

5 US congressman John Lewis, civil rights icon, dead at 80



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S&P revises Kuwait outlook to negative over fund depletion

Ratings agency expects budget deficit will widen to almost 40% of GDP

Amir undergoes medical checkups

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah entered hospital on Saturday to carry out a number of medical checkups, an official said. Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah revealed that HH the Amir is in good health, expressing his wishes of continued prosperity and wellbeing for Kuwait's leader. — KUNA



HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: S&P Global Ratings on Friday revised Kuwait's outlook to 'negative' from 'stable', saying it expects that the country's main liquidity buffer, the General Reserve Fund, will be insufficient to cover central government deficit. The agency however affirmed the country's ratings at 'AA-/A-1+'. "The GRF balance has been steadily reducing over the past three years, but this process has accelerated in recent months following the decline in oil prices and Kuwait's implementation of the OPEC+ oil production cut agreement," the ratings agency said in a statement.

Kuwait has been drawing down its GRF to plug the deficit, which the International Monetary Fund estimates could reach more than 11 percent of gross domestic product this year, compared with a 4.8 percent surplus last year. The ratings agency expects Kuwait's central government deficit to be almost 40 percent of GDP in fiscal 2020, up from an estimated 10 percent a year ago, estimating that the GRF alone will be unable to fund a deficit of that magnitude.

In the absence of other measures, complete depletion of the GRF could lead to a hard budget

S&P Global Ratings

constraint for Kuwait, which could precipitate a distortionary expenditure adjustment when economic performance is already weak, S&P said. A government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, had told Reuters on July 12 that the state was considering selling assets of the GRF to the Future Generations Fund as one alternative to plug the deficit.

The Future Generations Fund automatically receives 10 percent of state oil revenue each year and accounted for about \$489 billion of Kuwait Investment Authority's estimated total assets of \$527 billion at the end of March, according to Fitch Ratings estimates.

"The ratings are constrained by the concentrated nature of the economy and relatively weak institutional settings compared with those of non-regional peers in the same rating category. Kuwait derives about 50 percent of GDP, more than 90 percent of exports, and about 90 percent of fiscal receipts from hydrocarbon products. Given this high reliance on the oil sector, we view Kuwait's economy as undiversified," the report said.

"In addition to its impact via the oil industry, we project that COVID-19 pandemic will also take a direct toll on Kuwait's wider economy, similar to most other countries this year. Kuwait's economic growth was already sluggish even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with output expanding by just 0.4 percent in 2019 and 1.3 percent in 2018.

"As such, Kuwait's growth rates will remain lower over the economic cycle on average compared with other countries at a comparable level of economic development. Against the background of the pandemic, the government has announced a renewed Kuwaitization effort, whereby expat workers should be replaced by Kuwaiti nationals," the report added. — Agencies

News in brief

White House moves portraits

WASHINGTON: In a break with tradition, the White House of President Donald Trump has removed the portraits of two recent presidents, Bill Clinton and George W Bush, from the building's entrance hall, CNN reported Friday. The two paintings were moved from the Grand Foyer, where the portraits of recent presidents usually hang, to the Old Family Dining Room, which CNN described as "a small, rarely used room that is not seen by most visitors". It said the room was mainly used to store tablecloths and furniture. In place of pictures of Trump's recent predecessors, there now hang pictures of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. — AFP

Iran police break up protest

TEHRAN: Iranian police said Friday they forcefully dispersed a protest by a crowd chanting "norm-breaking" slogans in the southwest of the country over economic hardships. "Following a call, a small number of Behbahan city's people gathered at 9 pm on Thursday to protest the economic situation," Behbahan city's police chief Col Mohammad Azizi said, quoted by state news agency IRNA. The police first tried to talk to the crowd "but not only did they not disperse but started shouting norm-breaking chants", he said, a term usually used by Iranian authorities to refer to anti-system slogans. — AFP

NY police charge assistant

NEW YORK: The assistant of a wealthy young technology entrepreneur who was found decapitated in his luxury New York apartment this week was charged with his murder Friday, police said. Tyrese Haspil, 21, is accused of killing 33-year-old Fahim Saleh. "Mr Haspil was Mr Saleh's executive assistant and handled his finances and personal matters. It is also believed that he owed the victim a significant amount of money," Rodney Harrison, the NYPD's top detective, told reporters. Harrison added that Haspil was believed to have assaulted Saleh with a Taser before murdering him on Monday. — AFP

25m Iranians infected; India cases top 1m

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that 25 million Iranians have been infected with the coronavirus and that another 35 million are at risk of acquiring it. The figures, which Rouhani said were based on a new Health Ministry report, are far higher Iran's official toll of 269,440 infected. Rouhani in a televised speech did not address the discrepancy.

Iran, with a population of more than 80 million, has been the Middle East country hardest hit by the epidemic. "Our estimate is that as of now 25 million Iranians have been infected with this virus and about 14,000 have lost their dear lives," Rouhani said in the speech.

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Twitter attack work of young hacker pals: NYT

SAN FRANCISCO: Hackers involved in the high-profile hijacking of Twitter accounts earlier this week were young pals with no links to state or organized crime, The New York Times reported Friday. The attack, which Twitter and federal police are investigating, started with a playful message between hackers on the platform Discord, a chat service popular with gamers, according to the Times. The paper said it had interviewed four people who participated in the hacking, who shared logs and screenshots backing up their accounts of what happened.



KUWAIT: Worshippers, distanced safely from each other and clad in facemasks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, perform Friday prayers at Al-Rashed Mosque in Adailiya, after Friday prayers resumed after four months. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 4)

"The interviews indicate that the attack was not the work of a single country like Russia or a sophisticated group of hackers," the Times reported. "Instead, it was done by a group of young people - one of whom says he lives at home with his mother - who got to know one another because of their obsession with owning early or unusual screen names, particularly one letter or number, like @y or @6."

The massive hack of high-profile users from Elon Musk to Joe Biden has raised questions about Twitter's security as it serves as a megaphone for politicians ahead of November's election. "Based on what we know right now, we believe approximately 130 accounts were targeted by the attackers in some way as part of the incident," Twitter said in a tweet. "For a small subset of these accounts, the attackers were able to gain control of the accounts and then send Tweets from those accounts."

Posts trying to dupe people into sending hackers the virtual currency bitcoin were tweeted by the official accounts of Apple, Uber, Kanye West, Bill Gates, — AFP

Continued on Page 2

COVID trial shows steroid has risks too

WASHINGTON: The keenly-awaited full results from a UK trial of the steroid dexamethasone were published Friday, confirming its life-saving benefits for COVID-19 patients on ventilators but suggesting it may cause harm if given too early. A total of 2,104 hospitalized patients were assigned to

receive six milligram daily doses of the medicine for up to 10 days, and 4,321 to receive usual care, with the rate of deaths compared after 28 days.

Among patients on ventilators, the rate of death for patients on the drug was 29.3 percent compared to 41.4 percent on those without. In other words, this group saw a 29 percent reduction in mortality, just under a third. In patients who were given oxygen but through less invasive means, the benefit was smaller - 23.3 percent on dexamethasone died versus 26.2 who were not on it.

Continued on Page 2



LONDON: In this photo taken on June 16, 2020, a pharmacist holds a box of dexamethasone tablets at a pharmacy. — AFP

Local

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 58,221 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 404 deaths. With the exception of 143 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 tens of thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 49,020 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 8,797 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. Friday prayers resumed at around 1,000 mosques around Kuwait on July 17, with strict social distancing and health precautions observed.

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.

School year ended

The Ministry of Education announced on July 17 ending the 2019-2020 school year, with the remaining part of the curriculum of the year's second half will be integrated into the first chapter of the next academic year 2020-2021 virtually effective as of October 4, after modifying the curriculum. Pre-school pupils, students of elementary and intermediate levels will be promoted to the higher classes. As to the high school level, students who desire to improve their grades can re-enroll in the scholastic year. As to class 12, the remaining period of the second semester was set at six weeks, while curricula were amended in tandem with the complementary study period, due between August 9 and September 17, and that will be via electronic means. Students' assessment will be on weekly basis through interaction and virtual presence at the set educational website. Earlier, the Ministry of Education had 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.

Commercial flights

Commercial flights are set to resume on August 1, while the airport will operate at 30 percent capacity during the six-month first phase of a three-stage airport reopening plan. Kuwait had earlier sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries.

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)

some of the planet's most densely packed cities, is the third nation to hit a million cases after the United States and Brazil, although the numbers of deaths in those two countries are far higher.

Also, Bollywood star and former Miss World Aishwarya Rai Bachchan has been moved to a Mumbai hospital along with her eight-year-old daughter Aaradhya, nearly a week after they were revealed to have the coronavirus, media reports said. They had been in self-quarantine at home but the Times of India newspaper said they were moved to the Nanavati Hospital on Friday after complaining of "breathlessness". "They are fine," a hospital source told Press Trust of India news agency. Her actor husband Abhishek Bachchan and superstar father-in-law Amitabh Bachchan are already in the same hospital.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said Thursday that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are together fast becoming the next epicenter of the virus. "While the world's attention has been focused on the unfolding crisis in the United States and South America, a concurrent human tragedy is fast emerging in South Asia," the organization said. "COVID-19 is spreading at an alarming rate in South Asia, home to a quarter of humanity."

Until now India's main hotspots have been the megacities of Mumbai and New Delhi, but recently smaller cities and rural areas - where 70 percent of Indians live - have begun to raise the alarm. Goa on Thursday evening became the latest state to go under lockdown, imposing a three-day shutdown and a nighttime curfew until Aug 10. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said too many people were "step-

Speaking to AFP in June, leading US scientist Anthony Fauci cautioned that dexamethasone should not be prescribed too soon after a person was infected. "It had no effect, if not maybe even a suggestion of making things worse early on," he said. "This is perfectly compatible with knowing that early on in infection, you need the immune system to suppress the virus."

The authors of the paper, which appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine, added that getting benefit from the drug "is dependent on a selection of the right dose, at the right time, in the right patient". They added that, as far as the COVID-19 illness is concerned, for patients who require oxygen, the abnormal immune response seems more responsible for harm than the replication of the virus in the body.

Medicine delivery

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

Amiri Hospital: 50880699
Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
Adan Hospital: 50880908
Jahra Hospital: 50881066
Sabah Hospital: 97632660
Jaber Hospital: 96992079
Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948
Chest Hospital: 99258749
Razi Hospital: 97633487
Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
Maternity Hospital: 98559531
As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
Zain Hospital: 97552031
NBK Hospital: 96931761
Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

Meanwhile, all licensed pharmacies in Kuwait delivering medicine are allowed to continue their services 24 hours a day. The Ministry of Health is also asking doctors and nurses affiliated with the private medical sector to volunteer in order to contribute to the fight against the virus. Volunteering is available through the link: <http://volunteering.q8-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-Khalidi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.

Dr Ahmad Al-Khalidi: daily 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9910-7965.

Dr Muneera Al-Qattan: Monday and Wednesday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9953-3108.

Dr Zainab Al-Saffar: Sunday and Thursday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 9954-9908.

Dr Sameera Al-Kandari: Tuesday 9:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 6770-9434.

Dr Kawthar Al-Yaqout: Monday and Wednesday 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Call 5521-0088.

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

ping out to meet people at parties" and there was a low level of "awareness and sensitivity".

The coastal tourist region followed Bihar, one of India's most impoverished states and home to 125 million people, in reintroducing curbs after IT hub Bangalore did so earlier in the week. Other areas have also brought back restrictions including parts of badly-hit Tamil Nadu and Kerala - previously lauded as a success story - as well as Assam.

But the situation on the ground in Bihar underscored the challenges in keeping the pandemic in check. The streets of state capital Patna were still teeming with traffic and people after the lockdown began, many ignoring social distancing advice and not wearing masks. "The lockdown is not being fully enforced," local businessman Ranjeet Singh complained.

With per capita spending on health care among the lowest in the world, India's hospitals are reeling. Frontline staff, especially in rundown state-run hospitals, are working punishingly long shifts with often shoddy protective equipment. "COVID patients often get delirious. They refuse to eat, pull away their tubes and even get violent with us," Showkat Nazir Wani, a doctor at one hospital in Uttar Pradesh state told AFP.

Many experts say India is not testing enough people or properly recording fatalities, meaning the true caseload is likely much higher. The tally is "almost certainly underestimated", Gautam Menon, a professor of physics and biology at India's Ashoka University, told AFP. "We feel it might be underestimated by a factor of maybe something like 20 to 30... And maybe that number could be even larger. We have no idea at the moment." — Agencies

But they cautioned that this hypothesis should not be applied to other viral respiratory illnesses, like SARS, MERS and influenza, without further study as they may have different impacts. Dexamethasone was adopted into UK practice on June 16, the day when the initial results were announced, and is also recommended by the US National Institutes of Health.

On its website, the NIH cautions that it isn't yet known how well dexamethasone might work in combination with the anti-viral drug remdesivir, which has proven beneficial when used alone. It adds that patients on the drug should be closely monitored for secondary infections and high blood sugar. It is also known that use of corticosteroids can also re-activate previous infections that were lying dormant, like the hepatitis B virus or tuberculosis. — AFP

In My View

Self-discipline



By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

I was at the office a few days earlier and I mentioned the word discipline, which prompted one of my colleagues to jump and say: "Boy, do we need it...self-discipline". So I went back to books and good old friend Google and searched and researched this word discipline, and I was amazed by all what is written about it.

One writer said: "The possession of self-discipline enables you to choose and then persevere with actions, thoughts and behaviors, which lead to improvement and success. It also gives you the power and inner strength overcome addictions, procrastination and laziness, and to follow through whatever you do."

The single most important attribute to becoming successful is self-discipline, another said. In fact, self-discipline gives one the ability to remain focused on achieving goals and keep up with difficult matters. It gives you the ability to remove obstacles and keep going forward. If we take schools for example, teachers have their own understanding of discipline in their classrooms, but experts say that it can be put down to three forms - preventative discipline, supportive discipline and corrective discipline.

With discipline, you go long way towards success, as it will create abundant energy to stay vibrant, as success in life starts with being disciplined. Self-discipline creates a habit, bearing in mind that habits can make or break you. Self-discipline creates a habit in your life that builds up only through discipline. Most people never remain disciplined in their lives because they are lazy. However laziness is a form of habit as well. Successful people discipline themselves to work and stay consistent to it. This is what attracts success in their lives.

In conclusion, we must have self-discipline in our lives - once we are tasked to do something, we must remain with it until we achieve our goals, otherwise we will be making U-turns to start from the beginning and nothing will be achieved. We must persevere and continue our efforts to fulfill our ambitions. And progress in our lives.

