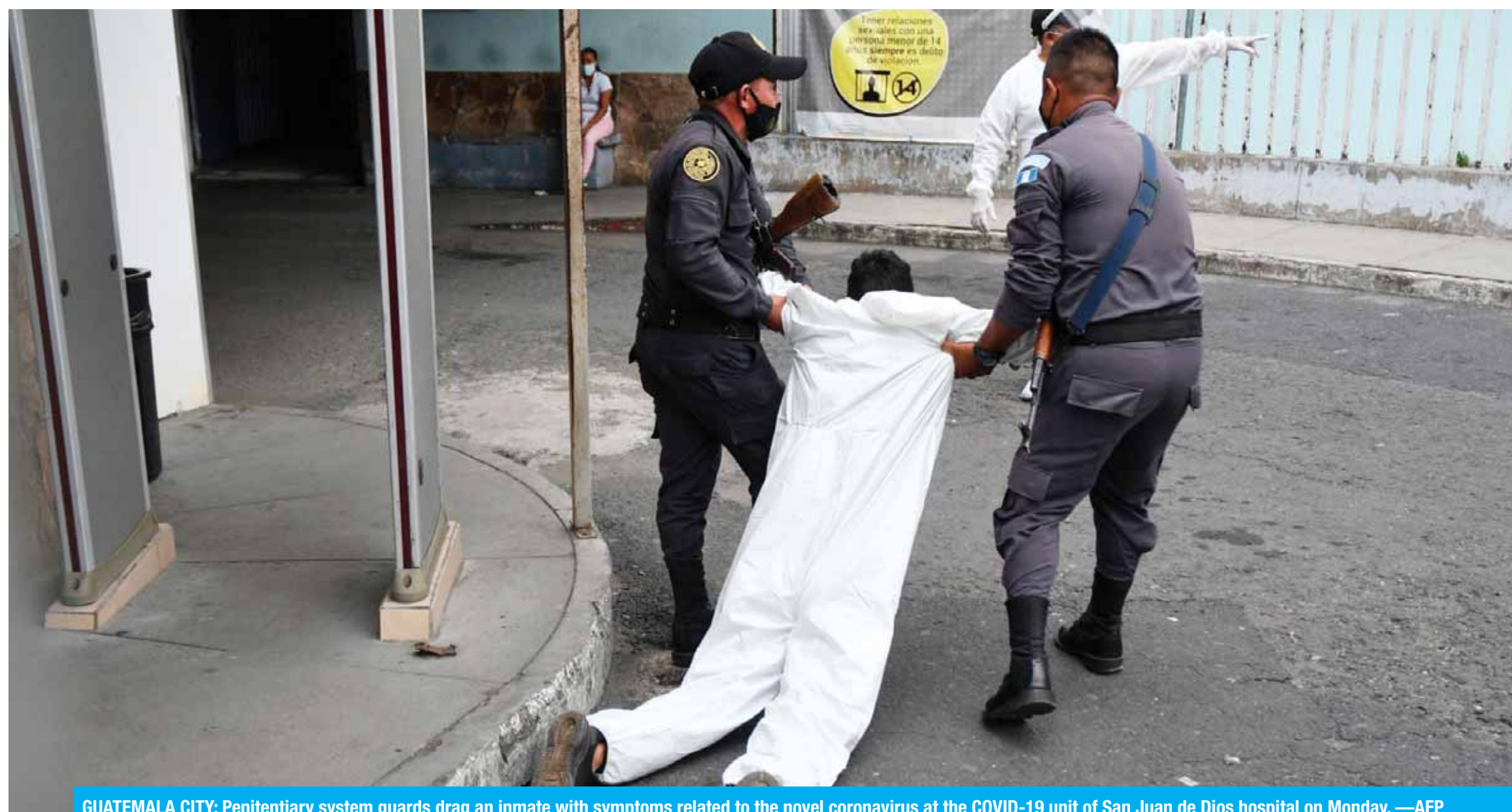


Pandemic risks 'surge' in infectious disease deaths

Page 6

Shorter hours, cleaner air? Egypt may extend COVID evening curfew

Page 7



GUATEMALA CITY: Penitentiary system guards drag an inmate with symptoms related to the novel coronavirus at the COVID-19 unit of San Juan de Dios hospital on Monday. —AFP

Asia ramps up curbs; new clusters erupt

Southeast Asian countries eye fresh lockdowns

SYDNEY: Australian states tightened borders and restricted pub visits yesterday, while Disney prepared to close its Hong Kong theme park and Japan stepped up tracing as a jump in novel coronavirus cases across Asia fanned fears of a second wave of infections. Many parts of Asia, the region first hit by the coronavirus that emerged in central China late last year, are finding cause to pause the reopening of their economies, some after winning praise for their initial responses to the outbreak. Australia largely avoided the high numbers of cases and casualties seen in other countries with swift and strict measures, but a spike in community-transmitted cases in Victoria state and a rise in new cases in New South Wales has worried authorities.

South Australia cancelled plans to reopen its border to New South Wales on July 20, while Queensland introduced a mandatory two-week quarantine for people who have visited two areas in Sydney's western suburbs. New South Wales, which has seen several dozen cases linked to the outbreak in Victoria, said pubs will be limited to 300 people, responding to an outbreak centered at a large hotel in southwestern Sydney. "Indoor activity, where people aren't seated is a huge health risk. It increases the chance of transmission," state Premier Gladys Berejiklian told reporters. Australia's second largest city, Melbourne, is in the second week of a six-week lockdown.

The number of coronavirus infections around the world hit 13 million on Monday, according to a Reuters tally, climbing by a million in just five days. The pandemic has now killed more than half a million people in six-and-a-half months. The World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the pandemic would worsen if countries failed to adhere to strict precautions. "Let me be blunt, too many countries are headed in the wrong direction, the virus remains public enemy number one," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual briefing on Monday.

In the Northern Hemisphere, countries are racing to get a handle on outbreaks before winter, which could bring a renewed surge. A second wave of infections in Britain this winter could kill up to 120,000 people over nine months in a worst-case scenario, according to health experts. Hong Kong, which suffered remarkably few cases in the first wave of the pandemic, will impose strict social distancing measures from midnight, the most stringent yet in the Asian financial hub.

Hong Kong recorded 52 new cases on Monday, including 41 that were locally transmitted, health authorities

said. Since late January, Hong Kong has reported 1,522 cases and media reported an eighth death on Monday. "The recent emergence of local cases of unknown infection source indicates the existence of sustained silent transmission in the community," the Hong Kong government said. Walt Disney Co said it is temporarily closing its Hong Kong Disneyland theme park from today. China, which has contained a cluster in Beijing in recent weeks, loosened border restrictions between Macau and the neighboring province of Guangdong, sending shares of Macau casino operators surging.

Tokyo tracing

In Tokyo, health officials were trying to locate more than 800 members of an theatre audience after 20 people including cast members of a recent performance tested positive for the coronavirus. Japan, which has not seen an explosive outbreak, is pushing ahead with its easing of restrictions, with plans to reopen a runway at one of its biggest airports, even as infections persist in big cities, rural areas and on US military bases. India's tech capital of Bengaluru began a

new, week-long lockdown yesterday after a surge in cases following the easing of restrictions. From about 1,000 cases on June 19, when the city was believed to have escaped the worst thanks to contact tracing, it has gone up to nearly 20,000.

Health experts say the movement of people following the lifting of a nationwide lockdown in June has led to Bengaluru falling back. Other cities, including Pune and Aurangabad, have reimposed curbs in recent days. The Philippines this week recorded the biggest daily rise in coronavirus deaths in Southeast Asia and part of Manila will return to lockdown affecting 250,000 residents. A presidential spokesman said restrictions in other parts of the capital were unlikely to be relaxed.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has resisted pressure to lock down due to concern about the economy, despite the highest death toll from virus in East Asia outside China. Now, the governor of Jakarta is reported to be considering tightening some of the relatively mild restrictions in place after a spike in cases in the capital. Even Thailand, which has had no locally transmitted cases reported for six weeks, has stepped up border security over concern about a second wave of infections after the arrests of thousands of illegal migrants in the past month. — Reuters



Australian states tighten borders, distancing rules

Police levy fines as Indians chafe at mask rules

NEW DELHI: Indian police are having a field day handing out fines to people who do not wear a mask during the coronavirus pandemic. Many people just cannot get used to the accessory, which has come to symbolise the new normal, having been made compulsory in most big cities. New Delhi shared-ride driver Munish Tiwari said he had received two tickets for 500-rupee (\$6.50) fines since taxis got back on the road a month ago, which had wiped out a day's earnings. "It is just not comfortable and I cannot breathe when I have to wear it," he said. "I have to wear it when there are passengers, but as soon as the door closes and they are gone, normally I take it off. I am easy prey for the police."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently chided the country's 1.3 billion people for being "careless" about social distancing. Offenders in cities across India tell similar stories to Tiwari's. India has almost 880,000 virus cases and more than 23,000 dead, and experts say the peak is still weeks away. But both rich and poor say they feel awkward or uncomfortable covering up their face.

Masks hanging from people's ears - or not covering their nose - are a familiar sight on the streets. Many wear no mask at all. Delhi police say they have issued more than 42,000 fines since March - 792 on Sunday alone - to people not wearing masks or flouting other social distancing rules. Police across India have reaped hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines, which range from 200 rupees in Bangalore to 1,000 rupees in Mumbai.

Bangalore police chief Hemant Nimbalkar announced on Twitter last week that his force had collected mask fines worth more than \$132,000 in one month. "We are not at all proud of this feat," he said, appealing for greater respect for social distancing as cases surge in the southern city. — AFP



This combination of pictures created on Monday shows people using masks in different ways to cover their faces from various cities across India. — AFP

Six 'arrested for backing annexation'

JERUSALEM: The Palestinian Authority has arrested several people who said they would favor Israeli annexations in parts of the West Bank, corroborating sources say, despite Ramallah's denial. In an Israeli television report aired in early June, several Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are heard expressing the hope of becoming Israelis if annexation under a US-Israeli plan moves forward.

The comments by those interviewed directly contradict the Palestinian Authority's (PA) total opposition to any West Bank annexations, a view shared by an overwhelming majority of the Palestinian public, according to surveys. The Palestinians featured in the program were captured by hidden camera and their identities concealed in the broadcast through blurred faces and distorted voices.

"I want an Israeli identity card," one Palestinian is heard saying. Another stated that he didn't see "Israelis as enemies - their government is the enemy". And a third said he "chose Israel" and wasn't afraid to speak out publicly. The prominent Israeli journalist who made the report, Tzvi Yehezkel, said at least six people who spoke out in favor of annexation were subsequently arrested by the PA's security services. "I was surprised to see that even though I've blurred the faces of all the people I filmed and distorted their voices, the Authority has reached and arrested (some) of them, it's just amazing," he told AFP.

Contacted by AFP, several PA security sources rejected the claims. "We have not arrested anyone in connection with this case," Palestinian interior ministry spokesman Ghassan Nimr told AFP, while Palestinian police spokesman Louay Arzeikat also denied anyone was being held over the report.

'Fear' of arrest

Israel had set July 1 as the date from which it could decide on the implementation of the Middle East plan pro-

posed by US President Donald Trump and backed by right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It proposes Israel's annexation of its Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley in the West Bank, a Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 by the Jewish state. No announcement has so far been made on annexation - a move that would violate international law - but Netanyahu has said talks with Washington are ongoing.

Palestinian leaders have warned annexation would shatter any hopes for enduring peace and a two-state solution and risk sparking a new uprising. Some 88 percent of Palestinians oppose the "Trump plan", according to a poll last month by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, and 52 percent even said they would support a return to armed struggle. There have been waves of demonstrations against annexation and the Trump plan across the West Bank in recent weeks.

Nonetheless, Yehezkel, who has been a correspondent in the Palestinian territories for nearly 25 years, told AFP he realized there are also many Palestinians who do not share the outright opposition of their leaders. Some interviewees had told him that "we don't care about annexation" and that "the Palestinian Authority has failed" and was "corrupt", he said, adding that he regretted not airing all those comments on television. He insisted he had been told of their subsequent arrests by their families and stressed that he felt "responsible".

One Palestinian contacted by AFP said his relative, who had criticized the PA in the report, had been held for several weeks by Palestinian police and was due to face a court soon. The individual said he was also in favor of annexation and, despite "fear" of being arrested, added he remained hopeful "that Israel will give us citizenship".

Some Palestinian commentators say such statements reflect the deep dejection of people who have spent decades under occupation, denied the peace and prosperity they had long hoped for. — AFP



Tzvi Yehezkel

International

Pandemic risks 'surge' in infectious disease deaths

World hunger worsening as COVID weighs and obesity rises

PARIS: Poorer nations could see hundreds of thousands of additional deaths from HIV, tuberculosis and malaria as COVID-19 disrupts vital health services and access to life-saving treatment, new research warned yesterday. Modeling the impact in countries that will bear the brunt of the three diseases over the next five years, the study found that they could even see as many years of life lost from those illnesses as from the pandemic itself.

The team behind the research said it was vital for governments to ensure that people living with the three killers continued to have access to diagnosis and treatment even while health systems are stretched by COVID-19. HIV, tuberculosis and malaria kill close to three million people every year, the vast majority in low- or middle-income countries despite the existence of cheap and effective treatment or prevention.

Dozens of countries are already reporting an increase in people avoiding health care facilities out of fear of contracting the virus, and the supply of medicines such as anti-retroviral treatments for HIV are stretched. "In countries with a high malaria burden and large HIV and TB epidemics, even short-term disruptions could have devastating consequences for the millions of people who depend on programs to control and treat these diseases," said Timothy Hallett from Imperial College London and paper co-author. For the study, which was published in the Lancet Global Health medical journal, the team looked at four different policy scenarios affecting the

spread of COVID-19. They then incorporated transmission models of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria to estimate the impact on health services within the different scenarios over a five-year period. The greatest impact was projected to be from interruption of anti-



1 in 9 people going hungry

retrovirals for those living with HIV, with parts of southern Africa experiencing up to 10 percent more HIV deaths than would occur without COVID-19.

In the worst case scenario, screening and treatment for tuberculosis—still the world's biggest infectious killer—could see deaths rise by 20 percent in southern Africa. Malaria deaths linked to the interruption of mosquito net campaigns could surge by 36 percent if little is done to stem the spread of COVID-19 in high incidence countries. Study co-author Alexandra Hogan said the pandemic risked destroying many gains made in malaria control over the past decade. "Routine preventative measures



UKHIA, Bangladesh: In this file photo taken on Sept 27, 2017, Rohingya refugees run for food being distributed at the Thangkhal refugee camp. — AFP

must be prioritized, ensuring mosquito net distribution campaigns and (preventative) treatments, such as mass drug distribution, are maintained," she said.