I read a narrative that I want to give as an example of self-discipline and extremely good manners.

A poor man took a cup of grapes to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) took the cup and started eating. He ate the first grape and smiled, then the second and smiled. The poor man became extremely happy as he saw that. The Prophet's (PBUH) companions were looking on in amazement, because they were used to the Prophet (PBUH) sharing with them any gift he received, yet he was eating one grape after the other while smiling until he finished the cup, while the companions were left wondering!

The poor man then left very happy. A companion asked the Prophet (PBUH): Why did not you share the grapes with us? The Prophet (PBUH) smiled then said: You saw how happy he was with the cup of grapes, but when I tasted it, I found it bitter, and I was afraid if I shared it with you, there could be one who may spoil that man's joy.

We should understand that not all what is on our minds is said, and not all what is said is meant, and not all what is written is a reality. A true smile, clean heart, good treatment, easy spirit and courteous word - this is how life's beauty is lived. Be of good manners and all hearts will love you!

Twitter attack work of young...

Continued from Page 1

Barack Obama and many others on Wednesday. Twitter said it appeared to be a "coordinated social engineering attack by people who successfully targeted some of our employees with access to internal systems and tools."

Fraudulent posts, which were largely deleted, said people had 30 minutes to send \$1,000 in cryptocurrency bitcoin, promising they would receive twice as much in return. More than \$100,000 worth of bitcoin was sent to email addresses mentioned in the tweets, according to Blockchain.com, which monitors crypto transactions. The young hackers interviewed by the Times said a mysterious user who went by the name "Kirk" initiated the scheme with a message and was the one with access to Twitter accounts.

They contended they were only involved in commandeering lesser-known Twitter accounts, particularly to swipe coveted short handles such as an "@_" sign and single letters or numbers that could easily be sold, according to the report. The young hackers maintained they stopped serving as middlemen for "Kirk" when high-profile accounts became targets. Some hackers are "obsessed" with hijacking "Original Gangster" social media accounts staked out in the services' early days that have short profile names, according to Brian Krebs of Krebs on Security.

"Possession of these OG accounts confers a measure of status and perceived influence and wealth in SIM swapping circles, as such accounts can often fetch thousands of dollars when resold in the underground," Krebs said in a post. — AFP

25m Iranians infected; India...

Continued from Page 1

"There is the possibility that between 30 and 35 million other people will be at risk," he said. "In total, more than 200,000 people have been hospitalized," he said. The health ministry on Friday said 13,791 people had died from COVID-19.

"We have not yet achieved herd immunity and we have no choice but to be united and break the chain of transmission of the coronavirus," Rouhani added. It appears to be the first time a senior Iranian official has indicated the country is seeking to defeat COVID-19 via herd immunity. Rouhani's deputy head of communications, Alireza Moezi, said on Twitter hours later that the 25 million refers to "those who have encountered the virus and achieved complete immunity".

Meanwhile, coronavirus cases in India passed one million on Friday, official data showed as authorities struggle to check the spread of the deadly pandemic across the world's second-most populous nation. With over 600 Indians dying daily, lockdowns are being re-imposed across the country of 1.3 billion following an easing of restrictions in recent weeks on hopes the outbreak was under control.

Health ministry data released Friday put the total cases recorded at 1,003,382, a jump of almost 35,000, with 25,602 deaths after an increase of 687 — both new daily records. India, home to

COVID trial shows steroid...

Continued from Page 1

However, there was no benefit among the group who weren't receiving any oxygenation at the time the trial started. In this cohort, 17.4 percent on the steroid died compared to 14 percent who did not receive it - suggesting the drug increased their mortality risk. This is because the drug works by suppressing the abnormal immune response that damages the body's organs, rather than attacking the virus.

Local

Health ministry has final say on lifting Farwaniya lockdown

Kuwait concludes scholastic year 2019-2020



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA



Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi attends the meeting.



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah attends the meeting.

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti government spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrim said Thursday the decision to end the complete lockdown in Farwaniya is still awaiting the assessment of the Ministry of Health. "The decision depends on the health authorities analyzing the readings of data related to the developments of the situation of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This is what happened before ending the lockdowns in Hawally, Mahboula, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Khaitan areas," he pointed out.

Mezrim, also head of the government communication center, made the press remarks at Al-Seif Palace Thursday evening after a virtual Cabinet meeting. Asked on the five stages of gradual return to normal life, he said this week, the third week of phase 2, will see the health authorities assessing the possibility of the country moving to phase 3. Mezrim noted that each stage last for three weeks. He advised the citizens to avoid travelling abroad as a precaution against the outbreak of COVID-19 worldwide.

School year

Meanwhile, Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi announced on Thursday concluding the scholastic year (2019-2020) due to ramifications of the novel coronavirus. The remaining part of the curriculum of the year's second half will be integrated into the first chapter of the next academic year (2020-2021), virtually effective as of October 4 — after modifying the curriculum, the minister declared. The announce-

ment came during a news conference following a Cabinet session held as part of state efforts and follow-up on repercussions of the pandemic, particularly at the teaching level. Pre-school pupils, students of elementary and intermediate levels will be promoted to the higher classes. Those who do not have grades due to absence are entitled to be enrolled for the second round of examinations.

As to the high school level, students who desire to improve their grades can re-enroll in the scholastic year. As to class 12, the remaining period of the second semester was set at six weeks, the minister said, adding that curricula were amended in tandem with the complementary study period, due between August 9 and September 17, and that will be via



Phase 3 move assessed this week

electronic means. Minister Harbi said students' assessment will be on weekly basis through interaction and virtual presence at the set educational website. As to the university level, the minister said it was decided to resume the remaining duration of the second semester as of August 9 until October 6, with teaching to be done online as well. The summer semester will be between October 11 and November 17. The next academic year (2020-2021) will kick off on November 29, 2020 and proceed until March 17, 2021. The next virtual semester will begin on March 28, 2021, until July 13 and the summer one will be from August 1 until September 21, 2021.

Anti-coronavirus precautions

The Cabinet held an extraordinary virtual session

on Thursday, under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, urging citizens and expatriates to continue to abide by precautions against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Following the session, Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said the prime minister briefed the ministers about his meeting with His Highness the Amir, late on Wednesday, during which His Highness the Amir expressed satisfaction at the government efforts for facing the novel coronavirus. Saleh quoted the premier as saying during the session that His Highness the Amir, during the meeting with him, advised for pursuing with efforts and putting all resources at disposal of sparing the citizens effects of the virus at all levels, particularly in the educational sector so that students would be able to continue education.

Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah informed the ministers about the coronavirus developments at the regional and international levels, along with statistics compiled by the World Health Organization. He also briefed the executives about the local health status, namely figures of cases according to regions and nationalities, in addition to counts of recoveries and deaths as well as critical cases in intensive care units. The minister of health noted in his presentation that deaths stabilized, with mounting cases of recoveries, however cases among citizens remained high due to mingling. The Cabinet renewed the call upon the public to adhere to the health guidelines, set by the health authorities to protect themselves against infection with the virus.

Latest developments

The ministers followed up on latest developments with respect of treatment, precautions and logistical services related to the combat against the virus, examining recommendations by the ministerial emergency commission against the coronavirus, regarding the plans for completing the teaching year. They were informed about assessment reports, presented by the ministry of education, Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied



Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh attends the meeting.

Education and Training for resuming the academic year 2019-2020 and start the next year 2020-2021. Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi presented details of the plans and programs regarding the teaching status in both the public and private sectors. He lauded the plans that have been prepared in light of the changing facts resulting from ramifications of the health crisis, noting that they would be regularly reviewed.

In the meantime, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan and the Director General of the Public Authority for Industries briefed the ministers about efforts to increase production of anti-coronavirus materials, noting that a strategic stockpile of these supplies has been secured. The ministers examined a report by the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Mohammad Al-Hashel, who doubles as the chairman of the higher economic boosting commission, about the scheme for shoring up the national economy, in the shadow of the virus crisis. — KUNA

News in brief

Salary certificates

KUWAIT: Employers can now renew work permits for employees registered in their files without the need to present salary certificates, the Public Authority for Manpower announced Friday. This decision came upon instructions of Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel to facilitate procedures for work permit renewals, authority director Ahmad Al-Mousa said. Employers must present a signed undertaking to provide salary certificates at any time the authority requires them to do so, Mousa said, adding that the form for that can be obtained from the authority's website.

Commercial flights

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah held a meeting on Thursday with officials at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, following up on the plan to re-operate commercial flights via Kuwait International Airport in August. The rapporteur of the higher committee tasked with resuming these flights Saad Al-Otaibi said that the participants in the session examined final phases of implementing the health precautions, as well as the guidelines for resuming commercial flights in shadow of the coronavirus. The committee briefed the minister on preparations done at the airport's buildings and terminals for resuming commercial flights with the required health precautions for outgoing travelers and arrivals.

Oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 56 cents to \$43.15 per barrel Friday after being at \$43.71 pb Thursday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the price of the Brent crude went down by 23 cents to \$43.14 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by 16 cents to \$40.59 pb.

Fifteen flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that 15 flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 3,135 passengers. They included six flights to Egypt, three flights to India, two flights to the UAE, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Pakistan, one flight to Lebanon and one flight to Bangladesh.

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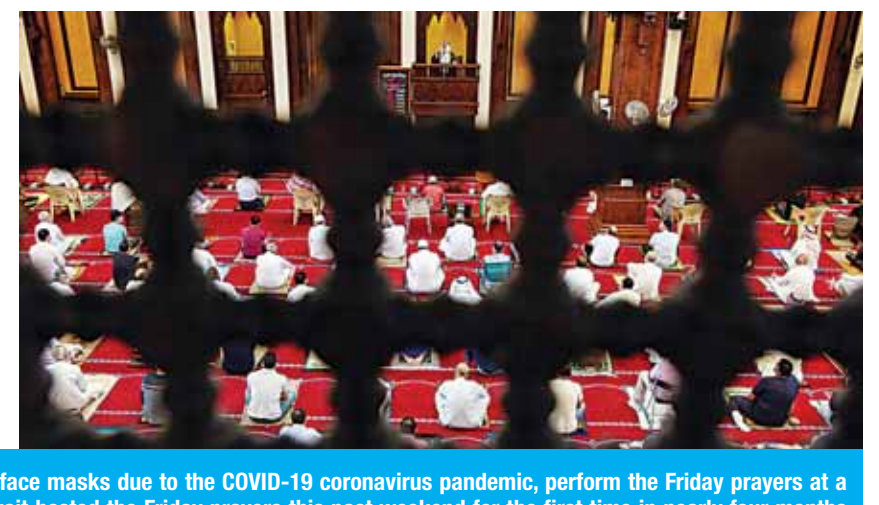
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Local

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
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for first time in four monthsDisabled people
of personal
concern to PM

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel (right) speaks during the meeting. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel affirmed that people with disabilities are active members in the society and of personal concern to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Speaking to the press after a series of meetings with representatives of societies regarding the people of special needs on Thursday, the minister said the meeting dealt with related issues and stressed on importance of joint cooperation. The rehabilitation centers for psychological, behavioral and severe and moderate mental disabilities returned to work, she disclosed. During the meeting, the minister promised to form working teams to follow on all recommendations and proposals aimed at developing services and preparing an emergency plan to face any challenges concerning care for this segment of the society. She pointed out that it was agreed to increase remote work and electronic services to exert more efforts for the people of special challenges. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Muslim worshippers, distanced safely from each other and clad in face masks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, perform the Friday prayers at a mosque in Kuwait City on July 17, 2020. Around 1,000 mosques around Kuwait hosted the Friday prayers this past weekend for the first time in nearly four months when all worship places were closed as a precaution to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KRCS distributes masks
at mosques during prayers

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed masks and sanitizers to worshippers in many Kuwaiti governorates after it opened on Friday prayers, as a precautionary measure to combat COVID-19. Director of Public Relations and Information at KRCS Khaled Al-Zaid said that they also distributed gloves while providing awareness about the virus' symptoms and ways

to prevent infection. This requires public and private institutions' cooperation to provide needs and supplies to counter the contagion, he added. He praised the keenness of worshippers wearing masks while social distancing. Zaid appreciated the nonstop efforts made by all state ministries, sectors and various institutions to protect people. —KUNA

US, GCC, Iraq
renew support
for GCCIA

WASHINGTON: The governments of Iraq, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and United States have renewed their full support for the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) project to connect the electricity grids of Iraq and the Gulf bloc, a joint statement said here late Thursday. The statement, released by the US Department of State,

pointed out that "the United States is committed to facilitating this project and providing support where needed. This project will provide much-needed electricity to the people of Iraq and support Iraq's economic development, particularly in the southern provinces. The governments of Iraq, Gulf Cooperation Council, and United States look forward to increased close economic and energy cooperation between the United States, Iraq, and the GCC countries, as a basis for peace, development, and prosperity in the region." It carried on saying that all parties "called for the speedy and full implementation" of the pledges made in 2018 by the international community at the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq. —KUNA

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Doctors toil and wilt as India COVID cases hit one million

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LIANYUNGANG, China: A teacher and her students pose with Communist Party emblems during a class about the history of the Communist Party at a school in China's eastern Jiangsu province on June 28, 2020. —AFP

How hot could US-China 'Cold War' get?

Trump administration has increasingly gone global against Beijing

WASHINGTON: Tensions are mounting by the day between the United States and China, leading to talk of a new Cold War. Experts see important historical differences - but believe the two powers are entering dangerous territory. US President Donald Trump's administration has increasingly gone global against China, pushing other nations to reject its strings-attached aid and telecom titan Huawei, and siding unreservedly with Beijing's rivals in the dispute-rife South China Sea.

Trump has made China a major campaign issue as he heads into the November election, but the relationship looks unlikely to change in more than tone if he loses to Joe Biden, who has accused the president of not being tough enough. Stephen Walt, a professor of international affairs at Harvard University, said the world's two largest economic powers were engaged in a long-term competition over "incompatible strategic visions," including China's desire to dominate Asia.

China sees Trump as a "weak and error-prone leader" and likely believes the "disastrous" US response to the coronavirus pandemic presented opportunities to press its advantage, he said. "It resembles the US-Soviet 'Cold War' in certain respects, but it is not yet as dangerous as that earlier rivalry," Walt said. "One key difference is that the two states are still closely connected economically, although that relationship is now under considerable strain."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is taking stern warnings about Beijing around the

world, did not reject the Cold War comparison in a recent radio interview. He also noted that the United States was never as economically intertwined with the Soviet Union - and said the West therefore needed to separate from China, especially its technology, which Washington fears will be used for espionage.

Chance of 'hot war'

Oriana Skylar Mastro, an assistant professor at Georgetown University and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said it was dangerous to speak of a Cold War with China. "The situation with China is nothing like the Cold War," she said. "On the positive side, we have extensive engagement. On the negative, there is a real possibility of a hot war between the two sides to a degree that never existed with the Soviet Union." She said that using a Cold War lens leads to ineffective responses, including Washington incorrectly seeing Beijing as an ideological threat.

Mastro said that China had plenty of options to alleviate US concerns, such as pulling back weapons systems in the South China Sea. "But Beijing won't do this because it fundamentally misunderstands the drivers of US policy. It thinks the US is responding to its own decline in power - that no matter how Beijing acts, the US will lash out," she said. "So there is no impetus to try to moderate its ambitions and how it attempts to achieve them. This is a mistake. And China's failure to do so, to try to assure the US, could lead us into a war."

Sharp hardening

In a shift from a few years ago, US businesses, stung by what they see as rampant theft of intellectual property, are rarely asking for de-escalation. David Stilwell, the top State Department official for East Asia, said he learned as US defense attaché in Beijing that China responded to "demonstrable and tangible action". "Personally I was of that school that you could work with these folks. But my epiphany came 10 years ago when I went to Beijing," he told a recent think tank event.

The United States has also pressed China over its clampdown in Hong Kong and mass incarceration of Uighur Muslims, each time triggering retaliatory measures by Beijing. Trump has still voiced hope of preserving a trade deal with China, which promised before the coronavirus pandemic to ramp up purchases of US goods. Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing, said both sides knew China would no longer be able to carry out the agreement in full.

Shi said he expects relations will keep deteriorating. "The old Cold War was a very fierce confrontation and competition between two great powers, driven by ideology and strategy," Shi said. In the case of the United States and China, the two powers are selectively but rapidly "decoupling" from each other, he said. "Using this definition, it can be said that China and the United States have begun to enter a new Cold War." —AFP

Lewis, civil rights icon, dead at 80



John Lewis

WASHINGTON: John Lewis, the civil rights warrior who died Friday aged 80, excelled at what he liked to call "good trouble" - standing up against racial injustice to forge a better United States. The African-American icon marched with Martin Luther King Jr, was nearly beaten to death by police, and later as a sitting congressman was arrested multiple times for protesting genocide or leading immigration reform sit-ins.

Lewis was a sharecropper's son whose fights for justice helped define an era, and whose moral authority as an indomitable elder statesman left a permanent imprint in Congress. He was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer in late 2019. "Today, America mourns the loss of one of the greatest heroes of American history," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said of the 17-term congressman from Georgia.

She described Lewis as "a titan of the civil rights movement whose goodness, faith and bravery transformed our nation". Lewis clashed with President Donald Trump on multiple occasions - boycotting his inauguration and citing Russian interference in the 2016 election to question his legitimacy.

Risked 'life and blood'

Lewis was just 21 when he became a founding member of the Freedom Riders, who fought segregation of the US transportation system in the early 1960s, eventually becoming one of the nation's most powerful voices for justice and equality. He was the youngest leader of the 1963 March on Washington, in which King delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech.

Two years later Lewis nearly died while leading hundreds of marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on a peace march to Montgomery when state troopers, seeking to intimidate those demonstrating for voting rights for black Americans, attacked protesters. Lewis suffered a fractured skull that day, which would become known as "Bloody Sunday". Fifty years later in 2015, he walked across the bridge arm in arm with Barack Obama, the nation's first black president, to mark the anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery march. Obama presented Lewis with the Medal of Freedom, among the nation's highest civilian honors, at a White House ceremony in 2011. "Not many of us get to live to see our own legacy play out in such a meaningful, remarkable way. John Lewis did," Obama tweeted early Saturday.

"He loved this country so much that he risked his life and his blood so that it might live up to its promise," Obama added. Another civil rights giant also died Friday. Reverend CT Vivian staged anti-segregation sit-ins in the 1940s, was an early advisor to King and helped organize the Freedom Rides. He died early Friday at 95. Bernice King, youngest daughter of Martin Luther King Jr, tweeted photographs of the two men early Saturday, with the caption: "Elders, now ancestors. Hallelujah." —AFP

Resurgent virus crisis rattles Bibi

JERUSALEM: His poll numbers are sinking, protests are growing and economically punishing restrictions have just been re-imposed. Surging coronavirus cases in Israel have left Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu encircled by trouble. After a late-night cabinet meeting, the government on Friday announced that stores, markets and various other public spaces would be closed on weekends.

It said restaurants would be limited to takeaway services through the week, with a later statement specifying the measure would start from Tuesday. Netanyahu's office said the premier wanted to avoid another "general lockdown" - a move that would likely infuriate a public battered by the pandemic. But it is clear that coronavirus stumbles by Netanyahu, a right-winger, have dented his support. A poll this week by Channel 13 found that 61 percent of voters were "displeased" by his handling of the crisis. That marks a stark reversal for Netanyahu, whose response early in the outbreak won praise. After his government curbed flights and imposed lockdown measures in March, Israel briefly reduced its daily tally of newly confirmed cases to the single digits in early May, but in recent weeks new cases have regularly topped 1,000 per day.

According to the Israel Democracy Institute think tank, 57.5 percent of the public supported Netanyahu's coronavirus management at the beginning of April. As of July 12, that number had fallen to 29.5 percent. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, whose support has been essential to Netanyahu in power, have voiced frustration over the looming threat of renewed synagogue closures. Netanyahu met with ultra-Orthodox party leaders this week and said he wanted to ease their "distress," while pledging to hold consultations before imposing any closures.

'Storming the Bibistille'

Netanyahu has taken responsibility for the hasty re-opening of Israel's economy between late April and June - measures widely seen as triggering the resurgence in cases. Protests against economic hardship have spread across the country, and some 10,000



JERUSALEM: Israeli protesters brandish placards during a rally against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu outside his official residence on Friday. —AFP

people demonstrated in Tel Aviv on Saturday. A rally outside the premier's Jerusalem residence on July 14 saw minor skirmishes with police. One Israeli media outlet dubbed it the "Storming of the Bibistille," as that rally coincided with the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille during the 1789 French revolution. The new restrictions cap at 20 the number of people allowed to assemble in open air spaces. Opposition lawmaker Ofer Cassif of the mainly Arab joint List told the Ma'ariv newspaper Friday that this was a "politically motivated" decision to suppress further protests. In an apparent bid to quell rising public anger, Netanyahu has also announced plans for cash payments to all Israelis.

Meanwhile, a blame game has erupted between politicians and public officials. Among them is Siegal Sadetzki, the former director of public health who resigned this month, levelling blistering accusations at the government and claiming her expertise had been ignored. For Dan Ben-David, an academic at Tel Aviv University, Netanyahu is responsible for Israel's undeniable coronavirus missteps. —AFP

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International

Masks spark political and legal battles in US as virus cases soar

Health authorities report more than 77,600 new cases

WASHINGTON: The United States' COVID-19 virus case load is soaring at an explosive rate, even as leaders of some of the worst-hit states resist mandatory mask measures to stem the spread. Health authorities reported more than 77,600 new cases on Friday, according to the Johns Hopkins University database. The number of patients hospitalized for the virus is at its highest level since April 23, according to The COVID Tracking Project.

The death rate, which plummeted in May and June, has been rising since last week. Florida, the new epicenter, posted more than 11,000 new cases and 128 deaths on Friday.

Coronavirus is meanwhile spreading to new parts of the country including Idaho, Tennessee and Mississippi. But New York, the original US epicenter where more than 32,000 virus patients have died, moved to further ease its restrictions after bringing its outbreak under control.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said Friday that zoos and botanical gardens could open with limited capacity, as could baseball games, without spectators.

Trump briefings

President Donald Trump's ratings have plummeted since the start of the pandemic. Only 38 percent of Americans approve of his handling of the crisis, against 51 percent in March, according to a Washington Post poll published Friday. Trump aide Kellyanne Conway said Friday the decline is explained because the president has stopped giving daily briefings on the virus. "The president's numbers were much higher when he was out there briefing everybody on a day-by-day basis about the coronavirus," she said, adding: "I think the president should be doing that."

The task force briefings featuring Trump were halted in late April amid mounting criticism over his exaggerated and inaccurate claims about the public health response and his penchant for pushing bogus treatments. "We've really got to regroup, call a



Florida state emerges as new epicenter

time-out," Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious disease specialist, told Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg in a video chat Thursday. "Not necessarily lock down again, but say, 'We've got to do this in a more measured way,'" he added.

'Do not be a sheep'

States enacted lockdowns in patchwork fashion, and several skipped important epidemiological checkpoints before easing stay-at-home orders, said Fauci. Subsequently, many have been forced to close bars that had just recently reopened, but also sometimes shut down gyms, movie theaters, places of worship and shops.

Some mayors have imposed mandatory mask orders. But in Georgia, the state's Republican governor Brian Kemp sued Atlanta's mayor for issuing a face covering directive. "While we all agree wearing



MIAMI BEACH: A waiter wears face mask as he works at a restaurant on Ocean Drive in Miami Beach, Florida amid the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

a mask is effective, I am confident Georgians do not need a mandate to do the right thing," Kemp said. His lawsuit seeks to overturn not just the mask order but Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms' return to a stricter lockdown. Bottoms, a Democrat who has herself tested positive for coronavirus, believes Kemp's decision was political retaliation, telling CNN the suit came one day after Trump visited Atlanta when she pointed out he was breaking the law by being maskless at the airport.

Similar conflicts abound elsewhere. In Texas,

which notched a record 174 coronavirus deaths on Friday, Governor Greg Abbott has ordered a statewide mask order after seeing cases surge, but he has been condemned through censure resolutions passed by multiple local Republican officials.

They accuse him of violating the party's principles of separation of powers, free enterprise and personal responsibility, according to The Texas Tribune. The Democratic mayor of Houston, the state's largest city, wants to move back into lockdown—a move refused by the governor. — AFP

News in brief

23 bodies found in Mexico grave

GUADALAJARA: The bodies of at least 23 people have been found in a hidden grave close to a police base on the outskirts of the western Mexican city of Guadalajara, local authorities said Friday. "The people deployed to the site have found 23 bodies, as well as four bags with various items of evidence, and three of the bodies have been identified," said the Jalisco state prosecutor's office in a statement. The statement said the mass grave had been found on Monday. The families of the three people so far identified have been informed, the office added. — AFP

Pentagon nixes Confederate flag

WASHINGTON: Pentagon chief Mark Esper on Friday effectively banned the display of the Confederate flag at all US military facilities, where the banner — seen by many as racist — is frequently displayed in barracks and common areas. In a message to all US military officials, the Defense Department posted a list of flags authorized to be flown at bases and aboard warships, in offices and conference halls, and in any spaces operated by the military. Left off that list was the Confederate battle flag, a red banner with two diagonal blue stripes and 13 white stars symbolizing the southern slaveholding states that seceded from the union or supported the effort during the 1861-1865 American Civil War. — AFP

Ginsburg treated for cancer

WASHINGTON: US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the 87-year-old anchor of its liberal wing, said Friday that she is undergoing chemotherapy for a recurrence of cancer but will remain on the bench. Ginsburg, one of the four progressive justices on the nine-member court, said a biopsy in February had revealed lesions on her liver. Ginsburg, the oldest member of the court, said a course of immunotherapy had proved unsuccessful but chemotherapy was "yielding positive results." "I have often said I would remain a member of the Court as long as I can do the job full steam," she said in a statement. "I remain fully able to do that." — AFP

Iran oppn gathers online

PARIS: With prominent supporters from Europe and the United States, an exiled Iranian opposition group on Friday held its annual conference online to press for "uprising" and regime change in Tehran. The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), which is outlawed by Iran, held a physical meeting of just a few dozen at its base in Albania, but said thousands more joined in online. The event at its base of Ashraf 3 in Albania was addressed in person by the NCRI's France-based leader Maryam Rajavi who stood in front of conference delegates but also a bank of hundreds of screens as guests dialed in from outside. "Our first commitment is that we, the Iranian people and the Resistance, will overthrow the clerical regime and will reclaim Iran," she said. "The final word is that the mullahs have no solutions and their regime is doomed to fall in its entirety," she said. Rajavi pointed to the recent protests that have swept Iran as the economy suffers under sanctions and the "maximum pressure" policy of US President Donald Trump, including the November 2019 demonstrations against a petrol price hike. — AFP

How new inventions can fight spread of COVID-19 indoors

WASHINGTON: It's become a familiar mantra: masks, hand-washing and physical distancing can slow the spread of the coronavirus while work continues on developing the vaccines and treatments needed to rid the world of its threat. But as tens of millions of people return to public transit, their workplaces and schools, are these interventions enough?

Researchers are increasingly looking at the pandemic through the lens of engineering, devising ways to make indoor environments safer. Here's a preview of what's in store.

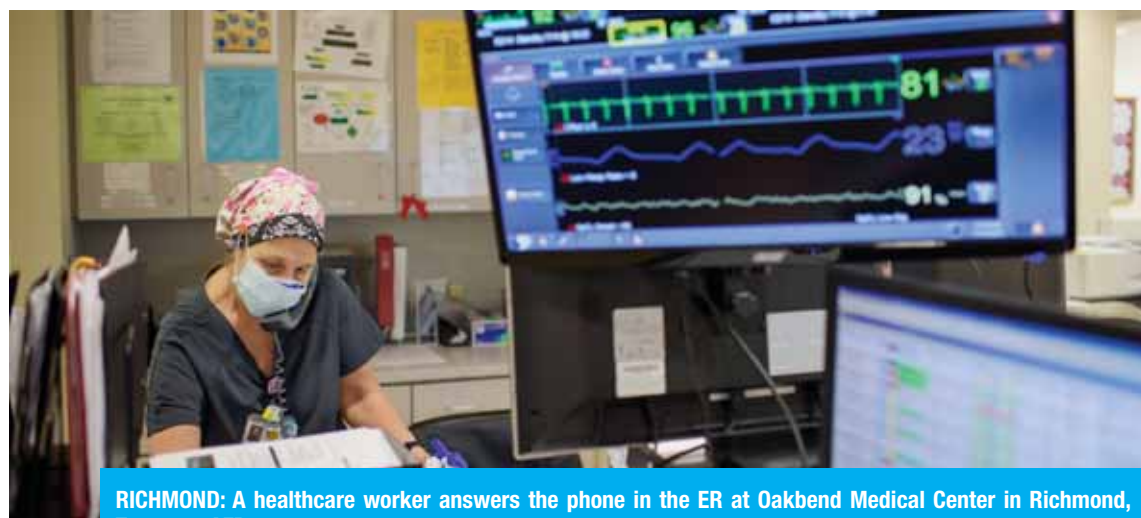
Heated nickel air filters

Scientists are getting more worried about the potential airborne spread of the coronavirus, at distances far greater than the two meters (six feet) of

spacing urged by guidelines. Certain super-spreading events, such as a choir practice in Washington state in the spring, appeared to involve so-called microdroplets that became suspended in the air. HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters—technology that first came to market in the 1950s—are used widely in hospitals, biocontainment labs and airplanes. These use a fan to draw air through felt-like filters to capture the tiniest of microbes. But the filters become contaminated over time and must eventually be incinerated or autoclaved.