Meanwhile, nearly one in nine people in the world are going hungry, with the coronavirus pandemic exacerbating already worsening trends this year,

according to a United Nations report published Monday. Economic slowdowns and climate-related shocks are pushing more people into hunger, while nutritious foods remain too expensive for many, contributing not only to undernourishment, but to growing rates of obesity in adults and children. — Agencies

News in brief

Australia cases top 10,000

SYDNEY: Australian states yesterday tightened restrictions on movement as authorities struggle to contain a fresh outbreak of COVID-19 in the country's southeast that has pushed the national tally of cases beyond 10,000. With growing fears of a second coronavirus wave nationally, two states extended border restrictions and Australia's most populous state imposed limits on the number of people allowed in large pubs. The changes come as scores of new cases were uncovered in Victoria, the country's COVID-19 hotspot, despite a return to lockdown last week for nearly 5 million people in state capital Melbourne. Active cases in the state rose to nearly 2,000 after another 270 infections were detected in the past 24 hours, authorities said, taking Australia's total number of cases to about 10,000. Australia's death toll hit 110 on Tuesday after two people in their 80s died from the virus in Victoria. — Reuters

Canada's Trudeau 'sorry'

OTTAWA: Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized Monday for not recusing himself from discussions about a government contract to a charity that had paid his family large sums of money for speaking appearances. "I made a mistake not recusing myself immediately from the discussions, given our family's history. And I'm sincerely sorry," Trudeau told a news conference. His apology came amid opposition demands for an investigation into a CAN\$900 million (USD \$662 million) contract awarded by the government to development and youth advocacy organization WE Charity. The NGO has admitted paying nearly CAN \$300,000 to Trudeau's mother, brother and wife for speaking engagements. Trudeau himself admitted to taking part in negotiations with the charity over the contract. He said he knew his mother Margaret worked for WE as an advocate on mental health issues but didn't know the "details." — AFP

Kosovo's Thaci quizzed

THE HAGUE: Kosovo President Hashim Thaci arrived on Monday for questioning by war crimes prosecutors in The Hague, saying that "nobody can rewrite history" over his role in the 1990s war. Thaci, 52, was indicted by a special tribunal in late June for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the 1998-99 conflict with Serbia that won the province its independence. Thaci and others are charged with being "criminally responsible for nearly 100 murders" in addition to other crimes against Serb, Roma and Kosovo Albanian victims while he was leader of the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). "Today I am here to respect what I dreamt and fought for, a free independent Kosovo based on equal rights, multi-ethnic society and rule of law," Thaci told reporters outside the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC). "I am ready to face the new challenge and succeed for my son, my family, my people and my country. Nobody can rewrite history. This is a price of freedom." — AFP

Malian jihadist on trial

THE HAGUE: The trial of a Malian jihadist accused of demolishing Timbuktu's fabled shrines and unleashing a reign of terror begins at the International Criminal Court yesterday. Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, 42, has been charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity, rape and sexual slavery. The charges cover a period when Islamic fundamentalists exploited an ethnic Tuareg uprising in 2012 to take over cities in Mali's volatile north. — AFP

2nd virus wave in UK could see 120,000 deaths

LONDON: A second coronavirus wave in Britain this winter could see 120,000 deaths in hospitals alone in a "reasonable worst-case scenario", scientists warned yesterday. The Academy of Medical Sciences report, commissioned by the government's chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance, urged immediate action to mitigate a second wave.

With hospitals also battling seasonal flu cases, a second wave could eclipse the current outbreak resulting in up to 120,000 deaths between September and June next year. The modeling does not include deaths in care homes or the wider community, and assumes no government action to prevent a fresh surge in cases. Britain has seen almost 45,000 deaths so far in the first wave—the highest toll in Europe and third only to the United States

and Brazil. The latest predictions are based on an assumption that the R rate—which measures how many people an infected person is expected to infect—rises to 1.7 from September.

The scientists also modeled for a lower increased R rate of 1.5, which would lead to 74,800 deaths. The R rate is currently between 0.7 to 0.9 across the whole country, according to the latest government figure published last Friday. Stephen Holgate, who led the study Academy of Medical Sciences study, said the 120,000 figure was "not a prediction but it is a possibility". "The modeling suggests that deaths could be higher with a new wave of COVID-19 this winter, but the risk of this happening could be reduced if we take action immediately."

'Intense preparation'

The group of 37 scientists involved in the report said the government needed to prepare immediately because of the "serious risk" to health of a potential surge in cases. A winter outbreak could be worse due to people spending more time indoors, where the virus can spread more easily, added Azra Ghani, from Imperial



PROMACHONAS, Greece: A public health worker collects a swab sample from a woman to test for the novel coronavirus at the Greek-Bulgarian border crossing on July 10, 2020. — AFP

Concern grows in Balkans at rising COVID-19 cases

BELGRADE: The numbers may still be modest, but the Balkans, one of the poorest regions in Europe with the most fragile medical infrastructure, is bracing against a surge in coronavirus infections. Several European countries have imposed restrictions, such as a two-week quarantine on travelers from Bulgaria and Romania, or a negative coronavirus test result on arrival.

In Serbia, the situation is worse than in April, epidemiologist Predrag Kon said on the national broadcaster RTS, particularly in Belgrade where the health system is at saturation point. Kon, part of the national team tackling the coronavirus pandemic, announced a record 18 deaths on Friday. Protesters are demonstrating on the streets every night against what they say is the administration's mishandling of the crisis.

In neighboring Kosovo, there is also growing concern. Blerim Sylja, the head of the health sector unions warned that Kosovo could become the Wuhan of the Balkans—a reference to the Chinese region hit hardest by the virus. And if that happened, he said, Kosovo's health system, already under tremendous pressure, would collapse. Many people in Kosovo choose to seek treatment in neighboring countries. In EU member Croatia, microbiologist Goran Lauc, part of a scientific team advising the government, says the situation is "not

bad", but notes that cases are rising as the tourist season gets underway.

Fragile health services

So far, the Balkans has escaped the coronavirus pandemic relatively unscathed with nearly 3,500 deaths. The eight deaths recorded Friday in Kosovo and hundreds of new cases in Bosnia and Romania in recent days are not yet enough to set alarm bells ringing in the international community. But Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Romania have all registered record numbers over the past week, both in terms of the daily tally of deaths and new cases.

According to a July 10 AFP tally, these countries accounted for 15 percent of new cases detected that day across Europe although they account for only seven percent of Europe's population. The health services in these countries are not equipped to deal with a surge like that one that overwhelmed parts of western Europe in spring. While Italy has 4.1 doctors for every 1,000 inhabitants, Albania has only 1.2 according to World Health Organization figures—the lowest coverage in Europe. In Bosnia, the figure stands at 2.0, and in Romania 2.2. Union leader Blerim Sylja says that Kosovo lacks 5,500 health professionals. On the streets of Belgrade, one demonstrator, Petar Djuric, became the face of the growing anger, shouting before the cameras that his father had died because there was no respirator to save him. In Albania, which has so far recorded nearly 100 deaths, the authorities insist the situation is still under control. But the director of the infectious diseases hospital in Tirana, Najada Como, told citizens they had to understand that "the solution isn't through hospital treatment, where we are doing the impossible to care for the seriously ill." — AFP

Deadly under-the-radar heatwaves ravage Africa

PARIS: The impacts of extreme heatwaves amplified by climate change are going unrecorded in sub-Saharan Africa, making it nearly impossible to detect patterns and set up early warning systems, researchers said Monday. While detailed records of hot spells and their aftermath exist for the world's wealthier regions, in Africa scientists and governments are mostly flying blind in assessing the damage to human health and economies, the researchers reported in the journal Nature Climate Change.

"Both real-world observations and climate modelling show Sub-Saharan Africa as a hotspot for heatwave activity," said lead author Luke Harrington, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute. "But the consequences of these heatwaves are not being recorded," he told AFP. "It is as if they haven't happened, but we know they have." Only two heatwaves in sub-Saharan Africa have been listed over the last 120 years in the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), the most complete registry of extreme weather event impacts in the world.

By contrast, 83 European heatwaves—resulting in more than 140,000 deaths and \$12 billion in damages—have been logged since 1980 alone. "There is an urgent need to address this discrepancy," said Harrington. There is also an absence of data for other types of extreme weather in Africa, such as drought, heavy rains and major storms. Global warming is expected to increase the number of "deadly heat days"—beyond the threshold of human tolerance—in coming decades, especially in the tropics, earlier research has shown. But gathering data on the location, duration and intensity of heatwaves is only part of what is needed to plan ahead, the researchers said.

African voices not heard

"The problem is not the absence of weather data per se," senior author Friederike Otto, director of the Environmental Change Institute, told AFP. "It is the lack of impact data, such as records from hospitals on mortality, or power and infrastructure impacts." Climate models show that sub-Saharan Africa is going to be disproportionately affected by worsening heatwaves due to climate change, and the current lack of data hampers the region's ability to prepare, she said.

"Is five days above 40 degree Celsius (104 degree Fahrenheit) the threshold for serious impacts on mortality? Does one extremely hot day lead to infrastructure failure?," Otto asked. "Without assessing impact data and weather data together, you don't know how an early warning system should be designed." — AFP

International

Editing history: Hong Kong publishers self-censor under a new security law

Government removes books, banned songs and slogans

HONG KONG: In the last two weeks, Hong Kong publisher Raymond Yeung has hastily made changes to a draft paper copy of a book entitled "To Freedom," replacing the word "revolution" with "protests," tweaking a banned slogan and cutting passages that advocate independence for the Chinese-ruled city. The changes were hard to make, he told Reuters, but impossible to avoid since China passed a national security law on June 30, making the broadly defined crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces punishable by up to life in prison. "This is really painful," Yeung said as he flipped through pages of the collection of essays by 50 protesters, lawyers, social workers and other participants in the pro-democracy demonstrations that shook Hong Kong last year.

"This is history. This is the truth," he said, holding up the book with blue sticky flags on many pages to mark changes made because of the new law. Just as demand for political books was surging in Hong Kong after a year of protests, Hong Kong's once unbridled and prolific independent publishers are now censoring themselves in the face of the new law. Hong Kong authorities say freedom of speech remains intact, but in the past two weeks public libraries have taken some books off the shelves, shops have removed protest-related decorations and the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong! Revolution of our times" has been declared illegal.

"To Freedom" is the first political book Yeung has taken on as a part-time publisher. After Beijing introduced the security law, the book's original printer bailed, and two other printers declined, he said. Another printer agreed to take it anonymously, but wants to get a better sense of how the law is

implemented first. The Hong Kong Trade Development Council, which organizes the annual Hong Kong Book Fair, told exhibitors not to display what it called "unlawful books" at this week's planned fair, but did not explain further.

The council postponed the fair at the last minute on Monday due to a recent spike in cases of the new coronavirus. It did not specify a new date for the event, which draws about 1 million visitors. Three non-governmental pro-Beijing groups had teamed up to urge people to report stalls at the fair selling material promoting Hong Kong independence, a subject that is anathema to the Chinese government. "Every citizen has a duty to report crime," said Innes Tang, the chairman of PolitHK Social Strategic, one group behind the campaign. "We are not the police. We are not the ones to say where the red line is."

Jimmy Pang, a veteran local publisher who has participated in every fair since it began in 1990, called 2020 "the most terrifying year" because of the security law and the economic downturn that was already hurting publishers. He said the law has prompted publishing houses and writers to halt projects while printers, distributors, and bookstores have turned down sensitive books. For example, Breakazine, a local Christian publication, said it suspended the distribution of its mid-July issue called "Dangerous Reading" while seeking legal advice for navigating the security law. "Everyone is avoiding risks by suffering in silence," said Pang, a spokesman for 50 exhibitors at the fair.

Last year, a unit of Pang's Sub-Culture Ltd published Chan Yun-chi's "6430," a book of interviews with surviving pro-democracy protesters in the



HONG KONG: Activists hold a memorial event to mark the third anniversary of the death of Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (pictured) on Monday. Liu was arrested in 2009 and charged with "inciting subversion of state power", later dying of cancer. — AFP

run-up to the 30th anniversary of the bloody 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, a subject heavily censored on the mainland. "In the future, there will be no sensitive books related to politics," he said. Bao Pu, the son of Bao Tong, the most senior Chinese Communist Party official jailed for sympa-

thizing with Tiananmen protesters, founded New Century Press in Hong Kong to publish books based on memoirs and government documents and other sources that often differ from the official versions of events in China and could not be published on the mainland. — Reuters

News in brief

Taiwan lawmakers brawl

TAIPEI: Taiwanese lawmakers scuffled in parliament yesterday over a nomination for the head of a top government watchdog, the second time physical confrontations have erupted over the issue in as many weeks. Opposition Kuomintang (KMT) members clashed with legislators from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as they tried to block nominee Chen Chu from entering the main parliamentary chamber. A KMT lawmaker was sent to hospital after his arm was cut when glass panels were shattered during the melee while several other lawmakers from both sides suffered minor injuries. Taiwan's parliament was once notorious for mass brawls among lawmakers and has been the location of frequent protests. Scuffles broke out over reform policies and pension cuts when President Tsai Ing-wen first took office four years ago, but such confrontations had since become rare. — AFP

Bangalore locks down again

BANGALORE: India's IT hub Bangalore will go back into lockdown yesterday as the number of coronavirus cases in the country surged towards a million with about 500 people dying daily. After imposing one of the world's strictest lockdowns in late March, India has been steadily easing rules to lessen the huge economic impact. But infections have continued to soar, passing 900,000 on Monday with almost 24,000 deaths, according to health ministry figures that many experts say underplay the severity of the situation. Mumbai and the capital New Delhi have been the worst hit so far but the southern city of Bangalore, home to more than 13 million people, has emerged as a new hotspot. A seven-day lockdown in the city is set to begin at 8:00 pm, the government announced earlier. — AFP

NZ opposition leader quits

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's opposition leader abruptly quit for health reasons yesterday just weeks after taking the job, leaving his party in disarray with an election against Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern looming. In a brief early-morning statement, Todd Muller announced his immediate resignation as leader of the centre-right National Party, saying "I am not the best person" for the position. "It is more important than ever that the New Zealand National Party has a leader who is comfortable in the role," he said. Muller ousted his predecessor Simon Bridges in late May but failed to reverse polls showing strong backing for Ardern ahead of the September 19 election. — AFP

US first federal executions

WASHINGTON: The Supreme Court of the United States yesterday allowed the first federal executions in 17 years to proceed, overturning a lower court order delaying them. Four federal executions were scheduled but a district court judge had suspended them to allow for legal challenges to the lethal injection that was to be used. The district court decision had come just hours before the first execution, of former white supremacist Daniel Lewis Lee, who was convicted with another man of murdering a family of three during a robbery intended to help fund the founding of an "Aryan Peoples Republic". The prisoners "have not made the showing required to justify last-minute intervention by a Federal Court," the Supreme Court said in a ruling released in the early hours of yesterday. — AFP

Deadly border clashes reignite Azerbaijan and Armenia conflict

YEREVAN: Deadly border clashes between arch-foes Armenia and Azerbaijan entered a second day on Monday, as the EU, US and regional power broker Moscow urged restraint. Three Azerbaijanis were killed on Sunday and one on Monday, oil-rich Baku's defense ministry said, adding that both sides were using artillery, mortars and tanks in the north part of their border. The Armenian foreign ministry said the artillery fire from Azerbaijan "receded" later on Monday, claiming Yerevan was "fully controlling" the situation.

The two former Soviet republics have been locked in a simmering conflict for decades over Azerbaijan's separatist region of Nagorno Karabakh, which was seized by ethnic-Armenian separatists in a 1990s war that claimed 30,000 lives. The international community still views the region as part of Azerbaijan. The current fighting—hundreds of miles from Nagorno Karabakh—erupted days after Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev raised the spectre of war and denounced delays in Karabakh talks. Each side blamed the other for the current flare-up. "Armenia's political and military leadership will bear the entire responsibility for the provocation," Aliyev told officials in a meeting. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in turn accused Azerbaijan of "provocations" that would "not go unanswered" and his defence minister said Armenian forces would react "including by taking advantageous positions" in Azerbaijani territory.

Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan on Monday discussed the crisis by phone with the head of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Moscow-led military bloc. Before the call, Azerbaijani officials had already said Armenia's "military adventure" was aimed at drawing the CSTO into the fighting. All-out war between the two countries could potentially drag in regional powers—Armenia's military ally Russia and Azerbaijan's

China struggles to contain floods after record rainfall

SHANGHAI: Soldiers erected sandbag flood barriers in a city near China's largest freshwater lake after the heaviest rainfall in nearly six decades drenched the swollen Yangtze River basin. The vast Yangtze drainage area has been lashed by torrential rains since last month, leaving 141 people dead or missing and forcing the evacuation of millions more across several provinces. Flooding along the river — the world's third longest — has been an annual summer scourge since ancient times, but this year's inundation has been especially severe.

The downpours have intensified since last week, causing dozens of Yangtze-basin waterways to post record-high water levels, while more than 400 had exceeded warning levels. Vice Minister of Emergency Management Zheng Guoguang said on Monday. "Since June, average precipitation in the Yangtze river basin has been the highest since 1961," he told a news briefing in Beijing. Authorities had been monitoring a flood crest as it neared Wuhan, the metropolis of 11 million that the Yangtze winds through and which had already suffered the vast number of China's deaths and cases in the coronavirus pandemic, which first emerged in the city. They said river levels were decreasing after the crest passed Wuhan on Monday with no reports of major new flooding there.



In this file photograph taken on July 11, 2012, an Armenian soldier of the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh walks in a trench at the frontline on the border with Azerbaijan near the town of Martakert. — AFP

patron Turkey—which compete for geopolitical influence in the strategic region.