A research team at the Texas Center for Superconductivity at University of Houston and Galveston National Laboratory has now demonstrated the efficiency of a new type of filter based on an ultra-fine foam made of nickel. By heating the foam to 200 degrees Celsius (392 degrees Fahrenheit), the researchers were able to eliminate 99.8 percent of airborne SARS-CoV-2 virus from a room on first pass.

Crucially, the foam is insulated, so it doesn't heat up the room. The team published their findings in the journal Materials Today Physics last week, and Medistar—the company behind it—has received regulatory approval to sell the system. The firm says the system can either be installed in pre-existing air



RICHMOND: A healthcare worker answers the phone in the ER at Oakbend Medical Center in Richmond, Texas. — AFP

One small Texas hospital pushed to the limit

RICHMOND: Bed-ridden patients are treated in the congested corridors of the Oakbend Medical Center, a small hospital in Texas where a rapid increase in coronavirus cases threatens to overwhelm staff. Emergency cases are normally guaranteed immediate care at the hospital outside Houston but, with a limited capacity of 16 beds in the ward, the influx of COVID-19 victims has forced it to use ingenuity to cope.

"Right now, under the COVID crisis, unfortunately we're having to hold patients 24, 48 hours... until a bed space opens up," Bill Hamlyn, director of emergency critical care, told AFP.

Houston has emerged as a national hotspot of infections in recent weeks as the United States flounders in its efforts to control the virus and case numbers rocket to record highs.

Wearing a hairnet, two masks—one on top of the other—and sometimes a plastic visor, the caregivers busily administer first aid to newly admitted patients in the corridors. Near a bed placed against a wall, an ultraviolet lamp sterilizes the air. A nurse in a blue protective gown pulls on a second pair of gloves before moving one patient out of the "COVID holding room," whose door is made of white tarpaulin sealed with zippers.

On Wednesday, four of the 16 beds in the Oakbend Medical Center's emergency unit, located

on the ground floor of the building, were for COVID-19 patients. The hospital has also started a home oxygen service for patients whose condition is stable, with support provided by daily videoconferencing to a "COVID buddy" health professional.

"This is one of the ways we try to keep patients out of the hospital and maximize our space," said Hamlyn. Since the first peak of the outbreak in the spring, hospitals across the US have reported being overwhelmed. Often, this is because the extra intake of coronavirus patients, even if it has been relatively small, has taken up all their spare capacity.

People needing treatment for the virus have become much younger since the start of the summer holidays, said Donna Jameson, ER clinical coordinator. She predicted that the July 4th holiday would soon further increase the number of young people suffering as the long weekend of partying and social gatherings spread the virus.

Out of more than 26,000 patients whose cases have been analyzed by Texas health authorities, nearly 5,000 were between 20 and 29 years old. Upstairs at the hospital, the small intensive care unit dealt with 12 patients—five of them with COVID-19. "Now many of the patients that come, they come in, like, severe respiratory distress," said Niticia Mpanga, a registered respiratory therapist at the hospital. Since July 1, the number of detected cases in Texas has increased by about 70 percent, and health officials fear the easing of shutdown restrictions could be disastrous. The entire Houston area should again be put under lockdown for at least 10 days, said one emergency doctor who wished to remain anonymous. "That gives us time for some of these people to recover and go home," the doctor said, criticizing the political response, adding, "We need better leadership." — AFP

conditioning units or walked through a room in a mobile unit. "This is a very timely invention with great potential in fighting against COVID-19, particularly with increasing consensus that COVID-19 can be airborne," Gang Chen, an MIT professor who was not involved in the work, told AFP. But since COVID-19 carriers may stay in a room for a prolonged period, the key to how useful any filtration system is lies in how fast it can exchange air at high volume.

Lamps that operate on a particular area of the ultraviolet spectrum known as UVC have long been used to kill bacteria, viruses and molds, notably in hospitals and in the food-processing industry. But direct exposure to UVC is dangerous because the rays, which aren't present in regular sunlight, cause skin cancer and eye problems—meaning they can only be used once people leave. Researchers at Columbia University have been working for several years on a new type of UVC lamp, whose shorter wavelength of 222 nanometers makes them safe for humans but still lethal to microbes. Last month, a team led by physicist David Brenner published a paper in the journal Scientific Reports showing that their technology killed 99.9 percent of seasonal coronaviruses present in airborne droplets. — AFP

One family's vigil to protect memory of Albania's dictator

LABINOT MAL, Albania: Sabire Plaku gets short of breath when she climbs the hill that leads to the last intact statue of Albania's communist former dictator Enver Hoxha. Every morning, the 85-year-old checks that nobody has touched the effigy, which depicts him as a warrior. Hoxha ruled with an iron fist for 45 years until his death in 1985, persecuting and executing many thousands.

When the communist regime fell six years after his death, dozens of Hoxha's statues did not survive the anger of his countrymen. In Labinot Mal, a village nestled in mountains in central Albania, the more than two meters (6.6 feet) tall bronze effigy remains intact and hidden, thanks to the efforts of Plaku and other villagers who want to protect a "hero" of the nation.

The village plays host to a vital part of Albania's history—Hoxha installed the headquarters of the National Liberation Army in a huge stone house there in June 1943, during the fight against Italian fascists and German Nazi occupiers. The invaders were driven out of Albania shortly after, and the communist regime later transformed the house into a military museum.

However, it is now a shadow of its former self.

Moisture drips down its walls and the roof is on the brink of collapse. Everyone has abandoned it except Plaku and her family. Every day, she breathlessly climbs the hill and stairs leading to the house.

Once there, she will carefully clean the statue of the dictator, hidden under straw in a stable on the ground floor that the sun barely reaches.

"It is invisible but not absent," said Plaku, so fragile that she can barely open the dilapidated door secured with an iron bar. "I've been guarding him for years, since the fall of the regime," she said, referring to the events of April 1991.

At the time, dozens of people used ropes to tear out the statue from its stone pedestal next to the museum. The museum itself, displaying the dictator's weapons, photos and bed, was robbed.

To protect the statue from the victims of Hoxha's regime—as well as scrap dealers—"we hid it here, under straw", Plaku said. She is cautious and distrusts strangers visiting the village, accessible by a bad mountain road from Elbasan, the nearest town some 30 kilometres (19 miles) away. — AFP

International

Doctors toil and wilt as India COVID cases hit one million

IMA raises red alert as death toll of physicians touches 99

GREATER NOIDA: In suffocating full protective gear inside an Indian intensive care unit with no air conditioning, doctor Showkat Nazir Wani is risking his life battling brutal heat and treating coronavirus patients.

Almost 100 Indian doctors have died since the pandemic began, working punishingly long hours in temperatures that can top 40 degrees Celsius (105 degrees Fahrenheit). "Wearing this PPE kit at the temperature of 40 degrees, it's very difficult, I can say because you are drenched in sweat. Still, (we try) to do our best to save the lives of patients," Wani, a resident doctor at the private Sharda Hospital in Greater Noida outside New Delhi, said. "It feels very hot and suffocating. But we have to wear it for our own safety," the 29-year-old said before rushing to attend to a patient battling a lung collapse.

India on Friday hit a million coronavirus cases, the third-highest total in the world, with no sign yet of the infection curve flattening as new cases emerge in rural areas. More than 25,000 people have died nationally. The country has some of the lowest per capita health care spending in the world and poorly paid staff working in dilapidated state hospitals are highly vulnerable.

The Indian Medical Association, a voluntary group of doctors which says 99 physicians have died so far, this week issued a "red alert". "Doctors need to take charge of the situation and ensure the safety of themselves, their families, their colleagues and staff," it said in a statement.

Sharda Hospital has been providing free treatment to COVID-19 patients under instructions from the state government, which means facilities are basic and many

patients are poor. Not all patients are in hospital gowns. One was on a bed wearing a bedraggled T-shirt with bloodstains. Because there is no air conditioning, doctors and nurses are quickly drenched in sweat. Since they are enveloped head-to-foot in plastic protective gear, the sweat can't evaporate to cool them down.

And as going to the toilet means removing all the gear and then putting a new set, some staff skimp on drinking enough water. Nausea and dizziness can sometimes ensue, and in the long term the staff can risk serious problems including organ damage.

Abhishek Deshwal, who heads the hospital's intensive care unit, said working in such heat while wearing the body suits was "doubly stressful for the staff". "But we are trying to do our best, we don't have any other option."

Some staff have quit or gone on long leave, forcing the government to rope in medical students and even retired staff. The virus has also affected their relationships with families, and some have admitted being weighed down mentally. Wani, for instance, has not seen his family based in Indian Kashmir since the outbreak began in March.

As a resident doctor, he is on "Covid call" 24/7, and has hardly had any time to socialize. Dramatic scenes that unfold in the ICU play on his mind constantly, with every death affecting him "deeply".

"Covid patients often get delirious. They refuse to eat, pull away their tubes and even get violent with us," he said. One of his patients once slapped a nurse and tried to hit him as well. "But I try to be patient with them. I have often held their hands to



AHMEDABAD: Two health workers wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) suits (left and center) collect a swab sample at a makeshift test point at Sanathal, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad on Friday. — AFP

reassure them because they are all alone without their loved ones, sometimes for days at end. "I share these experiences with my parents over the

phone. They are obviously very concerned for me but they appreciate my work. Their appreciation motivates me to work even harder." — AFP

Mali opposition insists president must resign



BAMAKO: Protesters gestures on a barricade put up in front of the Salam mosque of Badalabougou. Mali's protest movement on Friday pressed on with a demand for embattled President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to quit, as international mediators tried to defuse the crisis in the insurgency-riven country. — AFP

BAMAKO: Mali's protest movement on Friday pressed on with a demand for embattled President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to quit, as international mediators tried to defuse the crisis in the insurgency-riven country. At a press conference in the capital Bamako, the June 5 Movement also insisted that the West African state's parliament be dissolved, and called for a "republican transition" from the current government.

The move came during soaring political tensions in Mali, which a delegation from the 15-nation West African regional bloc ECOWAS is trying to calm. The June 5 Movement has triggered a show-down with the government with unflinching demands that Keita resign over his perceived failures in tackling the dire economy and Mali's eight-year jihadist conflict. After staging several anti-Keita protests last month, the latest rally, on July 10, turned violent and deepened the political impasse. Three days of clashes between protesters and security forces ensued, leaving 11 dead and 158 injured, according to an official tally, in the bloodiest bout of political unrest in years.

The June 5 Movement—a disparate alliance of political, social and civil-society leaders—has stuck to its core demand and rejected conciliatory gestures from the president. ECOWAS mediators met Keita on Friday, according to a statement from the presidency. They also met influential imam

Mahmoud Dicko—who is viewed as the de facto leader of the movement despite not being a formal member. "We really spoke as brothers and Africans and I hope that, inshallah (God willing), something will come out of this that will give Mali back its greatness," he said.

Impasse

One of the June 5 Movement's leaders Ibrahim Ikassa Maiga restated the demand that Keita resign at the press conference on Friday. He also read from a statement entitled "note on exiting the crisis," which urged the international community to lean on the president to step down.

Mali's allies and neighbors are keen to avoid the fragile Sahel nation of some 20 million people sliding into chaos. Swathes of the country lie outside of government control because of a jihadist insurgency that began in the north in 2012, and has since claimed thousands of lives and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes. — AFP

ECOWAS mediators, who have been in Mali since Wednesday, continued to hold meetings between the warring parties. On the agenda is the March-April parliamentary election, the disputed outcome of which many analysts say is the root of the current crisis. — AFP

US passenger flights to India can resume July 23

WASHINGTON: The government of India has agreed to allow US air carriers to resume passenger services in the US-India market starting July 23, the US Transportation Department said on Friday.

The Indian government, citing the coronavirus, had banned all scheduled services, prompting the US Transportation Department in June to accuse India of engaging in "unfair and discriminatory practices" on charter air carriers serving India. The Transportation Department said it was withdrawing an order it had issued requiring Indian air carriers to apply for authorization prior to conducting charter flights, and said it had approved an Air India application for passenger charter flights between the United States and India.

A group representing major US airlines and the Indian Embassy in Washington did not immediately comment on Friday. India's Ministry of Civil Aviation said on Twitter it was moving to "further expand our international civil aviation operations" and arrangements from some flights "with US, UAE, France & Germany are being put in place while similar arrangements are also being worked out with several other countries." "Under this arrangement," it added, "airlines from the concerned countries will be able to operate flights from & to India along with Indian carriers."



NEW DELHI: India's Ministry of Civil Aviation said on Twitter it was moving to "further expand our international civil aviation operations" and arrangements from some flights "with US, UAE, France & Germany are being put in place while similar arrangements are also being worked out with several other countries."

The US Transportation Department order was set to take effect next week. The Trump administration said in June it wanted "to restore a level playing field for US airlines" under the US-India Air Transport Agreement. The Indian government had banned all scheduled services and failed to approve US carriers for charter operations, it added. The US government said in June that Air India had been operating "repatriation" charter flights between India and the United States in both directions since May 7. — Reuters

Heavy monsoon rains boost crop planting in India

NEW DELHI: Indian farmers have planted 69.2 million hectares with summer crops, up 21.2 percent from this time a year earlier, according to the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, boosted by bountiful monsoon rains that spurred sowing in most parts of the country.

Farmers typically start planting their summer-sown crops June 1, when monsoon rains usually reach India. Planting usually continues until the end of July or early August. Planting of rice, the key

summer crop, was at 16.8 million hectares as of July 17 versus 14.2 million hectares in the previous year, the ministry said. The area planted with cotton was at 11.3 million hectares versus 9.6 million hectares the prior year. Planting of overall oilseeds, including soybean — the main summer oilseed crop — was at 15.5 million hectares, up from 11 million hectares from the previous year.

Soybean sowing in India, the world's biggest buyer of cooking oils, looks likely to jump by at least 15 percent in 2020. Sugarcane sowing in the world's biggest sugar producer reached 5.1 million hectares compared with 5 million hectares last year.

The figures are provisional and subject to revision as updates arrive with the progress of the June-September monsoon season. The world's leading producer of most farm goods has received 10 percent above average rainfall since June 1. — Reuters

CONDOLENCES

The Chairman, Board Members,
Management and Staff of

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Wish to extend their
heartfelt condolences to

Mr. Sayid Mohammad Nasir AlMashoor

Vice President - Foreign Exchange
& Money Market Dept.

On the sad demise of

His Mother

Acceptance of condolences by phone only

due to the current circumstances.

Mobile : 99 68 79 33

*"May her soul rest in peace, and may the Almighty
grant solace and strength to the bereaved family
members during this time of grief"*

SUNDAY, JULY 19, 2020

Business



LONDON: In this file photograph, a British Airways Boeing 747 passenger aircraft prepares to land at London Heathrow Airport, west of London. UK flag carrier British Airways is retiring its entire Boeing 747 "Jumbo Jet" fleet, it said Friday, following the huge hit to international air travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

BA retires entire Boeing 747 fleet

Pandemic crushes air travel demand; global aviation industry in tatters

LONDON: British Airways on Friday retired its Boeing 747 jumbo jets, hastening the withdrawal of the ageing plane after the coronavirus pandemic crushed demand for air travel and carriers began switching to greener

The airline will operate more flights on modern fuel-efficient aircraft such as Airbus A350s and Boeing 787s, as it seeks to both slash costs and achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The carrier has 31 Boeing jumbos, more than any other airline, while the dwindling number of airlines continuing to fly the 747 include Air India, Korean Air and Lufthansa. In Australia meanwhile, Qantas on Friday carried out a farewell flight for its last remaining 747.

US aerospace titan Boeing launched the 747 in 1970, with the 400-seater jet dominating international air travel and cargo over the following decades. "It's the end of an era for the queen of the skies," independent aviation analyst John Strickland told AFP on Friday.

Production of the A380 superjumbo ceases next year—a decision taken by European planemaker Airbus before the pandemic struck. "The virus certainly expedited" BA's retirement of the 747, Strickland said, noting that the airline had already decommissioned almost half of its fleet that once stood at 57 aircraft. But COVID-19 hastened BA's latest move, with the virus battering the air transport sector and decimating demand, sparking bailouts and tens of thousands of job cuts at airlines. COVID-19 has killed nearly 600,000 people, according to an AFP tally. The United States is the worst-hit country with 138,360 deaths. "The global air market is... in tatters, not least the US market," Strickland said. British Airways is shedding 12,000 staff, while Boeing has confirmed 16,000 layoffs.

American Airlines has announced 45,000 job losses and Lufthansa—which received a nine-billion-euro state bailout—has removed 22,000 posts.

'Key to adapting'

The pandemic is pushing the aviation sector to more quickly embrace modern fuel-efficient aircraft which help carriers save precious cash and survive, according to London-based aviation analyst Alex Macheras. "Airlines concluded just weeks into the pandemic that larger and inefficient aircraft would hinder any efforts to break even," Macheras said.

He said older aircraft had "too many empty seats to fill and too much fuel required, or in some cases like the 747 — both". Macheras added: "Newer, lighter, smaller, and more economically and environmentally efficient aircraft such as the Airbus A350 are key to airlines adapting to fit the 'new normal'—and we are seeing these replacement decisions taking place at airlines around the world." — AFP



Carriers forced to switch to greener jets

jets. BA parent group IAG, which was already phasing out the iconic aircraft by 2024, said in a statement that the entire fleet had been retired "with immediate effect" owing to "the downturn in travel caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic".



BRUSSELS: (Left to right): Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron speak together ahead of an EU summit at the European Council building in Brussels, yesterday. — AFP

Saudi hosts G20 talks on virus recovery, debt

RIYADH: G20 finance ministers and central bankers are set to hold talks aimed at spurring global economic recovery from a coronavirus-triggered recession amid growing calls to widen debt relief for crisis-hit poor countries. The virtual talks, hosted by Saudi Arabia, come as the surging pandemic continues to batter the global economy and campaigners warn of a looming debt crisis across poverty-wracked developing nations.

The ministers and bankers will "discuss (the) global economic outlook and coordinate collective action for a robust and sustained global economic recovery," G20 organizers in Riyadh said in a statement.

The talks, chaired by Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan and central bank governor Ahmed Al-Kholifey, come a day after the European Union held its first face-to-face summit in five months to discuss a post-virus economic rescue plan. Kristalina Georgieva, the International Monetary Fund's managing director, has warned that despite some signs of recovery, the global economy faces sustained headwinds, including the possibility of a second wave of COVID-19.

"We are not out of the woods yet," Georgieva said in a message to G20 finance ministers, warning the pandemic was likely to increase poverty and inequality. Downgrading its growth forecasts, the Washington-

based crisis lender last month said it expected global GDP to fall by 4.9 percent this year due to a deeper contraction during lockdowns than previously anticipated.

The \$11 trillion in stimulus offered by G20 nations has helped to prevent a worse outcome, but "these safety nets must be maintained as needed and, in some cases, expanded," Georgieva said.

'Impending catastrophe'

In April, G20 nations announced a one-year debt standstill for the world's poorest nations.

Campaigners have criticized the measure as grossly inadequate to stave off the knock-on effects of the pandemic. France said on Friday it would ask the G20 to extend the debt service suspension. "The economic crisis will persist in 2021 throughout the world," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in a statement. "France calls on the G20 countries to extend the moratorium on debt servicing to give the poorest countries the means to overcome" the crisis.

So far, 41 out of the world's 73 poorest nations have applied for the G20's debt service suspension initiative, saving them up to \$9 billion this year, according to charities Oxfam, Christian Aid and Global Justice Now. But the 73 countries are still required to pay up to \$33.7 billion in debt repayments through the end of the year, the charities said in a research report released on Thursday.

"The global economy has been hit harder by the coronavirus than the already dire predictions we saw in April 2- the G20 finance ministers have the mandate to avert an impending catastrophe for hundreds of millions of people," said Chema Vera, Oxfam's interim executive director. —AFP

Emirates resumes Iran flights after 5-month break

TEHRAN: Dubai-based Emirates airlines resumed flights to the Iranian capital on Friday after a five-month break due to shutdowns to curb the spread of coronavirus. Iran, the worst-hit country in the Middle East, has been scrambling to contain the pandemic since it reported its first two COVID-19 deaths in February. Neighboring countries imposed travel curbs and strict quarantine measures after the first cases of their own days later, mostly in travellers with links to Iran. The 16 passengers on the Emirates flight from Dubai passed through a disinfection tunnel and had their body temperature checked upon arrival at Tehran's airport.

In the departures lounge, masked outgoing passengers lined up at the Emirates check-in counter while an airport worker disinfected dozens of luggage trolleys. The United Arab Emirates was among a list of countries that suspended all air links with Iran in February, along with nearby Armenia, Iraq, Kuwait and Turkey. The UAE, of which Dubai is a member, is a key international transit route for Iranians and had daily flights to Iran.

"My colleagues and I screened the passengers for symptoms with interviews and we also have thermal sensors," said Nadia Piri, one of the airport's resident doctors. Passengers had to fill in forms on arrival, Piri said, and would have to self-isolate for 14 days. Airport deputy head Mohammadreza Karimian said a number of airlines have asked to resume flights to Iran. "Different airlines have made requests, considering that we observe all health protocols thoroughly," he said, without naming them.

Iran has been battling a resurgence of COVID-19 illness, with official figures showing a rise in both new infections and deaths since a two-month low in May. The health ministry on Friday raised the overall virus toll to more than 13,790 deaths, with 183 new fatalities, and over 269,400 confirmed cases.

Iran has refrained from imposing full lockdowns but closed schools and cancelled public gatherings.

It banned travel between provinces in March but lifting the order the next month. The rising toll has prompted authorities to make masks mandatory in enclosed public spaces and allow worst-hit provinces to reimpose restrictions, with the capital Tehran among the latest. — AFP

Ambani takes on Amazon, Walmart in e-commerce gamble

MUMBAI: Backed by multi-billion-dollar investments from global tech giants, India's richest man is ready to rumble with Amazon and Walmart for the country's huge e-commerce market through his conglomerate Reliance. But it is far from certain that Mukesh Ambani's latest gamble will pay off in a crowded market where many suppliers are not well-versed in digital business.

The mogul has long trumpeted his ambition to revolutionise retail in the country of 1.3 billion by convincing farmers and shopkeepers to sell their goods on his new JioMart platform launched this year. But modernizing India's creaky, inefficient supply chains will not be easy, even for Reliance, the nation's largest retailer by revenue with a portfolio including supermarkets, electronics stores and fast-fashion outlets.

Google on Wednesday became the latest Silicon Valley player to invest in the digital unit of the Indian oil-to-telecoms juggernaut, following in the footsteps of Facebook and Intel. These votes of confidence notwithstanding, Ambani's success will depend on India's mom-and-pop stores and their ability to adapt to the demands of an online business, analysts say. Keeping bargain-hungry consumers satisfied in a fiercely contested market may be even harder.

Early signs have not been promising for JioMart since its roll-out in 200 Indian cities in May. Customers have complained about everything from rotting vegetables to missing deliveries and delayed refunds.—AFP



NEW DELHI: India's richest man and oil-to-telecom conglomerate Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani attends the India Mobile Congress 2018 in New Delhi in this file photo.—AFP

Business

US homebuilding rises in suburbs, but virus surge dents consumer sentiment

Housing starts increase 17.3%; consumer sentiment falls to 73.2

WASHINGTON: US homebuilding increased in June by the most in nearly four years amid reports of rising demand for housing in suburbs and rural areas as companies allow employees to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. But a resurgence in new coronavirus infections across the country eroded consumer sentiment in mid-July, other data showed on Friday, threatening the nascent housing and economic recovery. Some areas in virus hot spots in the populous South and West regions have either shut down businesses again or paused reopenings.

The economy slipped into recession in February.

"Home building is coming back at a steady, if unspectacular pace," said Robert Frick, corporate economist at Navy Federal Credit Union in Vienna, Virginia. "The numbers also verify that many people are leaving, or planning to leave, big cities as telecommuting becomes the norm for many businesses."

Housing starts increased 17.3 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.186 million units last month, the Commerce Department said. The percentage gain was the largest since October 2016. Data for May was revised up to a 1.011 million-unit pace from the previously reported 974,000. Still, homebuilding remains 24.3 percent below its February level. The South and the West accounted for about 75 percent of housing starts last month. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast starts increasing to a rate of 1.169 million units. A survey on Thursday showed confidence among single-family homebuilders vaulting in July to levels that prevailed before the coronavirus crisis upend-

ed the economy in March. Builders reported increased demand for single-family homes in lower density markets, including small metro areas, rural markets and large metro suburbs. The public health crisis has shifted office work from commercial business districts to homes, a trend that economists predict could become permanent.

Demand for housing is being supported by cheaper mortgage rates. The 30-year fixed mortgage rate is at an average of 2.98 percent, the lowest since 1971, according to data from mortgage finance agency Freddie Mac. But with a staggering 32 million Americans collecting unemployment checks and lumber prices at a two-year high, a robust housing market is unlikely. Unemployment could worsen as new cases of the respiratory illness skyrocket without a coordinated national effort to control the spread of the virus.

In a separate report on Friday, the University of Michigan said its consumer sentiment index dropped to a reading of 73.2 in mid-July "due to the widespread resurgence of the coronavirus" from 78.1 in June. It warned further declines were likely in the months ahead.

The United States reported at least 77,000 new COVID-19 cases nationwide on Thursday, a record daily jump in known infections for the seventh time this month, according to a Reuters tally.

"Sentiment will likely remain subdued in the absence of a more substantial health response that will result in better virus containment and prevent repeated closures that will cause more permanent damage to the labor market," said Rubeca Farooqi,



NEW YORK: In this file photo, a construction worker roofs an apartment home in Uniondale, New York. US home construction surged 17.3 percent in June, the Commerce Department said on Friday. — AFP

chief US economist at High Frequency Economics in White Plains, New York. Stocks on Wall Street fell as investors worried about the explosion in coronavirus cases. The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies while US Treasury prices rose.

Home building last month was boosted by a 17.2 percent jump in the construction of single-family housing units, which accounts for the largest share

of the housing market, to a rate of 831,000 units. Groundbreaking activity increased in the Midwest, South and Northeast, but fell in the West. Starts are likely to advance further in the coming months. Permits for future homebuilding rose 2.1 percent to a rate of 1.241 million units in June, placing them well ahead of starts. Single-family building permits shot up 11.8 percent to a rate of 834,000 units. — Reuters

KIPCO repays \$500m bond

KUWAIT: KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - has announced that it has repaid its \$500 million (KD 153.9 million) bond maturing on July 15, in addition to \$23.4 million (KD 7.2 million) in interest. KIPCO has no maturing debts for the next three years.

As part of its strategy, KIPCO regularly raises money in the local and international debt markets and will continue to do so with the aim of diversifying its investor base and providing the company with financial flexibility in cost and maturities. The \$500 million bond was issued in July 2010 for a ten-year tenure, under KIPCO's EMTN program. The next bond maturity will be \$500 million on March 15, 2023.

Commenting on the transaction, KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive), Faisal Al-Ayyar said: "Despite the short and medium-term challenges that may arise due to COVID-19, we have been successful in retiring the \$500 million bond with existing resources, leaving the company with no debt maturity until March 2023. This reflects the soundness of our financial strategy and proactive management of our liabilities."



Faisal Al-Ayyar

NBK customers can apply for loans or credit cards electronically

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) strives to enrich the banking experience of its customers by providing convenient top-notch banking services that can be accessed quickly and easily, while keeping them safe. In this context, the bank allows customers to apply for a loan or credit card, or open a bank account electronically, quickly and easily, in simple steps on NBK Digital Channels.