Majority-Muslim Turkic-speaking Azerbaijan has received strong backing from its historic ally Ankara. Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Azerbaijan was just trying to "protect its territorial integrity", labeling Armenia's actions "unacceptable" and urging the country to "come to its senses". Yerevan reacted by condemning Turkey's "provocative attitude," with its foreign ministry accusing Ankara, in a statement, of undermining the "security and stability in the region."

Armenia's military ally Russia—which wields influence on both Baku and Yerevan—expressed "serious concerns" over the crisis, which it said "endangers the region's stability", urging the countries to "show restraint". Later on Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held phone conversations with his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts, urging de-escalation. The US State Department urged both sides "to stop using force immediately... and strictly adhere to the ceasefire." The European Union issued a statement calling on both sides "to undertake immediate measures to prevent further escalation." — AFP



JIUJIANG, China: This photo taken on Monday shows Chinese soldiers building an emergency levee along the shore of Poyang lake to contain flooding due to seasonal rains and the swollen Yangtze River. — AFP

Record rainfall

Concern was now shifting downstream to Poyang Lake, which drains into the Yangtze in hard-hit Jiangxi province and is the largest freshwater lake fully within China's borders. State-run Xinhua news agency said water levels at a key hydrological station on the lake broke a record set in 1998, when more than 4,000 people were killed in China's worst flooding in recent decades. State media reported that more than 100,000 people — including rescue personnel, soldiers, and ordinary citizens — had been thrown into flood-control efforts in Jiangxi.

Around half of those were deployed at Poyang Lake, where many dikes and levees had collapsed, state television reported. In the city of Jiujiang, near where the lake drains into the Yangtze, soldiers

Shorter hours, cleaner air? Egypt may extend COVID evening curfew

CAIRO: As coronavirus restrictions ease, business is rebounding in Cairo's cafes, restaurants and shops. In the evenings, the sounds of street vendors plying their wares blends with the honking of horns, as the city gets back to normal. But the evening revival may not last long. To try to hold onto dramatic improvements in air quality during the city's lockdown, the government now has proposed to permanently ban late-night shopping and dining, in an effort to keep cars at home and hold down electricity use. "It is mainly for environmental, economic and social reasons," Khaled Qassem, a spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Local Development said. Besides the environmental benefits, the change would allow families to spend more time together in the evenings and potentially reduce crime, backers said.

Qassem said that the ministry, having tried out the evening shutdown during a partial coronavirus lockdown, now hoped to shorten working hours for shops, cafes, restaurants and malls in the post-coronavirus period. According to a government study, hours would vary by the type of business and where it is located, and "tourist establishments will have exceptional rules," Qassem said. But shortening working hours would "reduce our energy consumption, reduce traffic, lower air pollution rates" and free streets for evening trash pickups, he said.

A night curfew imposed as part of precautionary measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus led to a 36% air quality improvement in Greater Cairo, with even bigger gains in coastal cities and the Nile Delta, according to data from the Egyptian Ministry of Environment. Plans to continue shortened working hours are now under consideration by the prime minister's cabinet. In television statements, cabinet spokesman Nader Saad has said the government is "serious about the matter" and that the changes would be permanent and last beyond the coronavirus crisis. — Reuters

wearing orange life vests fortified the river bank with a wall of sandbags piled as high as a man. The Yangtze's length is exceeded only by the Nile and the Amazon, and its drainage basin is home to around 400 million people.

Summer rains and seasonal glacial melt in the river's Tibetan plateau headwaters cause routine annual flooding. But environmentalists say the threat has worsened over the decades due in part to rampant construction of dams and levees that have cut connections between the river and adjacent lakes and floodplains that for centuries had helped absorb the summer surge. Conservationists also warn that the rapid melting of Himalayan glaciers due to climate change may lead to more dangerous summer flooding. — AFP

Britain set to ban Huawei from 5G

Decision to anger China and please Trump

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to ban Huawei from Britain's 5G network, angering China but delighting US President Donald Trump by signaling that the world's biggest telecoms equipment maker is no longer welcome in the West. The United States has pushed Johnson to reverse his January decision to grant Huawei a limited role in 5G, while London has been dismayed by a crack-down in Hong Kong and the perception China did not tell the whole truth over the coronavirus.

Now, as Britain prepares to cast off from the European Union, Johnson will risk the ire of the world's second largest economy by ordering a purge of Huawei equipment which the United States says could be used to spy on the West.

Britain's National Security Council (NSC), chaired by Johnson, will meet on Tuesday morning to discuss Huawei. Media Secretary Oliver Dowden will then announce a decision to the House of Commons at around 1130 GMT.

The immediate excuse for the about turn in policy is the impact of new US sanctions on chip technology, which London says affects Huawei's ability to remain a reliable supplier.

"Obviously the context has changed slightly with some of the sanctions that the US has brought in," Environment Secretary George Eustice told Sky News when asked about Huawei. In what some have compared to the Cold War antagonism with the Soviet Union, the United States is worried that 5G dominance is a milestone towards Chinese technological supremacy that could define the geopolitics of the 21st century.

5G's faster data and increased capacity will make it a foundation of industries and driver of economic growth. As the West's most powerful intelligence power after the United States, Britain is being watched over the Huawei issue by allies.

Telecoms firms already had to cap Huawei's role in 5G at 35 percent by 2023. Reducing it to zero over another two to four years is now being discussed, though operators say going too fast could disrupt services and prove costly.

End of 'golden era'?

Hanging up on Huawei, founded by a former People's Liberation Army engineer in 1987, marks the end of what former Prime Minister David Cameron cast as a "golden era" in ties, with Britain



Timing and the extent of ban is unclear

as Europe's top destination for Chinese capital. Cameron toasted the relationship over a beer with President Xi Jinping in an English pub, which was later bought by a Chinese firm.

Trump, though, has repeatedly asked London to ban Huawei which Washington calls an agent of the Chinese Communist state - an argument that has support in Johnson's Conservative Party. Huawei denies it spies for China and has said the United States wants to frustrate its growth because no US company could offer the same range of technology at a competitive price. China says banning one of its flagship global technology companies would have far-reaching ramifications. Its ambassador



LONDON: In this file photo, the logo of Chinese company Huawei is seen at their main UK offices in Reading, west of London. — AFP

has said a U-turn on Huawei would damage Britain's image and it would have to bear consequences if it treated China as hostile.

In January, Johnson defied Trump by allowing so-called high-risk companies' involvement in 5G, capped at 35 percent. He excluded them from the sensitive 5G "core" where data is processed, as well as critical networks and locations such as nuclear and military sites.

Huawei and customers including BT, Vodafone

and Three are waiting to see how extensive the new ban will be and how quickly it will be implemented, with hundreds of millions of pounds riding on the outcome.

The other large-scale telecoms equipment suppliers are Sweden's Ericsson and Finland's Nokia. British lawmakers have lamented that no Western company offers the same value equipment, though there have been calls to create a Western consortium to compete with China. — Reuters

Pandemic knocks Singapore into recession

SINGAPORE: Singapore's trade-reliant economy plunged into recession in the second quarter with a record contraction, signaling a rough first half globally and an equally challenging outlook as the coronavirus crisis exacts a heavy toll on business and demand.

Gross domestic product (GDP) dived by a record 41.2 percent in the three months ended March, on a quarter-on-quarter annualized basis, preliminary data from the Ministry of Trade and Industry showed yesterday. That was worse than economists' expectations for a 37.4 percent decline in the quarter when Singapore was under a lockdown to curb the spread of the virus.

The first in Asia to report second-quarter GDP data, the grim numbers for the wealthy city-state - a bellwether for the global economy - underscore the sweeping worldwide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and point to an arduous road ahead. Many major economies are already facing their steepest downturn in decades. "If you want to read something into this, it is what is going to happen to economies that have taken a similar sort of lockdown," said Rob Carnell, chief economist, Asia-Pacific at ING Bank.

In June, the International Monetary Fund warned of a steep contraction in global economic activity as the health crisis shut businesses, depressed consumption and paralyzed trade. It forecast 2020 world output to shrink by 4.9 percent, compared with a 3.0 percent contraction predicted in April.

The once-in-a-century pandemic has so far infected over 13 million people worldwide and killed more than 571,000. Singapore has reported 46,283 coronavirus cases with 26 deaths as of Monday.

"There is an element of global weakness in there as well, obviously the trade side is very important for Singapore and that has been absolutely clobbered," Carnell said. The sectoral impact was broadbased with the services and construction sector hardest hit. Construction plummeted 95.6 percent on a quarter-on-quarter basis, grinding to a near halt as the city-state quarantined tens of thousands of migrant laborers in dormitories rav-



SINGAPORE: Cyclists ride along Marina Bay overlooking the financial business district in Singapore yesterday. Singapore plunged into recession in the second quarter as the economy contracted more than 40 percent, preliminary data showed yesterday. — AFP

aged by the virus.

"We were expecting these numbers to look quite dismal, although this is worse than what we had expected," said Steve Cochrane, economist at Moody's Analytics.

On a year-on-year basis, GDP dived 12.6 percent versus economists' forecast for a 10.5 percent contraction. The manufacturing sector grew 2.5 percent from a year ago, mainly due to a surge in output in biomedical sector, though that was still lower than the 8.2 percent rise in the first quarter.

The GDP slump marked the second consecutive quarter of contractions for the global finance hub - having declined a revised 0.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter and 3.3 percent quarter-on-quarter - meeting the definition for a technical recession.

Worst-ever slump

The Singapore dollar was down 0.2 percent on the day versus the US dollar. The government

expects full-year GDP to contract in the range of -7 percent to -4 percent, the biggest downturn in its history. Citi analysts see a 8.5 percent contraction and expect another downgrade to official forecasts next month when final GDP data is released.

The central bank eased its monetary policy in March and has introduced measures to boost bank lending, while the government has pumped in nearly S\$100 billion (\$72 billion) worth of stimulus to blunt the impact of the pandemic. The People's Action Party, which extended its unbroken rule in last week's election, has said protecting Singaporean jobs is its biggest priority.

Analysts expect the economy to start improving as more business and services reopen, but warned of a bumpy road ahead. "We expect growth to rebound in H2 supported by a massive fiscal response," said Oxford Economics' Sung Eun Jung. "But if global demand suffers another blow from a re-imposition of lockdowns...we are likely to see a more 'W-shaped' recovery." — Reuters

areas like digital payments, education and health. "There's no question we are facing a difficult moment today, in India and around the world. The dual challenges to our health and to our economies have forced us to rethink how we work and how we live," Pichai said.

"But times of challenge can lead to incredible moments of innovation," Indian-born Pichai said according to a transcript of his remarks released by the US search engine giant.

Foreign firms have spent tens of billions of dollars in India in recent years as they fight for a piece of the Asian giant's burgeoning digital economy. This has included only this year around \$16

billion in investments from Facebook, Intel and others in stakes in the digital services unit of Jio, controlled by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani. Pichai on Monday briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his plans, but a government statement suggested that Modi also expressed concerns about data security and privacy. Modi "said that tech companies need to put in efforts to bridge the trust deficit," the statement said.

Earlier this month the Indian government banned 59 Chinese cellphone apps including the hugely popular TikTok over concerns the firms were passing user data to the Chinese government. — AFP

G7 ministers urge implementation of G20 debt freeze

WASHINGTON: Group of Seven finance ministers on Monday called for full implementation of a G20 freeze in debt service payments by all official bilateral creditors, amid growing pressure on China's state-owned banks and enterprises to join the relief effort. In a teleconference early Monday, the G7 ministers underscored the need for greater transparency about lending, a US Treasury spokesperson said, an apparent reference to confidentiality clauses included in many Chinese loans to developing countries in Africa and elsewhere.

The ministers discussed domestic and international economic responses to the coronavirus pandemic and strategies to reverse a deeper-than-projected downturn in the global economy, ahead of a virtual meeting of finance officials from the Group of 20 advanced economies on Saturday.

G20 members, including China, and the Paris Club of official creditors in April offered a freeze on debt service payments to the 73 poorest countries through year-end to free up an estimated \$12 billion in funds for fighting the outbreak. But implementation of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) has proven challenging, and the unexpectedly deep downturn in the global economy has prompted calls for extension and expansion of the moratorium. China's refusal to include its state-supported China Development Bank and state-owned enterprises in the debt payment suspension and concerns over confidentiality agreements included in many Chinese loans to countries in Africa have slowed progress in executing the debt freeze, economists say.

Private-sector participation has also been sluggish. A senior US official said the G7 ministers discussed the need for China to participate fully and transparently in the global initiative. "It's key, both to realizing the full potential of the DSSI and from a transparency perspective," the official said. So far, 41 countries have applied for relief under the DSSI and the Paris Club has signed agreements with 20 countries ranging from Ivory Coast to Ethiopia and Pakistan.

World Bank President David Malpass said transparency was vital to ease work on debt restructurings and aid in reconciling debtor-creditor data. "It's important that the G20 broaden the scope of the debt suspension initiative, extend it, and that commercial creditors join," he said in a statement to Reuters Monday. Malpass last week backed an extension of the debt payment freeze through 2021 and the need for increased transparency about lending and said all official bilateral creditors, including policy banks such as China's Development Bank, and state-owned enterprises with implicit government guarantees should take part. — Reuters

Google to invest \$10bn in India

NEW DELHI: Google said Monday it will invest \$10 billion in India over the next five to seven years as it battles rivals like Facebook and Amazon as it battles rivals like Facebook and Amazon as it battles rivals like Facebook and Amazon as it battles rivals like Facebook and Amazon

Chief executive Sunder Pichai told a virtual Google in India event that its fund would help "accelerate India's digital economy" and will include investing in local firms and infrastructure in

Business

Venezuela's fuel shortages persist despite Iran deliveries

Country continues to witness long queues at gas stations

CARACAS: Long queues at gas stations around the country underscore Venezuela's continuing fuel shortages, despite Iran stepping in to help its Latin American ally with a major fuel shipment last month. "Iranian petrol is an illusion that has lasted a month," driver Nestor Hernandez told AFP in Maracaibo, the country's second-largest city.

He said he still had to queue for hours at petrol stations in the city that once was Venezuela's booming oil capital, where long lines, sleepless nights and anxiety have now become the norm for those seeking fuel. Despite enormous reserves, oil-producing Venezuela is experiencing a serious fuel shortage, exacerbated by the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The gasoline never arrived," says Pedro Perales, a resident of Puerto Ordaz in the eastern state of Bolivar, which borders Brazil. He said he spent two days straight, including the night, in his car waiting his turn to fill up with gas. Even then, he could only get half a tank, the quota per vehicle.

Up until 2018, Venezuela was sending 500,000 barrels per day to the United States alone, and received in return 120,000 bpd of light oil, diluents and fuel-producing supplies. Sanctions, however, have forced Venezuela—which used to refine enough oil for its own needs—to turn to allies such as Iran to alleviate a desperate gasoline shortage.

Tehran duly sent five tankers in May, laden with 1.5 million barrels of fuel, additives, spare parts and

other materials. The situation improved initially at gas stations with dollarized prices in several regions, but it did not take long for kilometer-long (half a mile-long) queues to form again.

The exception is Caracas: service stations in the capital are functioning normally again after running dry in March, during the first weeks of the coronavirus lockdown.

Price hike

The socialist government of President Nicolas Maduro increased fuel prices on June 1. In a country where fuel has been practically free, a liter of high-octane gasoline rose to 50 cents, though subsidies have been maintained within strict consumption and registration limits. The country is almost entirely dependent on oil exports for revenues, but production has fallen to roughly a quarter of its 2008 level as Venezuela enters its sixth year in recession.

Maduro's government blames the loss in production on US sanctions, including those levied against the state oil company PDVSA, but many analysts say the regime has failed to invest in or maintain infrastructure. Venezuela's oil production, which reached 3.2 million barrels a day 12 years ago, is collapsing.

Analysts expect the monthly report of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) today to reflect a further drop after

OPEC report may reflect output drop



MARACAIBO: Drivers queue to refill the tanks of their cars at a gas station in Maracaibo, Zulia State, Venezuela. — AFP

Venezuelan output fell below 600,000 bpd last month. Its refining system has disintegrated along with production. With capacity to process 1.3 mbd, it was barely ticking over at 12 percent of its potential in the first quarter of 2020, according to industry sources.

'A death foretold'

Ezio Angelini, head of the Maracaibo Chamber of

Commerce, said what's happening at the gas stations in his city "is the chronicle of a death foretold." "We are going back to the queues," said Angelini. "We knew this would happen, because Venezuela is not producing gasoline or is producing very little." The United States—which maintains sanctions against Venezuela and its oil in an attempt to displace Maduro—has challenged Iran's shipments, but Caracas and Tehran have said that they will continue. — AFP

UK economy begins tepid recovery in May after record slump

LONDON: Britain's economy took a first step on the long road to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis in May, as activity began to pick up after lockdown restrictions began to ease, but there was less of a rebound than economists had forecast. Gross domestic product rose by 1.8 in May after slumping by a record 20.3 in April, Britain's first full month of lockdown, the Office for National Statistics said, below all forecasts in a Reuters poll of economists.

Over the three months to May, the economy shrank by 19.1 and compared with a year ago it is 24.0 smaller. "The pick-up in output in May is more likely to reflect the partial release of pent-up demand as restrictions began to loosen, rather than evi-

dence of a genuine recovery," said Suren Thiru, head of economics at the British Chambers of Commerce.

The weak rebound was driven by just 0.9 growth in Britain's large services sector, with weakness in professional services, commercial property and computer programming. More than 44,000 people in Britain have died from the disease, the highest death toll in Europe. Britain's government closed non-essential shops and other businesses to the public on March 23, shortly after ordering the closure of bars, restaurants and cinemas. In May, there was a limited relaxation of lockdown rules, and more businesses became used to operating under the new restrictions. Private sector data has shown some



LONDON: In this file photo, shoppers walk past signs asking people to adhere to the British government's current social distancing guidelines and stay two meters (2M) apart, as they pass re-opened shops in Covent Garden in London. — AFP

signs of recovery in May and June, as lockdown measures eased, but the Bank of England has warned that a

big rise in unemployment is likely later this year as temporary job support measures end. — Reuters

Swatch sales nearly halved due to virus

ZURICH: Swatch, the world's top watch company, said yesterday its sales were nearly halved in the first half of the year due to coronavirus lockdowns, but that it has already returned to profitable operations.

The Swiss-based group whose brands also include Omega, Longines and Tissot, said sales plunged by 46.1 percent in the first half of 2020 from the same period last year to 2.2 billion Swiss francs (\$2.3 billion, 2.1 billion euros). It registered a net loss of 308 million francs for the period, against a profit of 415 million for the first six months of 2019.

The sales figures were just below the analyst consensus established by Swiss financial news agency AWP, while the loss far exceeded the 250 million francs expected by experts.

The company said state-imposed lockdowns to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus had at times shut up to 80 percent of its sales channels, but by June its operations had already returned to profit.

"The Group's management is convinced that the sales and profit situation will improve quickly in the coming months, parallel to the further easing of Covid-19 measures" in countries, it said in an earnings statement.

"A positive operating result is expected for the full year," it added.

Swatch said launches of new products as well as lower costs should help it overcome the first half loss, and pointed to a strong rebound in areas where lockdowns have been lifted,



BASEL: The Swiss-based group Swatch whose brands also include Omega, Longines and Tissot, said sales plunged by 46.1 percent in the first half of 2020 from the same period last year to 2.2 billion Swiss francs (\$2.3 billion, 2.1 billion euros). — AFP

including double-digit sales growth in mainland China in May and June compared to the same period last year.

The company shuttered definitively

some 260 sales points during the first half of the year and it shed 6.5 percent of staff over the period to around 33,700 employees. — AFP

Libya small businesses struggle to rebuild after waves of unrest

TRIPOLI: Libyan businessman Mahmud Al-Sharkassi surveyed the ruins of his factory on the outskirts of war-scarred capital Tripoli, disheartened but determined to get back to work. "This used to be the heart of my project. Everything started here," he said, looking over destroyed buildings where he used to store kitchen fittings before they were distributed to showrooms.

The Ain Zara district on the southern edges of Tripoli, where the factory lies, became a battleground in April last year as the forces of eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar tried to seize the capital from the UN-recognized administration. His rivals launched a searing fightback and repelled his forces earlier this year. But the violence had devastated industrial zones and residential suburbs in Tripoli's hinterland. The battle was the latest blow to small businesses in Libya, which plunged into violence after the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

After Gaddafi took power in a 1969 coup he had practically scrapped the private sector, sweeping away schools, factories, businesses, libraries and

hotels and replacing them with state-run enterprises. That saddled the oil-dependent country with a bloated public sector—two million civil servants out of a population of 6.6 million, their salaries representing 59 percent of the state's budget, according to the central bank.

Gaddafi's fall triggered the emergence of young and vibrant entrepreneurs, who have carried on despite the mammoth challenges facing the North African country. Sharkassi believes small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can be a vector for development—providing the state commits to diversifying the economy away from oil income and encouraging private enterprise. "There are opportunities," he said.

'Too many obstacles'

Nessrine Gaddah, from the French state's international technical cooperation agency Expertise France, agrees. "The mindset of young people has changed. Now many realize that the future is in the private sector, not in the public sector anymore," she told AFP. But the challenges are complex.

"A lot needs to be done," said Gaddah. There are "too many obstacles that have made most of Libya's SMEs too fragile and sometimes not even sustainable, (including) access to finance."

Even the process of registering a company is "long, painful and expensive", she said. Marwan Boueshi, an ironworker whose workshop was partly destroyed in the battle for Tripoli, urged the government to introduce structural reforms, restore stability and show it is capable of fighting graft.



TRIPOLI: Small businesses have taken a heavy blow in Libya after the country plunged into chaos and violence following the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi. — AFP

"Corruption has become alarmingly commonplace," the 47-year-old said.

"If you're not corrupt, you're seen as not clever enough to do business." Five years ago, deadly battles between rival militias prompted Walid Fathi to close his Tripoli-based printing and advertising company and leave the country. "From one war to the next our company did not survive," the 45-year-old said. His family set up the company in 2006 and it was successful, he said, but not worth risking their security and that of a dozen employees. — AFP

S Korea to spend \$95 billion on green projects

SEOUL: South Korea outlined a plan yesterday to spend 114.1 trillion won (\$94.6 billion) on a "New Deal" to create jobs and help the economy recover from the coronavirus fallout, anchored in part by "green" investment in electric vehicles and hydrogen cars.

The six-year plan will build digital infrastructure and a stronger safety net for job seekers, but its "Green New Deal" aspects have drawn attention as they aim to cut heavy reliance on fossil fuels in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

"The coronavirus pandemic once again reaffirmed the urgency of responses to climate change," President Moon Jae-in said in a speech, adding that the new projects were expected to create about 1.9 million jobs through 2025.

The plan envisages investment in smart grids to manage electricity use more efficiently, promotion of remote medical services, a work-from-home policy for businesses and online schools based on fifth-generation (5G) wireless networks, and tax breaks for telecom providers who install the systems. First proposed by Moon's ruling party ahead of the parliamentary election in April, the plan set ambitious goals of net-zero emissions by 2050, an end to funding of overseas coal plants, and introduction of a carbon tax.

But environmental groups criticized the initiatives as light on measures to rein in emissions. "This plan is a half-baked deal that lacks the goal of curbing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 and a roadmap to reach that," Greenpeace Korea said in a statement.

Electric and hydrogen-powered cars

A lawmaker helping to draft the legislation, Lee So-young, defended the lack of a nationwide timeline to phase out vehicles with internal combustion engines, saying it could be challenging for major auto exporters such as South Korea to adopt one. "It's easier for auto-import oriented countries like the United Kingdom to set a timeline," she said. South Korea aims to have 1.13 million electric vehicles (EVs) and 200,000 hydrogen cars on the roads by 2025, up from 91,000 and 5,000 each by the end of 2019, Moon said, while the government would add more charging stations for the vehicles.

Hyundai Motor Group leader Euisun Chung said flagship Hyundai Motor and sibling Kia Motors aim to sell 1 million EVs in 2025, together targeting more than a tenth of global market share. Hyundai Motor plans to launch a next-generation electric vehicle with a range of 450 kilometers (280 miles) for every charge, which will take 20 minutes or less, Chung said in a televised message. It aims to export 1,600 hydrogen-powered trucks to Europe by 2025, and develop a new system that doubles battery life at half the price, he said.

That system will also suit ships, trains, aircraft, buildings, power plants, and military purposes, he added. — Reuters

Last week Seoul said it would invest 2.6 trillion won on its own version of the Green New Deal, and set a 2035 deadline to stop registration of vehicles with internal combustion engines. It vowed to convert 4,000 of the capital's fleet of 7,396 public buses to electric or hydrogen power by 2025, and promised more conversion incentives for new taxis. — Reuters

Business

Pandemic has silver lining for Iraq: Food self-sufficiency

Ministry accelerates campaign to make Iraqi food markets self-sustainable

AFAK, Iraq: Unlike in years past, Iraqi farmer Ahmed Mohsen now walks past his local market with a smile on his face. The pale green melons he harvested are selling fast, thanks to the coronavirus pandemic. Iraq, in a bid to prevent the spread of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, shut its 32 border crossings to goods and people coming from Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia in mid-March.

That helped Iraq's agriculture ministry accelerate a campaign to make Iraqi food markets self-sustainable, after they had spent years relying on foreign imports for half of their supply. The land fit for farming in Iraq is roughly 9.3 million hectares (23 million acres) — much less than Iran's nearly 46 million or Syria's almost 14 million hectares.



Iraq's 40 million people still rely on farming to live

"For years, farmers have been working at a loss with little support from the state," said Mohsen, who lives in Iraq's agricultural heartland, the southern province of Diwaniyah. "But with the new coronavirus, the authorities have begrudgingly been forced to close the border."

Every year, Iraq would buy \$2.8 billion in goods from regional trade giant Turkey, with Iranian imports coming in second with \$2.2 billion in products sold to Baghdad. It was a grim reality for a country whose ancestral civilization, Mesopotamia, has been hailed for its pioneering agricultural and irrigation technologies for thousands of years. The land of two rivers is now making a small comeback. Every day, Mohsen's melons make their way from his home village of Afaq to be sold en masse to the rest of the country.

"The authorities didn't want to help farmers, but in the end they allowed us to prove that we can provide for the nutrition needs of Iraqis," said Mohsen, a 32-year-old farming engineer.

'The state is late'

A third of Iraq's 40 million people still rely on farming to live, but the industry is riddled with inefficiencies. As a holdover from the socialist era of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein, the government provides subsidies in water, fertilizer and equipment and purchases certain products—particularly wheat, barley and lentils—from Iraqi farmers at a price above the market rate.

But the state usually also imports cheap foodstuffs from Iran and Turkey at huge volume, causing an imbalance in the market, experts wrote in the "Sustainability" environmental magazine last year. Their research found that Iraqi farmers often opted not to work their land because they did not expect to sell the harvest, given the oversupply from neighboring countries.

Local farmers usually provide about five million tons of wheat products yearly, complemented by around three million tons imported from neighboring countries, mostly flour. Those who did sell their harvest to the government reported months-long delays in getting paid, which are still ongoing today.

That's why the coronavirus, despite bringing death and suffering to many, was also a blessing in disguise for their sector, farmers told AFP. "Each year, the state is late in paying farmers and this slaps us with losses," said Khashan Karayiz, 70.

He comes from a long line of wheat farmers and this year, for the first time he can remember, he has already sold all of his harvest by July. With little competition from Turkish or Iranian rivals, he was able to sell directly to the private sector, earning more money more quickly.

"I hope Baghdad will stop imports, in order to financially and morally support Iraqi farmers," Karayiz said. A little further on at the market, Hani Shayer offers melons, aubergines, cucumbers and tomatoes. It is the



ARBIL, Iraq: A worker inspects grain at a silo in the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region on July 5, 2020. — AFP

first time, he told AFP proudly, that his produce has been able to reign supreme in local markets. With no competition, his wares—which he insists "are much better quality than imports"—can be sold at lower prices.

Reaping what you sow

Already, Iraq's agriculture ministry has placed bans or new tariffs on 25 fruits and vegetables. Across the border, Syria and Turkey have also stopped selling their agricultural goods abroad due to COVID-19. That has helped Iraq become self-sufficient in 28 food products for the first time in years, said Mohammed Kachach, who heads Diwaniyah's Farming Confederation. Egg production, for example, steadily grew from 11 million eggs a month in January to 17 million in April, May and June, according to Iraq's agriculture ministry.

But structural problems remain. According to a government source, wheat and barley is still being smuggled in from Syria, Iran and Turkey and then being mixed into Iraqi farmers' harvests to pass them off as local and therefore win government subsidies.

And according to a recent report by the United Nations' World Food Programme and the Farming and Agricultural Organization, the lower prices in the market do benefit consumers, but still hurt local producers. Finally, Iraq continues to face chronic water shortages.

Its two mighty rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, risk are being slowly choked off by dams and over-use upstream by the very trade partners that have long brought the most agricultural goods, Turkey and Iran. — AFP



CBK receives KD 500,000 prize winner

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently received Abdul Khaleq Ghloum Ismael, the lucky winner of the Al-Najma account biannual draw

award of KD 500,000 that was made on air through the FM 88.8 radio channel.

Received by CBK executives, Ismael expressed his joy noting that he has had the Najma account for years and that he was fully satisfied with the services the bank provides.

On his part, CBK's acting general manager for individual banking services, Hanadi Al-Mislem wished the winner good luck and stressed that CBK clients can still multiply their opportunities to win KD 5000 weekly, KD 20,000 monthly, KD 500,000 biannually in addition to the annual grand prize of KD 1.5 million.

Tijo Thomas wins KD 4,000 in Burgan Bank Value Account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank yesterday announced Tijo Thomas Manadan as the winner of the Value Account KD 4000 draw. The winner expressed his excitement of winning the cash prize of KD 4,000.

Dedicated to offer the best in-class services, Burgan Bank's Value Account presents customers with exceptional features which were specifically designed to suit the needs of expatriates living in Kuwait. Account holders will be able to enjoy matchless benefits that include receiving a free credit card for one year, application for a loan, in addition to a chance to enter the quarterly draw to win KD 4000 as well as other discounts from selected merchant stores. Burgan Bank will continue presenting exclusive services and draws with an aim of exceeding customers' expectations while offering them chances to win valuable cash prizes all year round. Opening a Value account is simple, interested Individuals with salaries starting from KD 150 and above are eligible to open a Value Account.

Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is the youngest commercial Bank and second largest by assets in Kuwait, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base.

Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks. The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

Towards a productivity oriented economic discourse

By Manaf Abdulaziz Al-Hajeri

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is obvious to those keeping up with economic developments in Kuwait that there is a clear dilemma in the decision-making process. This is with regard to two specific key issues, namely the growing budget deficit and the consequent concern for the sustainability of the economy, and the private sector's position and role in this context. Regardless of which of these two issues we begin with, the immediate thought that comes to mind is the state's economic model. A model which is regarded by the majority as a rentier model that has made it difficult to integrate new ideas and concepts, since they may be construed as favoritism towards specific segments of society. This, in turn, has built up our appetite to explore the current and prevailing economic discourse and ideologies such as the fair distribution of benefits, the right of some segments to potential governmental support as opposed to others, and more importantly, the dire absence of key concepts to date, specifically the productivity of our economy.

In the past three months, I have realized the multitude of reports concerning the status of the economy that remain pending. Among them is a report issued by The Conference Board (TCB) on priority sectors in terms of productivity. According to the report, labor productivity declined by 2 pa on average from 2000 to 2018. In most other regions of the world, labor productivity growth has been the major source of output growth for decades. Negative productivity means that the potential of the GCC is not realized. If productivity growth had remained flat, economic growth in the region would have been faster than the average for emerging and developing economies. A recovery to positive productivity could accelerate economic growth in the region beyond that of major emerging economies in the next decade.

A careful reading of this report and developing well-thought-out solutions can ensure a quantum leap for our rentier economy. The report underscores the urgency for GCC countries to come together and reach a consensus on which are the productivity sectors such as financial services, telecommunications services, and alternative energy,

in order to move beyond this current sustainability predicament.

Here is an important thought: what if we introduced the word "productivity" as a fundamental concept that can drive significant change for a new economy? How about swapping a rentier economy that is laden with employment in the government sector, regardless of this sector's productivity level, for an economy that believes in strong modern governance with its sights set on the productivity of a private sector, which operates according to the highest standards of transparency?

In short, what if we trigger a productive economic discourse, rather than the worn-out rentier one?