Customers enrolled in the NBK Online Banking or NBK Mobile Banking can apply for these services and products easily through any of these channels. As for NBK customers who do not have access to NBK Online Banking or NBK Mobile Banking or non-NBK customers, they can apply for the same services and products through the bank's website, and also get Al-Shabab Package by completing the form available on the website through the following link:

<https://www.nbk.com/ar/kuwait/Apply-Easily.html>

Commenting on providing these services online, Hala Al-Shoaibi, Head of Digital Service Quality Management, National Bank of Kuwait said: "We



Hala Al-Shoaibi

are always striving to make our customers comfortable by meeting their needs and providing them with top-notch banking services that are accessible easily and quickly. To this end, we have introduced the service to apply for a loan or credit card online, study customer's application and respond without the need to visit the branch, as part of our digital transformation strategy and consolidation of our leadership in providing top-tier digital banking services."

"Upgrading our digital services is mainly based on our survey of the needs and expectations of our customers and working to meet them. And as we pay special attention to the youth segment, we worked on providing online applications for Al-Shabab Package," Al-Shoaibi added.

Al-Shoaibi stressed that NBK upgrade of its digital services and cutting-edge payment solutions pre-empted the current exceptional circumstances and helped our customers to adhere to the social distancing rules and keep them safe by meeting the needs of some of them to avail finance during the current circumstances. Concluding his statements, Al-Shoaibi stressed on the continuous efforts of Consumer Banking Group team to upgrade the digital banking channels, especially NBK Mobile Banking to cater to the needs and expectations of NBK Customers.

UK sees 'room for compromise' with US over WTO

GENEVA: A Briton seeking to lead the World Trade Organization voiced confidence Friday that a compromise could be reached with Washington to revive the organization's crippled appeals panel.

Britain's first post-Brexit international trade secretary Liam Fox, one of eight candidates vying to become the WTO's next director-general, insisted the dispute settlement system could be fixed. "I believe from my discussions with my American colleagues that they do wish to see that resolution mechanism in place and I think there is room for compromise," he told media after meeting representatives from the WTO's 164 member states.

The appellate branch of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body, sometimes called the supreme court of world trade, stopped functioning in December after years of relentless US opposition. Washington accuses the court of major overreach and has blocked appointments of new judges, leaving it without a quorum of three needed to hear cases.

Fox said the US position was "not something that I'm unsympathetic to", suggesting that curbing the panel's mandate might be a way forward. But he emphasized the importance of a functioning dispute settlement system with the possibility to appeal decisions, warning that without it, the WTO system faced an "existential" threat.

Fox, who was the last candidate to be grilled by member states, dismissed questions about whether Brexit might weaken support for him among European countries. "Not everyone in the world sees every issue through the Brexit prism," he said, adding "I hope the EU will choose a candidate who is most in line with the values and the aspirations for global trade that the EU has."



GENEVA: Britain's first post-Brexit international trade secretary Liam Fox removes his protective face mask as he arrives for a press conference on Friday in Geneva following his hearing before 164 member states' representatives, as part of the application process to head the World Trade Organization (WTO) as Director General. — AFP

Existential crisis

The WTO is moving swiftly to replace director-general Roberto Azevedo. In a surprise move, the Brazilian diplomat announced in mid-May that he would end his second term 12 months early for personal reasons. The contest comes as the global trade body faces an existential crisis in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and resulting global economic crisis.

Candidate's countries and regions of origin have become a focus during the selection process.

Earlier Friday, former Saudi economy minister Mohammed al-Tuwaijri insisted that his country's trade disputes and long-running blockade of neighboring Qatar would not impact his position were he to become director-general. "I am here representing myself... I will be very neutral," he told AFP. "Qatar is a full member of the WTO. It will have from my point of view exactly the same treatment as any member," said Tuwaijri, who wants to become the organization's first director-general from an Arab country. Three candidates from Africa are also arguing it is time their continent got a shot. — AFP

Total wins \$14.9bn to finance gas project in Mozambique

JOHANNESBURG: French oil giant Total on Friday said it had signed a \$14.9 billion financing agreement for a gas project in northern Mozambique. The funding was secured for a \$23 billion (20.1 billion euros) liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in the northern Cabo Delgado province, near the border with Tanzania. As Africa's biggest financing agreement to date, it includes loans from eight export credit agencies, 19 commercial bank facilities and a loan from the African Development Bank.

"The signing of this large-scale project financing, less than one year after Total assumed the role of operator of Mozambique LNG, represents a significant achievement and a major milestone for the project," Total Chief Financial Officer Jean-Pierre Sbraire said in a statement on Friday.

"It demonstrates the confidence placed by the financial institutions in the long-term future of LNG in Mozambique." The agreement was signed despite uncertainties caused by the coronavirus pandemic and militant attacks on nearby villages.

Cabo Delgado has been grappling with a jihadist insurgency since 2017 that has killed more than 1,000 people and complicated Mozambique's plans to develop its offshore gas reserves.

Earlier this month, gunmen ambushed and killed eight employees of a private construction firm working on the LNG project development. — AFP

Virus resurgence poses biggest risk to US economy: IMF

WASHINGTON: The dominant risk to the US economic recovery is a resurgence of COVID-19 cases that would force renewed business shutdowns, the International Monetary Fund warned Friday. The US government will need to do more in coming months to provide support to households and boost demand, as well as address worsening poverty and the shortcomings of the US health system, the IMF said in its annual review of the world's biggest economy.

"Even with the unprecedented policy support being provided to the economy," the US suffered a 37 percent collapse in GDP in the second quarter, and the economy is expected to contract by 6.6 percent in 2020, the fund said, stressing the "tremendous uncertainties" surrounding the outlook. "The principal risk, and one that is the most difficult to quantify, is that a resurgence in the number of COVID-19 cases in the US could lead to renewed, partial shutdowns," the report said.

With case counts spiking in states like Florida, Georgia, Texas and California, local authorities already have reimposed some restrictions. The Washington-based crisis lender said the recovery "will require a further round of fiscal measures in the coming months that boost demand, increase health preparedness, and support the most vulnerable." "The US has fiscal space and it should be deployed quickly to hasten the recovery from the second quarter contraction, permanently improve the social safety net, and facilitate a broader remaking of the US economy," it said. President Donald Trump's administration is negotiating with Congress on the form of the next aid package, with internal debate reportedly raging over whether to reduce payroll taxes, which would only help people who are receiving salaries, or to extend unemployment benefits. — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, July 19, 2020

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Very hot with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind changing to south easterly wind with speed of 12 - 40 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with light to moderate south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 18/07/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	46 °C	35 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	47 °C	35 °C		
ABDALY	48 °C	32 °C		
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C		
JAHRA	48 °C	36 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	45 °C	30 °C		
SALMIYAH	43 °C	35 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	46 °C	32 °C		
WAFRA	48 °C	30 °C		
SALMY	46 °C	31 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	07/19	Very hot and some high clouds will appear	48 °C	33 °C	NE-VRB	08 - 32 km/h
Monday	07/20	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	48 °C	34 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 35 km/h
Tuesday	07/21	Very hot	49 °C	33 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 38 km/h
Wednesday	07/22	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	49 °C	32 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:27
Sunrise	05:00
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	15:29
Sunset	18:48
Isha	20:17

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	49 °C
MIN. Temp.	31 °C
MAX. RH	20 %
MIN. RH	07 %
MAX. Wind	N 46 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Sruthi Vijay Kumar Menon, Indian passport no. T8983320, have changed my given name as Sruthi Vijay Kumar and surname as Menon for all purposes henceforth. **(C 5500) 19-7-2020**

Old name: Galib Ahamed Ansari, New name: Talib Hussain Ansari, DOB: 23/03/1967, Passport No: J3969924. **(C 5499) 16-7-2020**

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

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

Word Scramble

Name _____

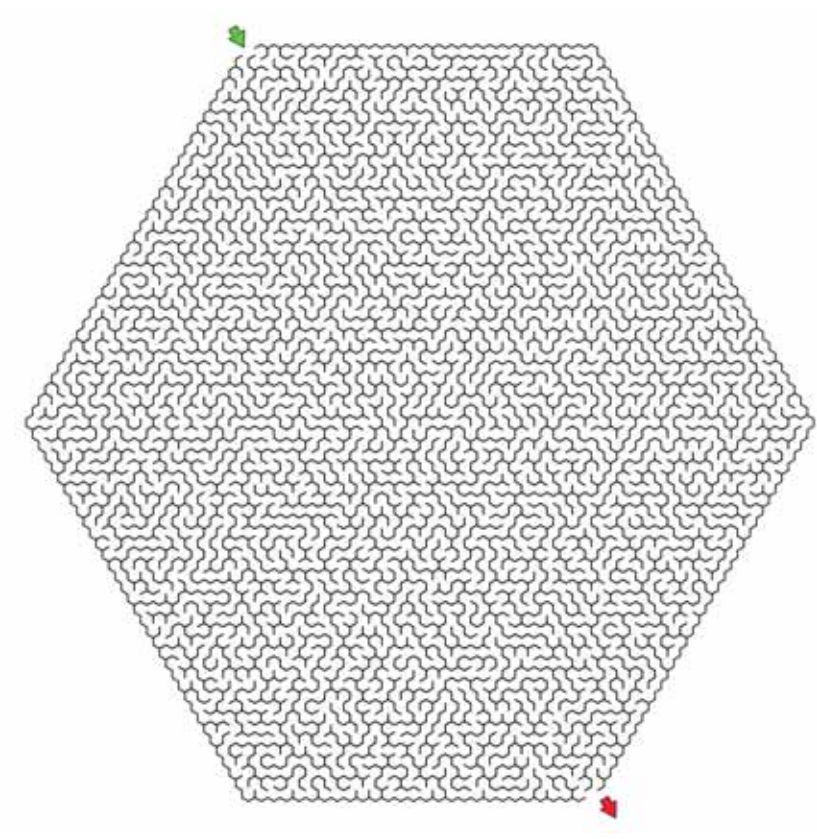
ON THE FARM

Word Scrambles

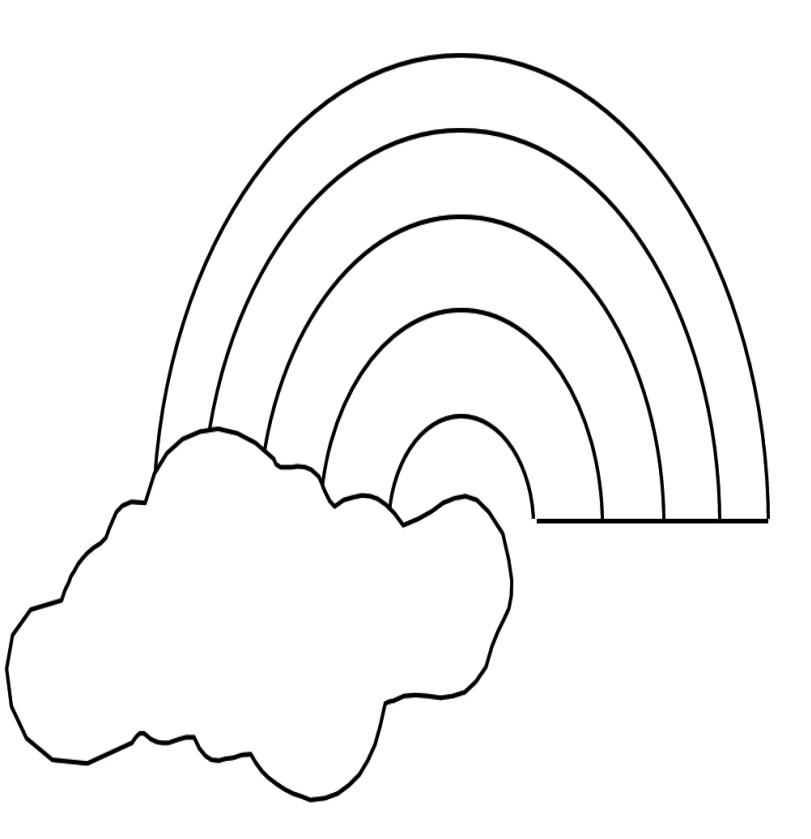
DIRECTIONS: Write the name for each picture on the dotted line using the scrambled letters.

 cduk	 oegos	 ohesr
 rtoesor	 rutyek	 ratbbi
 cwo	 ncceihk	 hepse

Find the way



Color it



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may be feeling a bit reserved today, Aries, especially when it comes to issues involving love and romance. Follow your instincts and know that your hesitation isn't unfounded. Sometimes it's good to slow down and question the road you're on. Just don't doubt yourself to the point that you become too frustrated that you can't take the next big step forward.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

In general, your spirit is upbeat, freedom loving, and adventurous, Cancer. Today, however, you might find that it's a bit more intense and possibly somber, especially when it comes to romantic issues. This approach to matters of the heart isn't exactly your normal style, but you're apt to find that it's appropriate for your situation now. Make sure you have the right tools for the job at hand.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your romantic, sensitive nature comes alive today, Libra, and you may find yourself searching for the security of a close lover. You're apt to be pickier than usual - not just anyone will do anymore. There is a longing within you for the company of someone who shares your deep intuitive understanding of people, emotions, and life in general.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Situations regarding love and romance are likely to get much heavier and more intense now, Capricorn. Are you ready to make a deeper commitment to the one you love? It may be quite hard for you to make a solid commitment because you could be wary of the freedom you'll lose. Now is the time to face the music and really dedicate yourself to the people who mean the most to you.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Reclaim control of things that might be holding you back now, Taurus. You may find that there's an element of restriction to the day that's keeping you from getting where you want to be. Try the best you can to relax and stabilize your emotions. Interaction with people who are older and wiser is likely to shed some important perspective on things today.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

It's important for you not to overanalyze every little detail of your situation now, Leo, especially when it comes to love and romance issues. You could be jumping to ridiculous conclusions based purely on circumstantial evidence. Don't lose sleep over things that you don't even know to be true. Release your stranglehold on certain issues and concentrate on simply rebuilding your own self-confidence.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Tension in your romantic life is apt to well up today, Scorpio. More than likely, there are certain responsibilities that you feel you have to attend to that take you away from your intimate experience with another. Whether or not you're currently involved in a romantic partnership, the day's energy is likely to stir up issues regarding love and romance. Try to find a healthy balance between work and play.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

The love and romance department should be going pretty well for you now, Aquarius. This is the time to probe more deeply into your current affair with that person who catches your eye. There's a greater sensitivity to your emotions today, and you could find yourself holding back a bit more than usual. An air of mystery and intrigue will surround you, drawing others toward you like a moth to a candle.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Be selective when it comes to expressing your passion today, Gemini. Remember that less is more. You don't have to use a tremendous number of bells and whistles in order to get your point across. Let your actions be minimal but meaningful. You can say a great deal with few words. There's more to your glance than meets the eye.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

When it comes to love and romance, you may find yourself in a bit of a pickle, Virgo. There's a request for greater commitment now. You may be unsure about how to respond. You may hesitate to give up the sense of freedom that you hold so dear. Recognize the importance of a close connection with one other person. Give yourself the opportunity to experience this kind of intense relationship on a more permanent basis.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You could be feeling the pressure of time now, Sagittarius. At this point in your life you may be more aware than ever of your limited time left on this planet. Perhaps you're thinking more about love and romance and how much they mean to you. Consider the limitations of each, but don't dwell on them. The important thing is to embrace today and make the most of the time and love you have now.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Your incredible passion and creativity are taking center stage, Pisces. It's also quite possible that there's a great restlessness within you egging you on to take things to the next level. Combine your powers of dedication with your flair for the dramatic to accomplish whatever it is your heart desires. You have the power within you to shine especially bright on a day like today.