Today, all that we fear in the sustainability of our model has swiftly surfaced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has also brought to light, now more than ever, the contrast between the strength of our financial model on one hand, and the weakness of our economic model on the other. The Kuwaiti economic model is a democratic institutional one based on the diversity and free speech, which makes it distinct, but on the other hand, it is one based on a rentier system that relies heavily on oil as the only source of national income. It also suffers from a significant weakness in its overall structure in terms of productivity, which in turn, leads to a weakness in the sustainability of the economy's constituents. This contrast between weaknesses and strengths of models, and between what is financial and what is economic, has clearly created confusion in the economic decision-making process. For instance, when considering the measures taken by the government in response to the pandemic, we can see that the lack of a solid decision has stalled a number of pleas from businesses of all sizes that required the provision of liquidity to avoid detrimental actions, such as reducing salaries or laying off employees in large numbers, which may create a case of recession that is difficult to overcome. All of this comes at a time when the state is experiencing a major budget deficit in one of its most vital components: the expansion of public sector employment, and consequently, there is an urgent need for a unified decision with regards to creating more jobs in the private sector as a top economic priority.

Uncertainty

This contradiction created evident uncertainty with regards to the private sector's positioning in all of this. That said, is there a clear government policy put in place that considers the private sector as a strong alternative for employment for the coming years, in response to the government's budget deficit and salaries component? And if so, will this create in turn, greater opportunities for the private sector, to grow and create jobs for a skilled workforce, while keeping up and competing with global labor markets?

Allowing for a confusing discourse to prevail and impact decision-makers is unwarranted; especially when we see that an environment of purposeless criticism has led to a state of paralysis in decision-making, whether in the government or the private sector. On the other hand, a coherent public opinion with long-term goals to build a productive, superior, and sustainable economy, away from skepticism in the private sector, is still non-existent. In fact, the recent discourse has taken a turn, reflecting a sentiment of hostility towards expatriates, regardless of caliber and skill, which in turn, has amplified the challenge faced by the nation in attracting talent from the global and regional labor markets. It has also become a substitute discourse that lacks any room for development or change. Unfortunately, it fails to address matters of employment in terms of deploying a more modern approach when it comes to managing skills and talent or enhancing productivity. It has even impacted Kuwait's relationship with other countries negatively.

As the New Kuwait 2035 vision testifies, the government's interest in the private sector is evident, but lacks enforcement and is tainted by hesitation. This is illustrated, for example, through the current model put in place to support private-sector employees, which is based on government support through the Manpower Support Fund, i.e. private companies with semi-governmental salaries. This model specifically defies the overall positioning of the private sector and its employees. That said, there is an urgent need for an in-depth understanding of the private sector, its strengths and weaknesses, and more importantly, a strong belief in its capabilities to manage financial resources and other resources effectively and productively. However, when referring to the private sec-

tor, there are many generalizations and risks that can only be taken on by a conscious government that is capable of managing the wild horse that the private sector can be; the risk of procurement, governance, and ensuring full alignment of both private and public interests are examples of areas that ought to be addressed therein. This level of awareness already exists to a reasonable degree as we had witnessed when the financial sector was successfully reorganized and was further demonstrated with the formation of the Capital Markets Authority. It was proven even more successful and showed great confidence with the privatization of the stock exchange, Boursa Kuwait.

Rentier model

The prevailing rentier model and low productivity mindset are distorted concepts of citizenship that grant rights with no commitments in return, and these constitute a dysfunctional landscape. That said, new economic discourses must be based on the capabilities of building trust, by creating a solid reform plan that is rolled out among institutions to eliminate corruption, and in turn, lead to institutional excellence. Also, it is important that creativity is empowered within a framework of social responsibility for institutions, in order to transcend its narrow role to an active national role, and encourage the seeking of the necessary assistance from specialized authorities by focusing on the qualifications, merit, and the components of trust. Ultimately, implementing a movement of institutional excellence and a true institutional reform to confront corruption in all its forms is the need of the hour.

To that effect, we support the complete transformation of the economic discourse, as many others do, where the first statement should focus on facing economic challenges for what's to come post-COVID-19. It must be one that puts an end to the current rentier discourse that stands for quantity rather than quality, diminishes any sense of competition and confuses decision-makers. Undoubtedly, Kuwait is in want of a discourse that urges a true economic reform with clear objectives aimed at building a sustainable and productive economy. Note: Manaf Abdulaziz Al-Hajeri is Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz)

Classifieds

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

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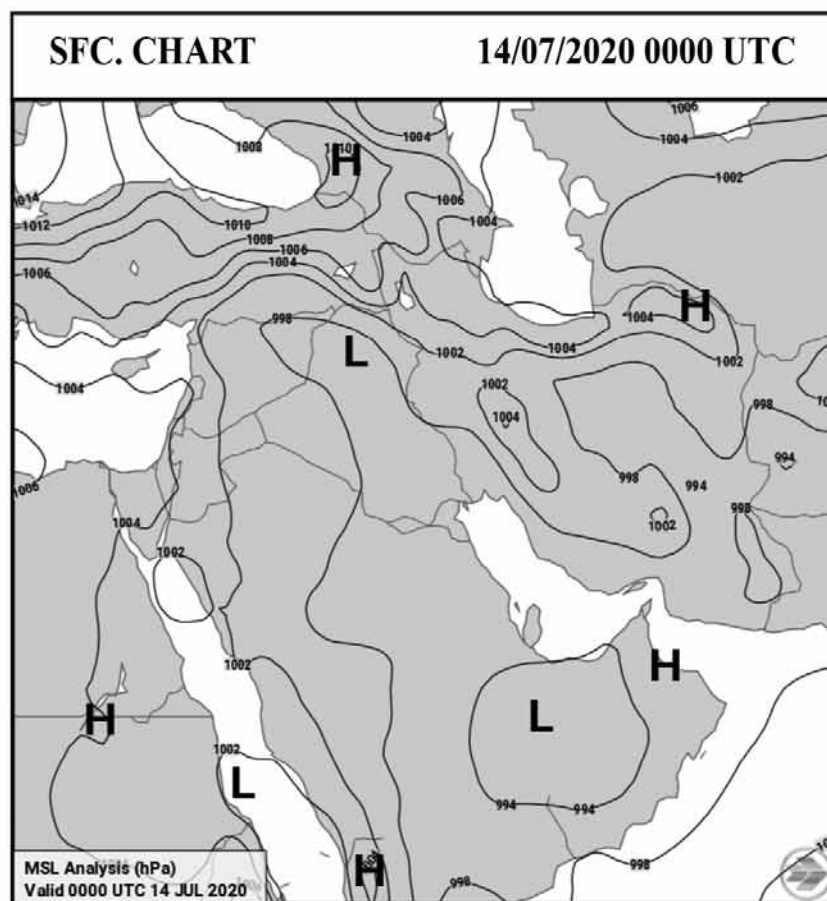
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 06 - 28 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with light south easterly wind changing to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
------------------------	---------------------

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	47 °C	35 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	48 °C	32 °C
ABDALY	47 °C	32 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	48 °C	35 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	47 °C	32 °C
SALMIYAH	43 °C	35 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	44 °C	33 °C
WAFRA	46 °C	31 °C
SALMY	47 °C	33 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	07/15	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas and some high clouds will appear	49 °C	32 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Thursday	07/16	Very hot	49 °C	32 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h
Friday	07/17	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	48 °C	33 °C	NW-SE	15 - 40 km/h
Saturday	07/18	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	49 °C	30 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:24
Sunrise	04:58
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	15:28
Sunset	18:50
Isha	20:20

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	48 °C
MIN. Temp.	31 °C
MAX. RH	27 %
MIN. RH	06 %
MAX. Wind	NE 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

Old name: Ebrahim Gulam Hussain, **New name:** Ibrahim, Father's name: Gulam Hussain Shikari, Surname: Shikari, DOB: 05/02/1996, Passport No: J3219770, Address: Mohammediya Colony PO. Galiakot. (C 5498) 15-7-2020

EMERGENCY ☎ 112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

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

STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) Relations with those you care about continue to be warm and supportive. Friends may want to pitch in and help you with a project, Aries, or you could lend a hand to someone else. Strong bonds with others could be forged at this time, which might lead to firm and lasting friendships in the future. This is also a good day to turn your attention to repairing, redecorating, or refurbishing your home.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) An appealing new face could appear on the scene today, Cancer. This might lead to a new friendship, although this person could be charming enough to bring out your insecurities. Put these aside - you're looking great. Since your efficiency is at an all-time high, plan on taking advantage of that by dealing with some errands you've been postponing for quite some time.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Romance and marriage are very much on your mind today, Libra. A special conversation with a possible love partner could have you hankering for happily ever after. Books on attracting and maintaining relationships might be especially appealing as well as useful. Take care not to put too much stock in detailed analyses, however. Remember that such books are based on generalities. You're unique.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) Friction with family members, particularly women, could prove irritating, especially since you're torn between their quirks and the love you have for them. This isn't the time to hold grudges, Capricorn. Let them go. You might feel the urge to do some home repairs, redecorate, or otherwise improve your home, or perhaps cook a great meal. Channel your energy into these activities instead of quarrelling.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) A strong sense of inspiration that seems to come from the higher planes could boost your natural artistic abilities, Taurus. No matter how rushed you may be with other tasks, it's important to take time to note your ideas. They're definitely worth pursuing and you'll want to refer to them later. If you're thinking about a friend, give that person a call. He or she might have news for you.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) A male friend could put you in touch with people from foreign countries or people who have traveled a lot. They might have valuable information that you could use later. This information could also help you finish old projects that have been waiting to be done. Your eye for detail is especially acute, Leo. Make notes of interesting facts even if they don't apply right now. You'll make good use of them later.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) You're feeling especially healthy, energetic, and attractive today, Scorpio, and some friends may suddenly see you in a new light. This could bring a valuable boost in self-confidence. New careers that pay more and offer more of a challenge are especially appealing to you now. Consider them seriously. Write down your ideas and research them to see if they're workable. This may be the start of a whole new life.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18) Today should bring pleasant and profitable communications with women, possibly some new friends. A lot of people will want talk to you, although perhaps more than you can realistically handle. Be careful not to commit to too many things. You could end up spreading yourself too thin. Travel to faraway lands may seem tempting at this time, Aquarius, but that might not be possible for some time. Relax and enjoy the company for now.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Although you might feel a bit inclined toward solitude today, Gemini, don't indulge it. This is a great day to get out with friends and meet new people, if possible, particularly women. You can forge closer bonds at this time, and you might also make valuable business contacts that prove profitable in the future. Affectionate communication with a romantic partner can make your day. Take the evening to enjoy a tête-à-</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) You're probably feeling especially sexy, Virgo, and you might want to take a lover out for a romantic dinner, if possible. You would especially enjoy going all out, experimenting with a new outfit, scent, or hairstyle. On a more mundane note, investments of either time or money should pay off today, as could hard work performed in the past. Have a great day!</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Your natural warmth and loving nature should be more apparent than usual today, Sagittarius. You're likely to attract new people, both men and women, into your aura. Perhaps old friends you haven't seen for a while suddenly reappear on the scene. This is an excellent time to plan a social event or invite a friend to lunch, if possible. You might also want to fix yourself up and plan a romantic evening!</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) New opportunities may give you a chance to increase your financial standing and expand yourself professionally. Innovations that you've produced in the past have attracted the attention of those in positions of authority, Pisces, and the fruits of your labor may manifest now. Don't expect to be able to relax and enjoy them, however, as a lot of effort still lies ahead. Summon all your inner resources and charge ahead.</p>

Lifestyle | Features

Silent screams: Japan rollercoaster virus guide wins hearts

It might be the unlikeliest instructional video ever, but footage of two Japanese amusement park executives demonstrating how to "scream inside your heart" to avoid spreading COVID-19 while on a rollercoaster has been a roaring success. "Now our customers stay silent while riding on rollercoasters," a spokeswoman for amusement park operator Fujiyuko told AFP, after the video on riding etiquette for the coronavirus era went viral. The video features the executives, one in a full suit and tie, the other in a shirt and bowtie, sitting stiffbacked and straightfaced in silence, with only the only sounds coming from the whipping of the wind and the grinding of the rollercoaster.

As they plunge downwards, one executive serenely readjusts his hair, and his facemask, but both other-

wise remain stoically silent, even as they sway violently in the coaster car. At the end of the ride, one man lifts his hands off the seat handles, visibly trembling. A black screen follows featuring advice that some social media users have dubbed a slogan for 2020: "scream inside your heart." The video was first posted last month, as coronavirus restrictions eased and reopening theme parks asked visitors to avoid screaming and keep social distance.

"Even though the amusement park association's guidelines ask you to 'refrain from speaking loudly' we have received complaints it is 'difficult' or 'impossible', so Fujiyuko Highland offers a good example," the operator said on its website with the video. It promised customers who could keep their screams silent would get a discount on photos taken

of them on the park's signature Fujiyama coaster, which plunges riders from a height of more than 71 metres. On Twitter, the footage delighted viewers in Japan and around the world. "This video is great fun," one Japanese user wrote. Others lauded the theme park for inadvertently summarising the way many have felt after months of the coronavirus pandemic. "Literally the best description of 2020 I've ever read: please scream inside your heart," one Twitter user wrote.—AFP

Visitors take a ride on a rollercoaster at the Toshimaen amusement park in Tokyo on Monday.—AFP



Ancient Aztec palace ruins found in Mexico City

The remains of an ancient Aztec palace, which later was the home of Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes, were discovered under a landmark building in Mexico City, the government said Monday. Basalt slab floors were found under the stately building of the Nacional Monte de Piedad, a historic pawn shop in the middle of the capital's central square, during building renovations. The floors correspond to an open area in the palace of Aztec ruler Axayacatl, who was the father of Montezuma, one of the final rulers of the empire.

Experts say that "it was part of an open space of the old Axayacatl Palace, probably a patio," the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) said. During excavation, archeologists also found evidence of the home Cortes had at the site after the fall of the Aztec empire. Archeologists noted that the floor was likely made of materials reused from Axayacatl's palace, which, like other sacred Aztec buildings, were razed by the conquistadors. The discovery was made during reinforcement work on the Nacional Monte de Piedad building, which dates back to 1755. Cortes first arrived in modern-day Mexico in 1518 on a mission to explore the region's interior for Spanish colonization.—AFP

Galapagos reopens tourist sites after virus lockdown

The Galapagos Islands on Monday reopened its tourist sites and marine reserve, which had been closed since March due to the coronavirus pandemic, Ecuadorian Environment Minister Paulo Proano said. "Today, under due biosecurity protocols, we are reopening the @parquegalapagos visit sites to contribute to the revitalization of the local economy," Proano wrote on his Twitter account. The environment ministry said that visitors must wear masks and use disinfectant gel, adding that "in the case of recreational sites near populated ports, the maximum stay will be three hours."

The Galapagos, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, partially opened its beaches for residents in May, when Ecuador began to ease its coronavirus lockdown. Only six beaches of the Galapagos National Park were allowed to open for three-hour stretches. The archipelago, with about 30,000 inhabitants, has recorded just 100 COVID-19 infections. Mainland Ecuador has recorded 68,500 cases and more than 5,000 deaths, with authorities reporting 3,277 other deaths were likely from the virus as well.—AFP

Superheroes and skater videos: Young LA entertainers lead new activism



Melina Abdullah (second left), civic leader and co-founder of the Black Lives Matter Los Angeles chapter, and her children (from left to right) Amara Abdullah, Amen Abdullah and Thandiwe Abdullah, pose during a portrait session.

In a town that sells silver-screen fantasies to the world, young Los Angeles entertainers are using their Hollywood talents to inspire and lead a new generation of real-life protesters. "I tell everybody we're all superheroes, because superheroes are the best of humanity," says Ciera Foster, who plays one in web television series "Ninjak vs. the Valiant Universe." "We're walking, breathing history right now." When not controlling machines with her mind as an African-American superhero, Foster organizes demonstrations against racism and police brutality through the streets of Los Angeles.

Like many in the entertainment industry, Foster—a students' rights and justice reform activist for years—spoke out after witnessing footage of the killing of George Floyd in May. Many young volunteers create "super-well produced" images of the protests that go viral on social media, including for her Black Leadership Allied Coalition.

Drone footage of more than 20,000 people peacefully marching down Hollywood Boulevard last month spread rapidly around the world, becoming an enduring image of the mass movement. "We have photographers hanging off bridges and the sides of buildings covering us. They're sending these full-on Sundance Festival pieces... it's amazing," said Foster.

'We are the change'

Tyson Suzuki, a young black film editor from Hawaii, has led daily anti-racism protests to the Los Angeles mayor's doorstep at City Hall since Floyd's death. "We start protesting but we do it in harmony: 'Eric Garcetti, listen. Eric Garcetti, listen. We are the change. We are the change.'" His Active Advocate group aims to achieve 100 continuous days of protest, but the thirty something leader's activism also goes back many years. Suzuki began

campaigning as a teenager when he realized his editing skills—honed making skater videos—could be of use for a campaign against big tobacco.

"I'm not an overnight activist, I am an organizer," he says, noting that many of those who support him also work in entertainment. "We all work in the creative economy. When you're creating something, you are innately developing a conceived idea, and the idea is driven with passion. Right now, the passion is destroying racism." For 28-year-old filmmaker AJ Lovelace, that means "doing socially conscious films and plays" as well as using technology and social media to help protesters "find the specific group they align with the most." "My plan to keep the momentum going is to continue to create content," he says.

'A better future'

The Los Angeles movement against racism does not just emerge from and employ the techniques of Hollywood, but actively targets the movie industry itself. Jasmyne Cannick, a 42-year-old social justice advocate, says it is no surprise "that young people in entertainment are pushing back" given the racism still rampant in the sector. "All the people who 'love black people' in Hollywood—they haven't done a good job, because it's still been allowed to continue all this time," she said. "I guess it just takes young people to come in basically with the attitude of 'we don't care—we're going to get this done.'"

For Paris Draper, a 20-year-old singer and activist, her generation's focus on empathy and kindness offer hope for radical change. "We definitely differ from past generations because we are taking the time to hear each other out," she says. "I think in this day and age we are all trying to have a better future."—AFP



This combination of pictures taken shows (from top left) Ciera Foster, actress and co-founder of Black 4 Black Lives; Jasmyne Cannick, 42, social justice advocate; Tyson Suzuki, 27, film editor and founder of "Active Advocate"; Melina Abdullah, civic leader and co-founder of the Black Lives Matter Los Angeles chapter; activist and singer-songwriter Paris Draper, 20, and AJ Lovelace, 28, co-founder of Black 4 Black live.—AFP photos

PARADISE REGAINED THEN LOST: MED MAMMALS MOURN LOCKDOWN END

When Europeans retreated into their homes to observe strict stay-at-home rules to contain the coronavirus, dolphins and whales on the Mediterranean coast basked and thrived in a hitherto unknown calm. But the return of tourists, noisy boats and heavy sea transport with the end of lockdowns in France and other Mediterranean littoral countries has signalled the return of danger and harm caused by human activity for underwater creatures. Nowhere is this more true than in the crystalline waters outside France's second biggest city of Marseille, a nature reserve important for wildlife but also thronged with day-trippers in the summer season. "As soon as the pleasure boaters came back, we saw footage that really annoyed us," said Marion Leclerc from the conser-

vationist organisation Souffleurs d'Ecume (Sea Foam Blowers). In one video, three teenagers jump from a boat close to a finback whale while wearing snorkelling masks, which is dangerous for both animal and human, said Leclerc. "We're speaking of an animal that weighs 70 tons," she lamented. "Many forget that the Mediterranean is also a home, where animals rest, feed and reproduce," Leclerc said. The Mediterranean Sea is home to more than 10,000 species, despite only amounting to 1 percent of the Earth's oceans. But the sea which separates Africa from Europe draws 25 percent of marine traffic. Heavy traffic increases the risk of fatal collision with the sea mammals. "It's the first cause of non-natural mortality for big cetaceans," said Leclerc.

Reduce speed

Out of the 87 marine mammals in the world registered by the UN, 21 have been spotted in the Mediterranean. Most of them are considered at risk of extinction. On a bright summer's morning, a group of fifty striped dolphins splash around an inflatable blue speedboat off La Ciotat bay a short boat ride from Marseille. "We need to reduce our speed and place ourselves parallel to their trajectory to avoid cutting their path. They come and play if they want to," said Laurene Trudelle, at the helm of the boat belonging to the scientific research group GIS3M.

The lockdown brought maritime traffic to an almost complete standstill, giving dolphins and whales the opportunity to explore areas from which they are normally kept at bay by tourists. All scientific studies were put on hold

in the Mediterranean during lockdown, but marine drone manufacturer Sea Proven got the necessary authorisation and funds from Prince Albert II of Monaco to continue observations in the Pelagos Sanctuary, a marine area protected by Italy, Monaco and France.

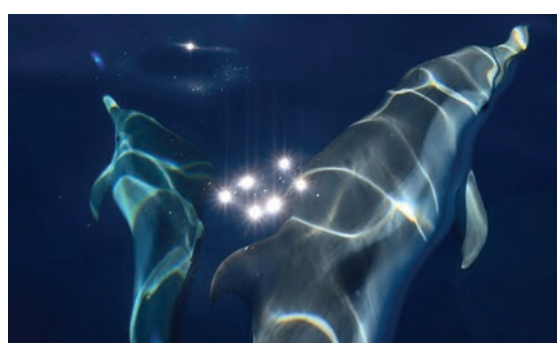
'Reversible pollution'

Bioacoustics researchers from a Toulon University team who analysed Sea Proven's data, observed a 30 decibel decrease in noise on the coastal areas as a result of the total lack of pleasure boaters. And the silence allowed the aquatic creatures to interact in areas between two and six times as large, said researcher Herve Glotin. "The lockdown period showed that we really are responsible for the noise in the bays and that this pollution is completely reversible," Glotin said. "When you think that reducing boats' speed by 10 percent in areas highly populated with marine mammals would be enough to significantly decrease sound pollution and the risk of collision" Glotin added.

The Quiet Sea research project also saw the amount of hydrocarbon—the principal component of petrol—halve during lockdown. "It's really good for biodiversity, so indirectly for all of the food chain," said Glotin. No binding international law obliges ship-owners to preserve marine mammals' natural habitat. But since 2017, France requires boats that are over 24 metres (78 feet) in the Pelagos Sanctuary to have onboard equipment which detects the animals.—AFP



Environmentalists Marion Leclerc and Laurene Trudelle monitor the sea.—AFP photos



Aquatic creatures such as these common dolphins swimming off the southern French coast benefited from less sound pollution from pleasure craft during lockdown.



Researchers track cetaceans in the Mediterranean off La Ciotat near Marseille — during lockdown they observed a 30 decibel noise decrease owing to the lack of pleasure boaters.



US actress Naya Rivera and son Josey Hollis Dorsey arrive for the premiere of "The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part" at the Regency Village theatre on February 2, 2019 in Westwood, California.—AFP photos



A map of Lake Piru is seen during a press conference held for missing actress Naya Rivera on Monday in Piru, California.



Ventura County Sheriff Bill Ayub speaks during a press conference held for missing actress Naya Rivera on Monday.

BODY OF ACTRESS NAYA RIVERA RECOVERED FROM US LAKE



In this file photo taken on April 16, 2016 Actress Naya Rivera attends the 23rd Annual Race To Erase MS Gala in Beverly Hills California.

US officials on Monday found the body of "Glee" actress Naya Rivera in the Californian lake where she drowned last week during a boat trip with her four-year-old son. Rivera's body was retrieved and an initial examination found no evidence of foul play or suicide, Ventura County Sheriff Bill Ayub told a press conference. "We are confident the body we found is that of Naya Rivera," said Ayub, pointing to the location, appearance, clothing and condition of the body. Her body was being taken to a medical examiner's office for a full autopsy and confirmation of her identity from dental records, though no other missing persons have been reported at Lake Piru, he added.

Rivera, 33, is believed to have accidentally drowned after renting the boat with her young son at the camping and recreational hotspot around an hour's drive northwest of Los Angeles. She vanished on Wednesday afternoon, and a massive search involving divers, patrol boats and helicopters was launched after her sleeping son was spotted drifting alone in a boat on the lake. The son later told investigators that Rivera had helped him into the boat before "he looked back and saw her disappear under the surface of the water," said the sheriff. Ayub pointed to the lake's strong currents as a possible cause of a fatal accident. "The idea perhaps being that the boat started drifting—it was unanchored—and that she must-

ered enough energy to get her son back onto the boat, but not enough to save herself," he said. The lake has been closed to the public since yesterday, with around 100 personnel, including the US Coast Guard and rescuers from neighbouring counties, joining the search.

Search teams used footage from video messaging calls Rivera made from the boat before her disappearance, as well as interviews with her son, to scour portions of the lake bed for her remains over six days, with no success. "We believe she was concealed within some of the shrubbery on the floor bed of the lake" before eventually floating to the surface due to natural decomposition, said Ayyub. With less than one foot (30 centimetres) of visibility underwater in

daylight, the recovery operation was a "complex search effort" even with use of sonar equipment, he said.

Rivera was best known for her role as high school cheerleader Santana Lopez in "Glee." She starred for six seasons in the wildly popular musical television series set in a US high school that ended in 2015. The "Glee" cast has been struck by tragedy before. Actor Mark Salling took his own life in 2018, weeks before being sentenced for possession of child pornography. Canadian castmate Cory Monteith died in July 2013 of an overdose of drugs and alcohol.—AFP

Milan goes 'phygital' for first apres-lockdown fashion week

Milan kicks off its first Digital Fashion Week yesterday with two live runway shows, including from heavyweights Dolce & Gabbana, to send out a message of "positivity." Running through Friday, this "phygital" fashion week—featuring both physical and digital shows—will present the Men's Spring/Summer 2021 collections, as well as men's and women's pre-collections. This is the third such show after London and Paris and Italy's first fashion week after the coronavirus crisis. Thirty-seven brands answered the call, including two who opted for real, in-person fashion shows: D&G and the Italian house Etro. "We decided to present the collections with a physical fashion show to give a strong positive message, fundamental at this time for the fashion system and the city of Milan," wrote Kean and Veronica Etro in a statement. "Real interaction is fundamental to fashion."

Etro will be held its show at the Four Seasons Hotel located in a converted 15th century convent while D&G has chosen the gardens of the university campus of the Humanitas Hospital, which has been involved in coronavirus research and which the fashion brand supports financially. Last month, Sicilian designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana announced their return to the Italian Fashion Chamber (Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana) and to the official calendar.

Since 1998 they have shown their collections outside the official calendar, due to differences with the management at the time. The chamber's president, Carlo Capasa, called it "a great return." "It comes at a difficult time for fashion and shows the strong bond that the designers have with our country. Today, more than ever, it is important to be united to safeguard our unique industry

in the world", Capasa said in a statement. Dolce and Gabbana said that "today, more than ever, fashion needs positivity and strong unity".

Digital versus real

The hybrid Fashion Week kicked off by MSGM yesterday noon, a day also marked by shows from Prada, Moschino and Philipp Plein. Today Etro and D&G follow suit, with Salvatore Ferragamo, Tod's and Dsquared2 tomorrow. The week closes Friday with Gucci, Ermengildo Zegna and Missoni.

To accommodate buyers, the chamber will offer live appointments round the clock over various time zones. In addition to the fashion shows, brand presentations, interviews and backstage sessions, there will be virtual "theme rooms" covering a wide range of topics, from sustainable development to diversity and technological innovations. Two other digital events, International Hub Market and Together for Tomorrow, are dedicated to upcoming designers.

It remains to be seen how buyers and the media react to Milan's hybrid fashion week. The Paris shows that ended Monday were presented in video, with some critics saying the new format fell somewhat flat. "Digital has a long way to go — light years — before it can replace the live fashion event," wrote fashion trade paper Women's Wear Daily (WWD), citing the "the genuine, enjoyable intimacy of actually 'being there,'" for a one-time-only fashion show. Barring a new wave of coronavirus, Milan is expected to return, for the most part, to its physical fashion shows for its Spring-Summer 2021 Women's collections from September 22 to 28.—AFP



Wigs are displayed for sale at a hair products shop in Peckham, south London on Monday, as novel coronavirus lockdown restrictions in England are further relaxed to allow nail bars, beauty salons and tattoo parlours to open.—AFP

UK YouTube star Nicole Thea dies aged 24

British YouTube star Nicole Thea, whose videos have gathered more than five million views, has died along with her unborn son, her family announced on Instagram. "To all Nicole's friends and supporters it is with great sadness that I have to inform you that Nicole and her son she and (partner) Boga named Reign sadly passed away on Saturday morning," the message said. "As a family we ask that you give us privacy because our hearts are truly broken and we are struggling to cope with what has happened."

The 24-year-old dancer, who lived in London, posted regular updates on her pregnancy and several videos filmed before her death will be published on her YouTube channel, the family said. Her final videos showed her getting a cast of her eight-month baby belly and a behind-the-scenes shoot of her bathing in milk. Partner Boga, 20, is a member of Ghana Boyz, a street dance trio originally from Ghana now based in the UK.—AFP



British YouTube star Nicole Thea

High stakes in Johnny Depp libel hearing

Hollywood star Johnny Depp wrapped up five days of gruelling testimony Monday in a libel trial that has exposed the dark underbelly of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. The "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise hero is suing the publisher and executive editor of Britain's The Sun tabloid newspaper over a 2018 story branding him a "wife beater". The 57-year-old denies abusing actress Amber Heard—now 34 and the global face of French cosmetics firm L'Oreal—during a rocky two-year marriage that ended in a messy 2017 divorce and several lawsuits. But he has admitted a debilitating drug habit

and allowed the defence to air graphic details of 14 assault allegations that made headlines around the world. Some legal experts following the High Court hearing in London question why Depp decided to put himself through the three-week ordeal given the subject matter being aired. "He's been extremely ill-advised to pursue this," Mark Stephens, a leading media specialist at London law firm Howard Kennedy, told AFP. "To expose (difficult divorces) to forensic examination is the height of stupidity or hubris." Here are the main points that have emerged from the trial so far.

Drink and drugs

Hollywood's drug culture has provided the backdrop for the entire hearing. Depp told the court on Friday that he snorted cocaine to help break his addiction to painkillers. He argued Thursday that he was suffering from withdrawal while coming off of drugs and was in "no physical condition" to hurt Heard during one alleged incident on his private Bahamas island. Depp further explained the party drug ecstasy had little effect on him and that he preferred to leave it to Heard and their celebrity friends. The actress herself was alleged to have sent a party invitation with instructions: "Bring some food, booze and drug of choice, yey!" Another text Heard allegedly sent from Depp's phone asked a friend to "procure more mushrooms".

Bloody finger

One of the darkest episodes involves an allegedly high and drunk Depp scrawling messages to Heard on a mirror and wall with the blood of his severed finger. Depp acknowledges dipping the finger in a can of paint to continue writing once the bleeding stopped. But he denies tripping on ecstasy at the time and claims Heard slashed off the tip of his finger with a bottle during a particularly bad fight. The defence says he hurt it while "completely destroying" the couple's vacation home in Australia. Depp said Thursday that he was experiencing "some kind of breakdown" and was feeling suicidal at the time.

Reputation

Mark Stephens said both Depp and Heard had plenty to lose and little to gain from the proceedings. "His reputation will be permanently stained if he is found to be abusive." And "if Heard is not to be believed, she will find it very hard to find work in Hollywood". British libel law puts the burden of proof on the defence and gives Depp the initial advantage. But the judge told Heard her upcoming testimony would not be bound by "confidentiality restrictions" agreed in the divorce.

Depp may find it even harder to clear his name in a separate defamation lawsuit he filed over an op-ed about the alleged abuse that Heard wrote in The Washington Post. That hearing is expected to begin in August in Virginia under US laws putting the burden of proof on Depp.—AFP



US actor Johnny Depp waves as he leaves after the fifth day of his libel trial against News Group Newspapers (NGN).



US actress Amber Heard (center) waves as she leaves on the fifth day of the libel trial by her former husband US actor Johnny Depp.

Photo of the Day



Football freestyler, Kotaro Tokuda from Japan, performs at Kuwait Towers in Kuwait. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

COVID fears:
Chicago Marathon
cancelled

LOS ANGELES: The Chicago Marathon became the latest major marathon to fall victim to the coronavirus on Monday as organizers confirmed cancellation of the race for only the second time in its history. The decision had been largely expected, with several other major marathons around the world already suffering the same fate because of the pandemic. The 43rd edition of the race was due to take place on October 11, with an estimated field of around 45,000 runners and wheelchair athletes. "The Chicago Marathon is our city's beloved annual celebration of more than 45,000 runners, as well as tens of thousands of volunteers, spectators and city residents," Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said.