These pictures show Bridger Walker and his sister. —Image credits nicolenoeWalker



Superheroes praise US 6-year-old who saved sister from dog attack

Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Spiderman... superheroes have lined up in recent days to praise the courage of a six-year-old boy who was mauled while saving his little sister from a dog attack. “You’re a hero, what you did was so brave, so selfless, your sister is so lucky to have you as a big brother,” said Chris Evans, the actor who played Captain America in the Avengers movies, of which the little boy is a big fan. “Your parents must be so proud of you,” said Evans.

Bridger Walker, who lives in the western US state of

Wyoming, put himself between a German Shepherd mix and his little sister on July 9 as the dog was about to attack the four-year-old girl. He was bitten badly in the cheek and underwent emergency surgery during which he had 90 stitches put in his face. “If someone had to die, I thought it should be me,” the little boy’s parents said he told them afterwards. His story went viral on US social media and a number of celebrities responded to an appeal by his aunt on Instagram for messages of support for the boy.

Among them was Robert Downey Jr, who plays Iron

Man in the Avengers series, who promised Bridger “something special” for his next birthday. Chris Hemsworth, the actor who played Thor in the superhero films, also praised Bridger as “an absolute inspiration.” “Your courage is beyond belief and we are all so impressed by you, and we’re thinking of you,” he said. “I know you’re an Avengers fan and so myself and all the team, we’d be honoured to have you on the team, and we love you and we’re sending you our support.” —AFP



This undated handout photo shows Singapore Zoo’s twin red-ruffed lemurs are placed in carrier during their first health check up in the animal hospital. —AFP

The Chicks, minus ‘Dixie,’ return with fiery new album

Nearly two decades after country music shunned them for famously repudiating George W Bush, the trio formerly known as The Dixie Chicks have soared back with a new album, new name and renewed fearlessness. The Texas group just weeks ago dropped “Dixie” from their moniker for its links to the slavery-era US confederacy, saying simply, “We want to meet this moment.” And on Friday, The Chicks release “Gaslighter”—their first album in 14 years, which the coronavirus pandemic delayed several more months—which leans pop but includes the group’s signature spellbinding harmonies and vividly personal lyricism.

The iconoclastic trio catapulted to fame in the late 1990s, becoming one of the best-selling female groups in history with their foot-stomping fusion of bluegrass, rock and country that shook the oft-staid Nashville establishment. But the group all but vanished from country’s main stage after lead singer Natalie Maines told a London show in 2003 she was “ashamed” that then-president Bush hailed from Texas—and that the band did “not want this war, this violence,” referring to the impending invasion of Iraq.

The comment caught fire. Many country radio stations banned their music—including hits like “Wide Open Spaces,”

“Goodbye Earl,” “Travelin’ Soldier” and a popular cover of Fleetwood Mac’s “Landslide.” They faced death threats as people burned their albums, and country singer Toby Keith toured with a doctored photo of Maines with Saddam Hussein.

The Chicks, who include Maines along with sisters Emily Strayer and Martie Maguire, appeared nude on the cover of Entertainment Weekly with many of the names they’d been called—including “Traitors” and “Dixie Sluts”—scrawled across their strategically concealed bodies. Years later, many artists still fear getting “Dixie Chicked”: scrubbed out if they voice opinions, political or otherwise. “Throughout my whole career, label executives and publishers would say, ‘Don’t be like the Dixie Chicks,’” country darling-turned-pop megastar Taylor Swift said in her autobiographical documentary, “And I loved the Dixie Chicks.”

Country’s flashpoint

After releasing their Grammy-winning album “Taking The Long Way”—a middle finger of a record aimed at the industry that blacklisted them—The Chicks flew under the radar for more than a decade, dabbling in solo and side projects. Few defended them in the early 2000s, but today many artists profess admiration for the three women who walked away from the line they were instructed to toe. The Jack Antonoff-produced “Gaslighter” is a barbed but clear-eyed, righteous but fresh album chronicling the pain of a brutal breakup—Maines divorced in 2019 — that also nods to gun violence and climate change. Its title track centers on the term “gaslighting,” which describes someone who psychologically manipulates others into doubting reality, and often applies to the abuse and silencing of women. —AFP



In this file photo winners of Best Record of the Year, Best Album of the Year, Best Song of the Year, Best Country Performance By A Duo Or Group With Vocal and Best Country Album, the Dixie Chicks, Emily Robison (left), Natalie Maines (center) and Martie Maguire (right) pose with the trophies at the 49th Grammy Awards in Los Angeles 11 February 2007. —AFP

Rare twin red-ruffed lemurs born at Singapore zoo

Twin red-ruffed lemurs have been born at Singapore zoo, officials said Thursday, a rare double delivery that is a boost for the endangered saucer-eyed primates. It was the first birth at the zoo of the endangered creatures, which are native to Madagascar, in over a decade, Wildlife Reserves Singapore said. The arrival of the yet-to-be-named twins was “particularly special” because the creatures breed only once a year, it said.

The fluffy lemurs are a distinctive rust colour, with black faces, hands, feet and tails, and a distinctive white patch on their heads. The last of the species to be born at the zoo was the twins’ father, Bosco, 11 years ago. The mother is

eight-year-old Minnie, who arrived in Singapore from a Japanese zoo in 2016.

Although the twins were born earlier this year, they have only recently become an attraction as the zoo was closed for months as a result of a coronavirus lockdown. Red-ruffed lemurs are classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature due to logging and hunting. Of the 107 surviving lemur species on Madagascar, some 103 are threatened, including 33 that are critically endangered—the last stop before “extinct in the wild”, the group said earlier this month. —AFP



In this file photo taken on January 15, 2020 Canadian circus troop “Cirque du Soleil” performs in their acrobatic performance on ice titled CRYSTAL at Arena Riga, Latvia. — AFP

Cirque du Soleil accepts purchase offer from creditors

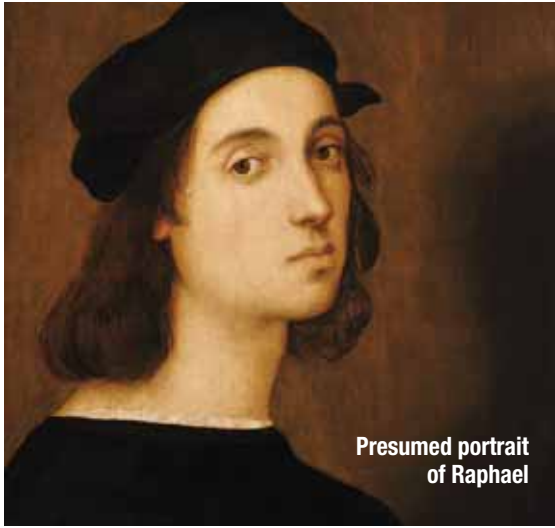
Canadian cultural icon Cirque du Soleil—currently under court bankruptcy protection—accepted a purchase offer from its creditors Thursday, which will serve as a minimum bid for an investors auction in August. The creditors “would acquire substantially all of the Company’s assets” in the agreement, according to a statement from the global entertainment giant. The new agreement replaces the arrangement that Cirque du Soleil and its current shareholders—American TPG, Chinese Fosun and Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec (CDPQ) — made in late June.

The Montreal-based circus troupe, which was founded in Quebec in 1984, was forced to cancel 44 shows around the globe in March as efforts to curb the coronavirus pandemic prevented large audiences from gathering. The company has since furloughed 4,679 acrobats and technicians—or 95 percent of its workforce. Most were officially let go in late June when the company filed for bankruptcy protection.

The Superior Court of Quebec, which is supervising the company’s restructuring, is set to rule on its approval of the plan during a hearing Friday. The accord would see lenders inject between \$300 million and \$375 million into the compa-

ny while also reducing its guaranteed debt to \$300 million from \$1.1 billion, according to the Canadian Daily Globe and Mail. It also includes a promise to maintain Cirque du Soleil’s Montreal headquarters for at least another five years. Creditors had disputed the previous agreement allowing shareholders to purchase the group because it would have seen the creditors recoup a smaller share of the debt that the company owes them.

“We are very pleased to have come to this agreement with Cirque du Soleil,” Gabriel de Alba, managing director and partner at Cirque du Soleil’s most important creditor Catalyst Capital Group, said in a statement. “The cooperation of the creditor group has been extraordinary to achieve our objective to recapitalize and revitalize the Cirque,” he said. Other investors have already planned to outbid the creditors—offers for which are due August 18. Among them are Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberte, the former fire-eating performer who sold the group as well as Quebec media empire Quebecor in 2015. —AFP



Presumed portrait of Raphael

It wasn’t the sex: Bloodletting fatal for Raphael, study claims

A feverish Raphael suffering from “a coronavirus-like disease” died after failing to tell his doctors he had been secretly visiting lovers on freezing cold nights, leading them to wrongly prescribe bloodletting, a new study claims. Popular myth has the Renaissance painter succumb to syphilis in 1520 after wooing one too many ladies, though experts widely agree that he died of an infection. Laid low by a raging fever, the prolific painter, designer and architect, was tended to by “the best doctors in Rome, sent to him by the pope” who feared losing the invaluable artist, medical historian Michele Augusto Riva told AFP.

But according to Italian painter Giorgio Vasari and his 1550 masterpiece on the lives of painters, Raphael failed to tell the physicians of his “frequent night outings in the cold” to visit lovers. “It was much, much colder in March in that period, and it’s very likely he caught pneumonia,” Riva said. The doctors diagnosed a fever caused by an “excess of humours”, or blood, and let his blood—either through incisions or leeches—which fatally weakened him. The artist, a child prodigy and part of a trinity of Renaissance greats along with Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, died aged only 37. Raphael was sent off with high honours at a grand funeral at the Vatican, and his remains rest in Rome’s Pantheon. A red rose graces his grave all the year round.

‘His own mistake’

“In that period, doctors were aware of the dangers of bloodletting in the treatment of infectious diseases, but were acting on misinformation,” said Riva, who co-authored the study with three fellow researchers from the University of Milano Bicocca. “A medical mistake, and his own mistake in not faithfully recounting his history, contributed to Raphael’s death,” he said. The researchers had been preparing the short study, which was published this week in the Internal and Emergency Medicine journal, before COVID-19 gripped northern Italy in late February. As practising doctors, they then had to put it on hold when they found themselves on the frontline of the crisis, caring for medical staff who had caught the virus in intensive care units.

“From what we know, Raphael died of a pulmonary illness very similar to the coronavirus we’ve seen now,” he said. Contemporary accounts of his death reveal the painter’s disease “lasted 15 days: Raphael was composed enough to put his affairs in order, confess his sins, and receive the last rites,” the study says. It said it was an acute disease, characterised by high and continuous fever. “A recent sexually transmitted infection—such as gonorrhea and syphilis—could not explain the incubation period. “An acute manifestation of viral hepatitis could not be considered without jaundice and other signs of liver failure. No epidemics of typhus or plague were reported in the city of Rome at that time,” it added. Despite his premature death, Raphael produced a vast oeuvre of seminal work, much of it at the Vatican, whose museums include several rooms filled with his frescoes. Completed by Raphael’s students after his death, they remain some of the Vatican’s most popular rooms. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo Bollywood actors Amitabh Bachchan (second left) claps from atop a residential building along with his son Abhishek Bachchan (right) with wife Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (second right) and their daughter Aaradhya (third right) to thank essential service providers during a one-day Janata (civil) curfew imposed amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, in Mumbai.—AFP photos

Bollywood star Aishwarya Bachchan moved to coronavirus ward

Bollywood star and former Miss World Aishwarya Rai Bachchan has been moved to a Mumbai hospital along with her eight-year-old daughter, nearly a week after they were revealed to have the coronavirus, media reports said. Her actor husband Abhishek Bachchan and superstar father-in-law Amitabh Bachchan are already in the same hospi-



In this file photo Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (center), daughter Aaradhya Bachchan (left) and mother Vrunda Rai pose during an event with NGO Smile Train India in honour of her late father, Krishnaraj Rai, in Mumbai.

tal, the highest-profile personalities to have been infected in India, which has now recorded more than one million cases in the pandemic.

Aishwarya Bachchan, a former beauty queen who went on to become one of India's top actors, and her daughter Aaradhya were revealed on Sunday to be

suffering from the coronavirus. They had been in self-quarantine at home but the Times of India newspaper said they were moved to the Nanavati Hospital on Friday after complaining of "breathlessness". "They are fine," a hospital source told Press Trust of India news agency.

Amitabh Bachchan, 77, and his son Abhishek, 44, are in the hospital's isolation ward. When they entered hospital their cases were described as "mild". No health update has been given since but Amitabh has been regularly issuing Twitter messages. "In happy times, in times of illness, you our near and dear, our well wishers, our fans have ever given us unstinting love," he said Friday.

Aishwarya Bachchan won the Miss World Crown in 1994 and has since become one of the most famous faces in Bollywood. She has been a regular on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival and married Abhishek Bachchan in 2007. The elder Bachchan, idolised in India and affectionately known as "Big B"—has a more than four-decade-long career in the film industry. He was voted "actor of the millennium" in a BBC online poll in 1999 and became the first Indian actor to gain a lookalike at London's Madame Tussauds waxworks museum. City authorities said India's financial and film capital has now seen nearly 100,000 cases, with more than 1,200 new patients being reported each day. More than 5,582 people in the city have died. Nationally, the country of 1.3 billion people has reported 26,000 dead.—AFP

House mate says Amber Heard faked injuries for blackmail

A live-in friend who witnessed Johnny Depp's tumultuous marriage to Amber Heard told the Hollywood actor's libel trial Friday the actress faked her injuries in order to blackmail him. The "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise star is suing the publisher and executive editor of Britain's The Sun newspaper in London's High Court over a 2018 story branding him a "wife beater". The Sun says it can prove the 57-year-old abused the 34-year-old model and actress on 14 occasions before their two-year marriage fell apart in 2017. Depp kicked off proceedings last week by admitting he told Heard after a particularly stormy encounter the two were "a crime scene waiting to happen".