"Like all Chicagoans, I'm personally disappointed that this year's event won't take place as originally planned; however, we look forward to welcoming all runners and their cheering squads once again when the Chicago Marathon returns to our city in full force for another very exciting race." Race director Carey Pinkowski said the decision had been taken with the safety of participants and volunteers in mind. "We understand the disappointment, but when we return to the streets of Chicago, it will be a celebratory moment and an uncompromising statement about the collective spirit of who we are as a running community: We are powerful, we are persistent, and we will reach the finish line again," Pinkowski said.

Chicago is one of the world's six Major marathons along with races in Tokyo, Boston, London, Berlin and New York. The Chicago race was last cancelled in 1987 after a loss of sponsorship. Tokyo went ahead in March with only elite and wheelchair athletes taking part, while Boston was due to take place in April but was then rescheduled for September before eventually being cancelled altogether. Both Berlin and New York were also cancelled, leaving London - which was moved from April 26 to October 4 - as the last marathon race standing. — AFP

Irish rugby agrees player wage cuts, deferrals for rest of 2020

Back into the bubble: NRL cracks down amid COVID-19 surge

LONDON: Irish rugby players earning more than 25,000 euros (£22,500, \$28,000) per year have agreed to a 10 per cent salary reduction for the second half of 2020 as well as a further 10 per cent deferral of their wages until 2021 due to the economic impact of coronavirus. The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) and Rugby Players Ireland (RPI) have been in talks for several weeks and announced a deal had been agreed on Monday.

The period will run from July 1 to December 31 this year. Half of the 10 percent deferral could also be subject to a retrospective salary reduction if the financial impact of the pandemic proves to be even worse than accounted for so far. IRFU chief executive Philip Browne said: "Irish Rugby, like all sports organizations, businesses and society in general, has been severely impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis with major uncertainty continuing around our future financial income streams. "The IRFU, the

Provinces and Clubs remain in a highly precarious financial situation, making it critically important that an agreement was reached on this matter."

Unlike in England where a bitter row over pay has erupted between the players union and Premiership clubs, the RPI highlighted a "good working relationship with the IRFU" as key to the agreement. "Aware of the significant challenges facing not just rugby but the country as a whole as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe the agreement reached is reflective of our shared ambition to see rugby at all levels continue to thrive," said RPI chief executive Simon Keogh. Irish provinces Leinster, Munster, Ulster and Connacht are set to return to action in the Pro 14 next month.



Players agreed to a 10 percent salary reduction

Back into the bubble
Meanwhile, Australia's National Rugby League (NRL) has ordered teams to adopt tighter biosecurity protocols yesterday following a surge of COVID-19 infections in the country's southeast. The announcement came as Victoria state reported 270 new cases and neighboring New South Wales ramped up social distancing restrictions amid a cluster of infections linked to a pub in western Sydney. The 12 teams based in NSW and the Australian Capital Territory would revert back to the strict "bubble" conditions the league enforced when it resumed on May 28, the NRL said.

That will mean players and staff will no longer be allowed to visit cafes, restaurants, pubs, beaches and

golf courses, while restrictions on home visitors also return. "We won't take any risks with our players and the community," league boss Peter V'landys said in a statement. "All our decisions are based on the data and we've said from the start, if the data changes then we will be proactive and take the necessary action required."

Four teams based in northeastern Queensland state, including Melbourne Storm who relocated north from Victoria, will remain under current restrictions. Queensland reported one new case of COVID-19 from a returned traveler at a quarantine hotel on Monday. The NRL had plans to base all of the league's 16 teams in Queensland if required, Australian media reported on Tuesday. A surge of infections in Victoria in recent weeks prompted the top flight soccer and Australian Rules leagues to move teams out of the state to allow their seasons to continue. — Agencies

Washington Redskins confirm name change

WASHINGTON: The Washington Redskins confirmed Monday the team is changing its name following pressure from sponsors over a word widely criticized as a racist slur against Native Americans. Washington announced on July 3 that the Redskins name had been placed under review after a wave of rallies against racial injustice swept across the United States following George Floyd's death on May 25. "Today, we are announcing we will be retiring the Redskins name and logo upon completion of this review," the NFL team said in a statement.

A replacement name was still being worked upon, the statement added. Washington owner Dan Snyder had long resisted calls to change the team's name but faced mounting demands to rethink that position as protests erupted against systemic racism after the death of Floyd, an unarmed African-American man, during his arrest by police in Minneapolis. Native American leaders had written to the NFL commissioner Roger Goodell last week demanding an immediate change of the team's name, logo and mascot. Washington's announcement was applauded by Ray Halbritter, an Oneida Nation representative and head of the "Change the Mascot" campaign.

"The NFL and Dan Snyder have finally made the right call and Change the Mascot commends them for it," Halbritter said in a statement. "This is a good decision for the country ... it closes a painful chapter of denigration and disrespect toward Native Americans and other people of color." US lawmaker Deb Haaland, one of the few members of Congress who identifies as Native American, also saluted the move. "About time," Haaland wrote. "It shouldn't take a huge social movement & pressure from cor-



ARLINGTON: In this file photo Washington Redskins players huddle during a game at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. — AFP

porate sponsors to do the right thing, but I'm glad this is happening."

Intense pressure from the team's most powerful corporate partners are widely believed to have forced the Washington move. FedEx, which purchased the naming rights to the team's stadium through 2025 for \$205 million, confirmed earlier this month it had requested the change. "We believe it is time for a change," PepsiCo had also said, while Nike removed the team's merchandise and gear from its website. Bank of America said as a sponsor, it had "encouraged the team to change the name." Goodell had also lobbied the team behind the scenes to consider a name change, according to reports.

Never say never?

The team was established in 1932 as the Boston Braves and took on its current name in 1933 before moving to the US capital four years later. Until now, Snyder had emphatically rejected requests to drop the Redskins tag. "We'll never change the name," he told USA Today in 2013. "It's that simple. NEVER-you can use caps." President Don-

ald Trump meanwhile had criticized Washington's announcement that the team name was under review. "They name teams out of STRENGTH, not weakness, but now the Washington Redskins & Cleveland Indians, two fabled sports franchises, look like they are going to be changing their names in order to be politically correct," Trump tweeted last week.

Washington's statement on Monday said Snyder and head coach Ron Rivera were "working closely to develop a new name and design approach that will enhance the standing of our proud, tradition rich franchise and inspire our sponsors, fans and community for the next 100 years". The Washington Post reported that the team had a preferred choice for a replacement name, but were working through trademark issues surrounding the tag. Rivera, one of only a handful of minority head coaches in the NFL and also the son of an army officer, said earlier this month that he believed the new name should show respect to Native American culture while giving a nod to the US military. —AFP

NBA players test positive for virus

MIAMI: The NBA said Monday two players have tested positive for coronavirus since teams began arriving in Orlando, Florida for the resumption of the league later this month. An NBA statement said out of 322 players tested at the NBA Campus at Disney World since July 7, two returned positive tests. However the league said neither player had cleared quarantine, which would have allowed them to fully enter the NBA's protective "bubble."

Both players have since left the Disney World Campus to isolate at home or at isolation-housing. The league said since July 1, a total of 19 NBA players had tested positive for the coronavirus during in-market testing. Those players were staying in their home markets and recovering until they are cleared to leave home isolation and join the NBA Campus in Orlando. The NBA has been in shutdown since March since the pandemic erupted across North America. The league is relaunching its season with teams based in Orlando for the remainder of the regular season and the playoffs.

Westbrook tests positive

Meanwhile, NBA star Russell Westbrook revealed Monday he has tested positive for COVID-19 as the league gears up for its return in Florida later this month. Houston Rockets star Westbrook, the 2017 Most Valuable Player and one of the biggest names in the NBA, said in a statement he was feeling well and was in isolation. "I tested positive for COVID-19 prior to my team's departure to Orlando," Westbrook said on Twitter. "I'm currently feeling well, quarantined and looking forward to re-joining my teammates when I am



Russell Westbrook

cleared. Thank you all for the well wishes and continued support," the 31-year-old added. "Please take this virus seriously. Be safe. Mask up!"

Westbrook was one of several Rockets players who did not travel to Orlando, where the NBA will resume its season on July 30 after a four-month shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. As well as Westbrook, fellow superstar James Harden and Cameroon international Luc Mbah a Moute also did not travel, although the team has not given a reason for their absence.

Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni on Sunday said Westbrook, Harden and Mbah a Moute were "working in their own home base." "We're still expecting them in a few days," D'Antoni said. "You never know, but we think we'll get them back in here by the middle of the week. D'Antoni would not comment on why the players had not travelled with the team. "These are things that people are dealing with," he said. "We're not going to get into why not. They're on their way." Westbrook is one of several NBA players to have tested positive for COVID-19, joining a list which includes Brooklyn's Kevin Durant, Boston's Marcus Smart and Utah Jazz duo Rudy Gobert and Donovan Mitchell. —Agencies

Sports

Man Utd miss chance to move up to third in Premier League

Obafemi's 96th minute equalizer earns Southampton a 2-2 draw

MANCHESTER: Manchester United missed the chance to move up to third in the Premier League on Monday after Michael Obafemi's 96th minute equalizer earned Southampton a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford in the latest twist in the race for a place in next season's Champions League. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men were unable to take advantage of weekend defeats for Chelsea and Leicester to remain in fifth.

United had become the first side in Premier League history to win four consecutive games by a three-goal margin, but there was no cruise for the Red Devils this time even after they responded to Stuart Armstrong's early opener. Two goals in as many minutes from Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial turned the game around, but United were



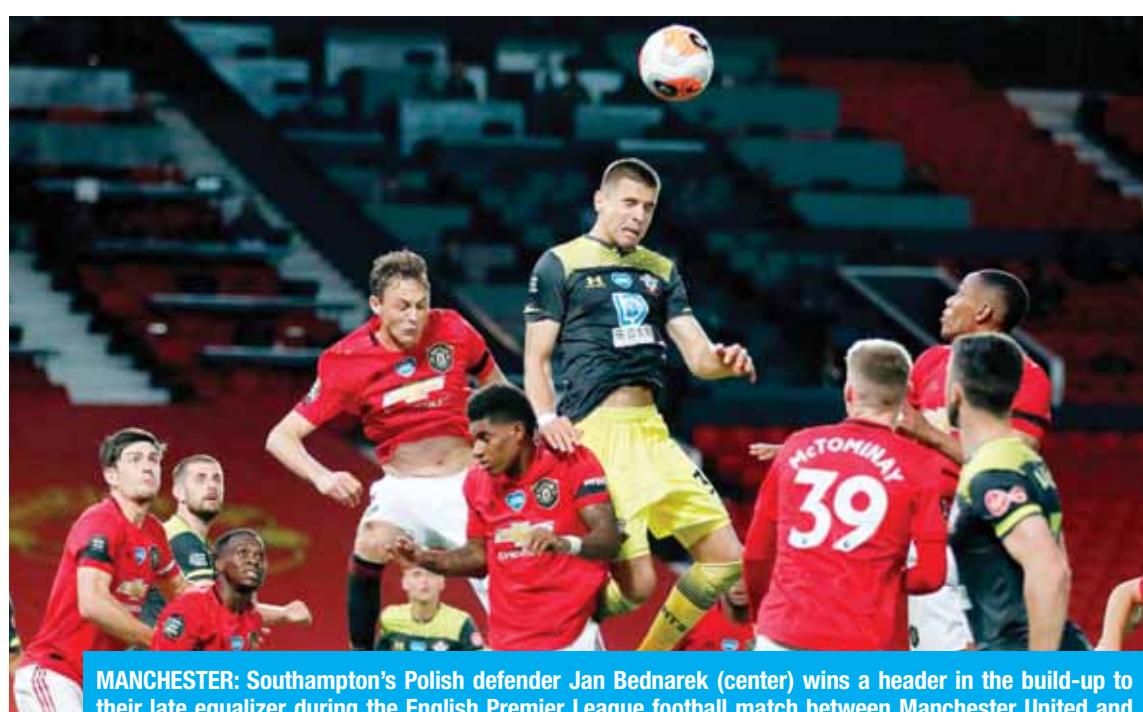
MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer reacts on the pitch after the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Southampton.

United to continue their impressive form with only a place in the top four now good enough for Champions League qualification.

Solskjaer will still be confident of achieving that goal as his side have closed an eight-point gap on Leicester, who they face on the final day of the season, since the Premier League's restart. But two dropped points were a reminder that United are far from the finished article if they aspire to challenge Liverpool and Manchester City for the title next season. "We didn't deserve three points today," admitted Solskjaer. "We never got the rhythm in our passing today, especially after 2-1." A 17-match unbeaten run looked in danger early as Southampton—who have been in impressive form themselves—were rewarded for a bright start at Old Trafford.

'Brave' Saints snatch point

Ralph Hassenhüttl's side remain in 12th, but have



MANCHESTER: Southampton's Polish defender Jan Bednarek (center) wins a header in the build-up to their late equalizer during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Southampton at Old Trafford in Manchester on July 13, 2020. The game finished 2-2. AFP photos

lost just once in six games since the restart. "We are becoming more brave," said Hassenhüttl. "You can feel the guys really enjoy what they are doing." Paul Pogba's return from injury has played a big part in United's free-scoring run, but the Frenchman was at fault for the opening goal as he was caught in possession by Danny Ings. Redmond then crossed for the unmarked Armstrong at the back post and the Scottish international took a touch before flashing a shot past David De Gea.

United have now scored 16 goals in their last five

league games to close the gap on Chelsea and Leicester in the top four race. That firepower was in evidence as the game was turned on its head within two minutes as Martial showed great strength and touch to tee up Rashford to slot home his 21st goal of the season. Both Rashford and Martial are enjoying their best ever scoring seasons and moments later it was the Frenchman's turn to score his 21st of the campaign as he powered past Kyle Walker-Peters before lashing a shot past Alex McCarthy for his 50th Premier League goal. — AFP



United stay fifth after Saints grab last-gasp leveler

caught out by a corner deep into stoppage time when substitute Obafemi turned home Jan Bednarek's flick on.

"It's the worst time to concede a goal but it happens in football. You have to be strong and take it," said United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "We've won so many games that way ourselves but it's all part of the learning for this team." Manchester City's victory over UEFA in the Court of Arbitration for Sport earlier on Monday upped the pressure on

CAS ruling protects Champions League dream for Man City's Abu Dhabi owners

LONDON: Manchester City have become the dominant force in English football over the past decade but are still waiting for the final piece in the Abu Dhabi project jigsaw—the Champions League title. Backed by Sheikh Mansour's immense wealth, inspired by Pep Guardiola's managerial genius and boasting a cast of superstars, the club have greedily scooped up 11 major trophies in nine years. Yet the prize that has eluded them is the Champions League, which the owners crave above all else. Monday's ruling from the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), lifting a two-season UEFA ban from European competition, will give Guardiola's men a huge lift for this season and next as they chase elusive European glory.

They can now prepare for the second leg of their last-16 tie at home against Real Madrid, leading 2-1, safe in the knowledge that they will be back at Europe's top table next season. City's great fear was if CAS upheld UEFA's ban, imposed in February, players would look to elsewhere and Guardiola himself could even lose interest. Now they can not only retain their best players, but look to recruit more talent in a bid to take back the Premier League title from Liverpool.

"From a footballing perspective, it is good to know that Pep Guardiola may now extend his con-

tract as City manager beyond next season, continuing to raise coaching standards in this country," said the Times. "It is a joy to know that Kevin De Bruyne, the finest midfielder player in the world on present form, may stay on, enchanting audiences with his extraordinary passing style." City have already lifted the League Cup this season and are well-placed in the FA Cup. But they know that to be considered a member of the established European elite, they must win the Champions League.

Corporate giant

The club's transformation from Premier League also-rans into a European force over the past 12 years has been remarkable. For so many years they were the perennially underachieving neighbors of mighty Manchester United. But under Mansour and chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak, the struggling club have become a global footballing behemoth. When Mansour and his Abu Dhabi United Group purchased City from Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra for £210 million (\$265 million) on September 1, 2008, they arrived to find a club languishing in United's shadow after finishing 32 points behind the champions the previous season.

City's inferiority complex was well-founded after decades of failure. When United won an unprecedented treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup in 1998/99, City were languishing in the third tier. It is a different story at the Etihad now after four Premier League titles in the past nine seasons as well as a wealth of cup success. The squad is brimful of international talent, led by global stars such as Kevin De Bruyne, Raheem Sterling and Sergio Aguero, with Guardiola demanding the highest standards.

"People forget that 10 years ago it was unthinkable that City would get to this place," one former



BRIGHTON: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (left) and Brighton's English manager Graham Potter greet before the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Manchester City in Brighton. — AFP

senior City executive told Britain's Daily Mail newspaper in 2018 - a decade after the takeover. "Building the club that Guardiola took over meant building a world-class team. Players had either never heard of us or weren't interested in us." Mansour's first signing for City was Robinho, a Brazilian forward then regarded as one of the world's most promising youngsters. That set the tone for the decade to come as Mansour kept spending until the silverware finally rolled in, starting with the club's first FA Cup for 42 years in 2011. — AFP

'Magic' UAE takeover of second-tier Bezier falls through

PARIS: A proposed takeover of second-tier club Bezier by an unknown UAE-based investor has failed after French rugby's financial watchdog (DNACC) refused to validate the deal on Monday. The Emirati was supported by former France winger Christophe Dominici. There had been talk of signing ex-New Zealand centre Ma'a Nonu, as well as England internationals Manu Tuilagi and Semesa Rokoduguni after a reported multi-million euro purchase was completed.

Bezier are the 11-time French champions and dominated French rugby in the 1970s and early 1980s but were relegated in 2005 and are currently in the second division. The DNACC had asked the potential new owner to supply documents and proof of wealth. Sotaco, the investment group representing the prospective owner, issued a press release saying they had tried to comply.

"We brought the required elements in a tight and pressured timeframe, and we legitimately thought that all the signals were green, but we suffered a mortal blow when the DNACC was not prepared to give their immediate agreement and as a first consequence we would not have been able to make the necessary player signings to take Bezier back to their rightful place in French rugby," Sotaco said. — AFP

Golf talking points: Tiger back; Morikawa power; Miguel for the ages

HONG KONG: A couple of comebacks and the continued emergence of a bright young star feature in AFP Sport's golf talking points for this week.

Woods in top company

When Tiger Woods returns to competitive golf for the first time in five months at Jack Nicklaus's Memorial Tournament tomorrow, he will do so in exalted company. Woods will tee off alongside world number one Rory McIlroy and Brooks Koepka in an eye-catching threeball for the first two rounds at Muirfield Village in Ohio. Woods needs a sixth victory at the event he last won in 2012 to become the most successful golfer in PGA Tour history, having tied Sam Snead's record 82 wins at October's Zozo Championship in Japan.

The 15-time major winner last played competitively at the Genesis Invitational in February, finishing 68th. Without Woods since the tour's return from COVID-19 lockdown, the buzz has been all about Bryson DeChambeau and Collin Morikawa, winners of the last two events, and they will go out together alongside defending champion Patrick Cantlay tomorrow. Big-hitting DeChambeau, the 2018 Memorial champion, is favorite

with the bookmakers at 10-1. Woods is priced at a tempting-looking 25-1. The bookies should note that the last time Woods returned from an enforced lay-off, at the Zozo after a 10-week break for arthroscopic knee surgery, he won.

Miguel keeps rolling

He might be nearer to 60 than 50 but Miguel Angel Jimenez proved he was still one to watch when the European Tour made a low-key return last week. At the Austrian Open, an event shared with the second-tier Challenge Tour, the 56-year-old rolled back the years to shoot his lowest score since the 2018 Italian Open, a seven-under-par 65 in the second round. It put the Spaniard into the lead and he finished tied eighth to record his first top 10 since the 2017 Hong Kong Open.

Jimenez has already set the record for the oldest winner on the European Tour three times and he threatened it again at the Diamond Country Club near Vienna, an event won by Scotland's Marc Warren. Jimenez won the 2012 Hong Kong Open at the age of 48 years, 307 days, before successfully defending it a year later when 49 years and 337 days old. Not content with that, he won the 2014 Open de



DUBLIN: Collin Morikawa has a milkshake following his victory of the Workday Charity Open at Muirfield Village Golf Club on July 12, 2020 in Dublin, Ohio. — AFP

Espana for his 21st title at 50 years, 133 days. The European Tour remains in Austria this week before moving to Britain for the first of six full-field events starting with the British Masters in Newcastle.

Collin's a cut above

Collin Morikawa only turned pro 13 months ago, but he won for the first time on the US PGA Tour at the Barracuda Championship just eight weeks later and has been so consistent that he now has more wins than missed cuts. His second tournament victory came at the Workday Charity Open at

Muirfield on Sunday where he won a nail-biting playoff against Justin Thomas on the third extra hole.

His reward is a huge jump in the world rankings from 29th to 13th, one place above Tiger Woods, and he is firmly in the Ryder Cup picture for the next edition at Whistling Straits, now shifted to September 2021. Morikawa's only missed cut came two weeks earlier at the Travelers Championship, and a fortnight before that he had the crushing disappointment of seeing a two-foot putt lip out to lose a playoff to Daniel Berger at the Charles Schwab Challenge. — AFP

Spurs more tactical under Mourinho, says Davies

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur are more tactical under manager Jose Mourinho than when Mauricio Pochettino was in charge, defender Ben Davies has said. Argentine Pochettino led Spurs to the Champions League final last season but was sacked in November after a poor start to the Premier League campaign and replaced by Mourinho. "Under 'Poch' we very much had our style of play and it was just the high press, high intensity," Davies told talkSPORT. "Now I think we're a bit more tactical, we're a bit more aware of what we're coming up against. We have a game plan for each game."

Mourinho's side have come in for criticism of late due to some disappointing performances but Davies, 27, said the players were adapting to their manager's methods. "In some games it hasn't been what we've wanted but everyone is buying into the skill set that Mourinho has and we all know that he's a top manager," Davies added. "He's won everything there is to win so us as players have got to put our trust into him and the results will follow. "We'll go away in the summer and I'm sure we'll do a lot of work in pre-season, get ready for it and next year has to be a different story." Tottenham, who are eighth in the league, visit Newcastle United on Wednesday. — Reuters

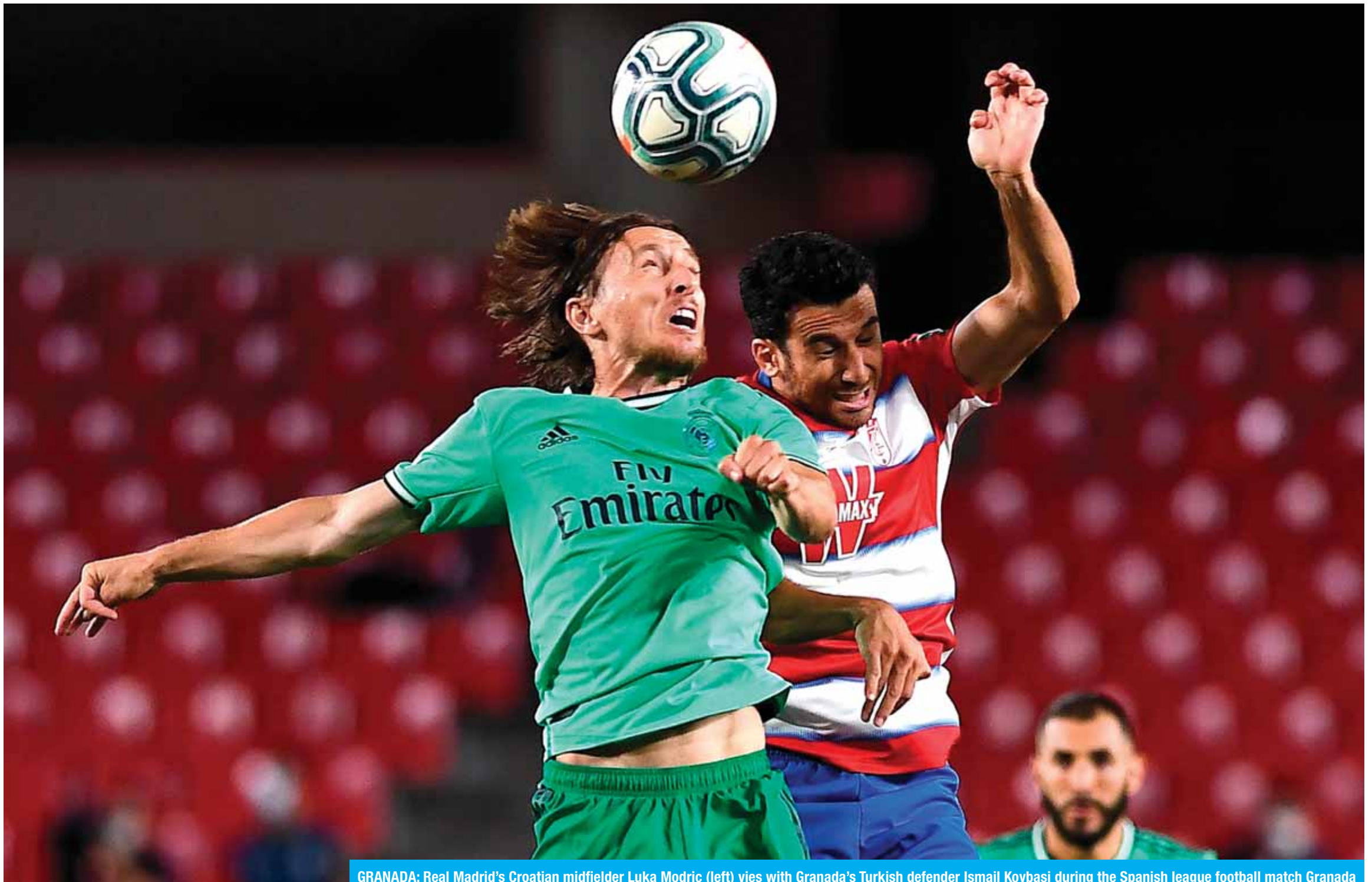
14 Irish rugby agrees player wage cuts, deferrals for rest of 2020



14 Two NBA players test positive for COVID-19



15 Man Utd miss chance to move up to third in Premier League



GRANADA: Real Madrid's Croatian midfielder Luka Modric (left) vies with Granada's Turkish defender Ismail Koybasi during the Spanish league football match Granada FC vs Real Madrid CF at Nuevo Los Carmenes stadium in Granada on July 13, 2020. — AFP

Real 'one win' to grab La Liga crown

Villarreal miss out on Champions League after Real Sociedad loss

MADRID: Real Madrid need one victory to secure La Liga after they held off a second-half comeback from Granada on Monday to win 2-1 and move four points clear of Barcelona. With two games left, Madrid will be crowned champions if they beat Villarreal at home tomorrow regardless of how Barca fare at the Camp Nou against Osasuna. But they were made to sweat by a Granada team that are gunning for Europe and have been arguably the division's surprise of the season after being promoted from second tier last year.

Ferland Mendy and Karim Benzema looked to have set Madrid on course for a comfortable win at Los Carmenes but Granada were transformed after the break and Darwin Machis's 50th-minute strike gave them hope. An increasingly nervous Madrid were clinging on by the end and needed Sergio Ramos to clear one shot off the line as Zinedine Zidane's side dug in for a ninth consecutive victory. "Our vision when we start every season is to win the league," said Zidane. "There are two games left. We are close but we're not there yet." When the final whistle blew, Zidane roared with relief and Ramos clenched his fists after coming through their toughest test since the restart.

"We can't relax, we're a bit closer but we have to carry on," said Ramos afterwards. "We let our guard down here a bit on the second half. We won the first half and lost the second and maybe that's a warning for us. We have to make sure we don't repeat that mistake." Madrid could win La Liga for the third time in eight years at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium tomorrow night. "It would mean a lot," said Ramos. "It's the prize for consistency over the whole year. Maybe we had a period of reflection during the suspension and we came back and reacted. We're in the race and hopefully on Thursday we can celebrate."

If Madrid slip up against Villarreal, they will still have a second chance on Sunday when they finish at Leganes while Barcelona visit Alaves. Machis's goal was the first Madrid have conceded in six matches but few would have seen it coming after the first half. Madrid scored twice in six minutes, with both goals coming from breaks down their left. Mendy had space in front of him and kept going, accelerating between Victor Diaz and Dimitri Foulquier before firing high and into the roof of the net from an acute angle.

The second goal came down the same side, Isco's back-

heel allowing Luka Modric to switch left to Benzema, who this time cut inside Diaz and shot into the far corner. Madrid cruised through the rest of the half, pushing the ball around at will, but comfort perhaps created complacency and Granada improved after the break. Machis pulled a goal back, striking through the legs of Courtois after Casemiro was dispossessed in midfield and Madrid were rattled as Granada began to dictate play. A scramble in Madrid's six-yard box saw several players hacking at the ball in panic and Courtois was twice required to make smart saves late on.

The closest Granada came was when the ball fell to Ramon Azeez at the back post and he fired towards the near post with Courtois stranded but Ramos was on the line to clear. Earlier, Villarreal's hopes of Champions League football were dashed after they lost 2-1 at home to Real Sociedad to confirm that fourth-placed Sevilla will join Atletico Madrid, Barcelona and Real Madrid in the competition next season. Villarreal remain fifth, three points ahead of Getafe and Real Sociedad, with all three hoping to secure a place in the Europa League. Getafe drew 0-0 against Alaves. — AFP



GRANADA: Granada's Spanish forward Carlos Fernandez (right) challenges Real Madrid's Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois (left) and French defender Ferland Mendy (down) during the Spanish league football match Granada FC vs Real Madrid CF at Nuevo Los Carmenes stadium in Granada. — AFP



MILAN: Torino's Italian forward Andrea Belotti (center) vies with Inter Milan's Croatian defender Marcelo Brozovic (right) during the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan vs Torino played behind closed doors on July 13, 2020. — AFP

Inter move second, close in on Champions League

ROME: Inter Milan put one foot in next season's Champions League on Monday after coming from behind to beat relegation-threatened Torino 3-1 and move up to second place in Serie A. Antonio Conte's Inter moved above Atalanta and Lazio to go eight points behind league leaders Juventus thanks to two goals early in the second half from Ashley Young and Diego Godin and another from Lautaro Martinez just after the hour mark.

The Milanese club are level on 68 points with off-form Lazio, who slumped to a 2-1 defeat at Sassuolo on Saturday, and one ahead of flamboyant Atalanta in fourth. However, with a first league title since 2010 unlikely, the most important statistic for Inter is the

14-point gap between them and fifth-placed Roma with six matches left to play. "It's important to win matches like this any way you can ... I think we deserved to win," said Godin to Sky Sport Italy.

"We're second now and we want to continue winning ... let's see where we can finish, but it's difficult to get closer to Juventus." Torino meanwhile still have to look over their shoulders following their fourth defeat since the league restarted last month. Moreno Longo's side are 16th, five points above the relegation zone with the visit of fellow strugglers Genoa coming up on Thursday. Inter, who were missing star striker Romelu Lukaku and started without regular first-teamers Milan Skriniar, Christian Eriksen and Antonio Candreva, didn't have it all their own way at the San Siro.

They found themselves behind with 16 minutes gone when under no pressure Samir Handanovic dropped a corner straight to the feet of Italy forward Andrea Belotti, who couldn't believe his luck as he tapped home the opener from inches out. The hosts, who have been rocked by rumors of dressing room

unrest, struggled to react and Christian Ansaldi could easily have doubled Torino's lead when Handanovic just managed to hold onto his powerful shot five minutes before the break. All their good work vanished in the space of two minutes shortly after the restart however, with Ashley Young leveling the scores in the 49th minute when he lashed home Martinez's knockdown.

Young was involved when Inter went ahead just two minutes later, the Englishman finding former Manchester United teammate Alexis Sanchez with a chipped pass and the Chilean heading over for Godin, who nodded home off the cross bar from close range. Torino had a chance to level when Simone Verdi's header was well saved by Handanovic in the 54th minute, but Martinez-whose talks with Barcelona have stopped according to Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu-wrapped things up soon after. The Argentine hadn't scored in five matches heading into Monday's contest and after collecting Sanchez's pass his shot was helped over the line by a big deflection.— AFP