But the focus shifted from the actor's alleged tendency to smash things up while high or drunk to Heard's credibility as Depp's various bodyguards and staff took the stand this week. Depp's childhood friend Isaac Baruch—an artist who lived in the couple's five penthouse apartment complex in Los Angeles—said pictures of Heard's injuries leaked to the media were "phony baloney". "She had filed a fraudulent domestic violence claim to push her hand and extort and blackmail him in the divorce," Baruch said.

'Not a single bruise'

One photo in question shows the right side of Heard's face around her eye covered in red markings. But Depp's friend said he saw Heard from "12 inches away" the next day and her skin was clear. "I didn't see a single bruise, redness, mark or the red tinted cellphone imprint that was advertised in (magazines).

Nothing. Not anything," Baruch said. Lawyer Sasha Wass, representing The Sun's publishers News Group Newspapers (NGN), tried to cast Baruch as an unreliable witness who depended on Depp for his livelihood.

She noted that Depp gave Baruch free accommodation and tens of thousand of dollars a year in living expenses. Wass also asked how Baruch could be sure Heard was not covering up her bruises with makeup. Baruch said he was "100 percent sure" because he saw Heard four more times over the next three days. "I saw no marks of any kind on either side of the face," he said.

'I hid it'

Heard has been attending the hearings daily but will only enter the witness box for the first time tomorrow. She can expect to be grilled by Depp's lawyer about whether she had staged or otherwise misrepresented any of the photos of her face submitted to court. The Sun's lawyers said they received a notice from Depp's team Friday claiming that around 20 of the images had been "adapted or manipulated".

Depp's lawyers said the picture Baruch was being asked about had been "photoshopped". Judge Andrew Nicol agreed to look into the matter further next week. But Wass presented an audio recording in which Heard told one of her staff that she covered up her bruises in public. "I hid it from everyone," Heard said in the undated recording played in court. The case was adjourned until tomorrow. — AFP



US actor Johnny Depp leaves after attending day nine of his libel trial against News Group Newspapers (NGN), at the High Court in London, on Friday. — AFP

France's cabaret queen Zizi Jeanmaire dies aged 96



In this file photo taken on January 15, 1970 French dancer and singer Zizi Jeanmaire poses at the Casino de Paris in Paris.

French dancer and singer Zizi Jeanmaire, an iconic cabaret showgirl from the 1950s whose grace and glamour was celebrated on stage and in film the world over, died on Friday in Switzerland aged 96, her family told AFP. Jeanmaire starred in ballets, cabarets, musicals and film, mixing up styles but never compromising on the rigour of her classic training, many of her roles created by her equally famous choreographer husband Roland Petit. "My mother passed away peacefully last night at her home in Toilechenaz," a town bordering Lake Geneva, her daughter Valentine Petit said on the phone. It was her leading performance in Petit's modern interpretation of "Carmen" in 1949 that launched her name and featured the short-cropped hairstyle that became her trademark feature.

The new-look production caused a sensation in Paris, London and on Broadway. Jeanmaire and Petit met in 1933, when they were around nine-years-old and students at the Paris Opera Ballet. They married in 1954

and had a daughter. "They became the power couple of Sixties Parisian cultural life, wearing Yves Saint Laurent and collaborating with Andy Warhol," The Telegraph wrote in an obituary of Petit, who died in 2011 a giant of 20th century dance. Jeanmaire was born in Paris on April 29, 1924, her real name Renee Marcelle Jeanmaire. Her nickname is reportedly rooted in her childhood pronunciation of "Mon zizi" for "Mon Jesus" (My Jesus).

Jeanmaire left the Paris Opera Ballet at 19, saying she wanted to see the world and eventually making her way to Hollywood and New York. "Her career was closely linked with that of Roland Petit, the man of her life, whom she met at the Paris Opera ballet school," the company said in a statement. "She gave her final recital at the Bastille Opera in 2000." "We'll never forget dear Zizi," a former etoile of the Paris Opera, Marie-Agnes Gillot, wrote on Instagram.

Her leading films roles were in the 1950s, including in the Hollywood musical "Hans

Christian Andersen" (1952), about the life of the Danish storyteller, and "Anything Goes" (1956) starring Bing Crosby. She triumphed at Paris' Alhambra music hall in 1961 with a performance of "Mon Truc en Plumes"—her legendary costume of huge, pink ostrich feathers designed by Saint Laurent—and in 1966 danced alongside Rudolf Nureyev for the film version of Petit's ballet "Le Jeune Homme et la Mort". Saint Laurent, who dressed her for 40 years, once said she "only had to walk on stage for everything to take life, fire and flames".

Sealing her place in popular culture, she was name checked in the opening line of Peter Sarstedt's classic "Where Do You Go to My Lovely" (1969), which says: "You talk like Marlene Dietrich. And you dance like Zizi Jeanmaire." A public ceremony in her honour will be organised for September, her daughter said.—AFP



In this file photo taken on March 2, 2004 French choreographer Roland Petit and his wife dancer and singer Zizi Jeanmaire pose after the show "Roland Petit raconte les chemins de la creation" at the Jean Vilar theatre in Suresnes, in the Paris suburb.



In this file photo taken on October 7, 1994 French dancer Zizi Jeanmaire poses during the dress rehearsal of "Gainsbourg" in Marseille, southern France.—AFP photos



In this file photo taken on February 1, 1972 French dancer and singer Zizi Jeanmaire performs at the Casino de Paris in Paris.



In this file photo taken on January 17, 1969 French dancer Zizi Jeanmaire and actor Alain Delon dance during a TV show directed by Roland Petit.



In this file photo taken on December 17, 1963 in Paris, French dancer and singer Zizi Jeanmaire and French choreographer Roland Petit perform during the show "La chanson de Zizi" as part of the New Year's festivities.



In this file photo taken on April 20, 1959 French choreographer Roland Petit (left) and his wife dancer Zizi Jeanmaire perform in "Cyrano" at the Alhambra music hall in Paris.



This file photo taken in the 1950's shows French dancer and singer Renee Jeanmaire also known as Zizi Jeanmaire.



In this file photo taken on December 1, 1961 French dancer Zizi Jeanmaire poses in her stage costume at the Alhambra music hall in Paris.



In this file photo taken on March 2, 1982 French dancer Zizi Jeanmaire (right) pose with her daughter Clementine and tv film maker Jean-Christophe Averty during the rehearsal of a tv show in the Buttes-Chaumont in Paris.

Sports

Photo of the day



DUBAI: Omeir Saeed performs at Hatta Dam in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

NFL players say virus attitudes must change for safe season

LOS ANGELES: The NFL's players union said Friday attitudes towards coronavirus health protocols must change for pre-season training camps to be held safely.

In a conference call with reporters, the NFL Players Association said the union had so far failed to reach agreement with the National Football League over preparations for the upcoming season. The NFL has maintained that training camps will open as scheduled, meaning that some clubs will start reporting for duty as early as next week.

However NFLPA president J.C. Tretter said players were far from happy with the attitude of some coaches towards COVID-19 as teams prepare to return to camp.

"We've had coaches say the protocols are too much to ask, coaches come forward saying, 'Everyone's going to get sick, so we might as well all get sick together,'" said Tretter. "Those attitudes can't happen. There are consequences to getting sick." Tretter, a center for the Cleveland Browns, noted that his position requires him to go virtually face-to-face with an opponent at the line of scrimmage before the offensive and defensive lines crash together.

"At this time more than any, I have a very dangerous job," Tretter said. "This is going to be a battle of risk mitigation and providing opportunities for guys to make safe decisions."

The NFLPA on Thursday spoke to doctors with teams located in areas of the US where coronavirus cases are skyrocketing, including Arizona, Miami, Tampa Bay and Jacksonville.—AFP

Finau, Palmer share Memorial lead as Woods squeaks into weekend

Reigning US Open champion Gary Woodland fired a 70, tied on 138 with Chez Reavie

LOS ANGELES: Tony Finau shook off two early bogeys to post a three-under-par 69 on Friday and maintain a share of the lead alongside Ryan Palmer after the second round of the US PGA Tour Memorial.

As reigning Masters champion Tiger Woods struggled with back issues on his way to a four-over-par 76 — making the halfway cut on the number — overnight leader Finau and Palmer, who started the day one back, steered a steady course.

Finau capped his round with an approach to two feet for his fifth birdie of the day at his final hole, the ninth, finishing 36 holes on nine-under par 135.

"I was really happy with the finish, the way I finished," said Finau, who opened with a bogey at the 10th and dropped another shot at 12 before rolling in an 11-foot birdie putt at the 15th and a two-footer at 17.

"Not the ideal start, but I knew I couldn't look back after 12, just keep on plugging along and try to hit good shot after good shot, and was able to execute a lot better after that," added Finau, who birdied five and seven before his impressive closing flourish.

Palmer also bounced back from an early bogey, notching five birdies in his four-under 68. They were one stroke in front of Spain's Jon Rahm, who carded a 67 for 136. Reigning US Open champion Gary Woodland fired a 70 and was two adrift, tied on 138 with Chez Reavie

(67) and Luke List (68).

World number two Rahm had six birdies in his five-under effort as he bids to overtake Rory McIlroy atop the world rankings this week.

With Muirfield Village in Dublin, Ohio, playing tough, McIlroy took a wild path to an even-par 72 and a two-under total of 142. The Northern Ireland star's round included a double-bogey, an eagle, four birdies and four bogeys.

"I don't know what it was," said McIlroy, who dunked a ball in a creek at 11 and landed

his approach from the fairway eight feet from the pin for eagle at the fifth. "It was a few birdies and an eagle thrown in there and a few mistakes.

"There's some good in there, some mediocre and there was some pretty poor shots," McIlroy said.

Tiger in trouble

"But I battled back well."

But Woods, playing his first PGA Tour event since February after a tour shutdown in March over the coronavirus pandemic, was battling more than Muirfield.

The 44-year-old Woods, who said his back was bothering him even as he warmed up, had five bogeys and a double-bogey with just three birdies. A solid finish, with two birdies and a par save in his final three holes, didn't do much to improve his outlook.

"Not very good," Woods said. "I three-

madness for the Blues."

Reports in New Zealand have said ambitious new franchise Kanaloa Hawaii, backed by a slew of former All Blacks, was in discussions with NZR about filling the void of a Pacific Island team. "I think the Pacifica idea is brilliant, but I would be housing them in Sydney," added McLennan.

"And because of COVID, the fact we don't know what's happening, I am not sure we could guarantee them for next year." Australia has ruled out having only two of its Super Rugby teams in any new competition, and delaying a Pacific side until 2022 would potentially allow all five — Queensland Reds, ACT Brumbies, Melbourne Rebels, NSW Waratahs and Western Force — to play next year.

"Hopefully we are moving in the right direction, an eight-team competition with two Australian sides doesn't work for us," McLennan, who last week described the relationship with NZR as "a bit master-servant", told the newspaper.

"So if 10 teams is on the table then we have the chance to create a world-class competition which will be highly valued and extremely exciting."

If New Zealand insist on a maximum of four Australian teams, then Rugby Australia would face having to either axe a side, merge two teams or stick to its own domestic competition.

The coronavirus halted this year's Super Rugby season in March, forcing New Zealand and Australia to set up their own domestic versions, while South African clubs and the Jaguares remain sidelined.

Robinson blamed the COVID-19 pandemic for the "extremely tough" decisions made around the new competition, saying it meant long-distance travel was impossible.—AFP



DUBLIN: Tony Finau of the United States plays his shot from the 14th tee during the second round of The Memorial Tournament on July 17, 2020 at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio. —AFP

putted two holes early, and whatever kind of momentum I was going to create, I stifled that early and fought it the rest of the day."

Woods had to wait out the afternoon to see if his three-over total would see him into the weekend, and it did, without a shot to spare. The five-time Memorial winner has never missed a cut in 17 prior appearances in the tournament hosted by Jack Nicklaus.

Brooks Koepka was also three-over through

36 holes, firing a second-round 75.

Bryson DeChambeau endured a horror-show 10 at the par-five 15th, where he found the water off the tee and was out-of-bounds twice on the way to the quintuple bogey. The big-hitting American's 76 gave him a two-day total of five-over 149. Dustin Johnson, who also started the tournament with a chance to topple McIlroy atop the rankings, also missed the cut with a second straight 80.—AFP

Australia wants Pacific Super Rugby team based in Sydney

SYDNEY: Rugby Australia said it would be "madness" for any Pacific Island team in a New Zealand-led revamp of Super Rugby to be based in Auckland and instead should play out of Sydney.

Plans for a Pacific side were unveiled Friday by New Zealand Rugby in a proposed shake-up of the flagship southern hemisphere club tournament from 2021 that would cull South African teams and Argentina's Jaguares.

They would feature in a new-look competition containing New Zealand's five existing teams, and two to four from Australia.

NZR chief Mark Robinson declined to say what he had in mind for the Pacific team, but previous proposals have suggested players from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga could be based in Auckland, despite potentially hurting the Blues' fan base.

RA chairman Hamish McLennan said a Pacifica side would be better off in western Sydney, which boasts a large contingent of Fijians, Samoans and Tongans, and only from 2022.

"We have a large and wonderful Pacific Islander population in Sydney and I think that would strengthen rugby long term," he told the Sydney Daily Telegraph. "Basing them in Auckland would be detrimental to the (Auckland) Blues, it would be



KUWAIT: President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad, and Committee Secretary General Hussein Al-Musallam visited Sulaibkhat Sports Club where they were received by the club's Chairman Saad Enad Al-Enezi, Secretary General Shuaib Ali Shaaban and General Manager Nasser Al-Enezi. The visit was to check on the club's preparations after the resumption of sports activities.

Sports

Real Madrid clinch 34th La Liga title with game to spare

For me this is one of the best days in my professional career: Zidane

MADRID: Real Madrid were crowned La Liga champions for the 34th time on Thursday after Karim Benzema scored twice in a 2-1 victory over Villarreal which clinched the title with one game to spare. Benzema's double included a second-half penalty at the empty Alfredo di Stefano Stadium as Madrid moved seven points clear to end Barcelona's two-year hold on the trophy.

Barca had to prevail against Osasuna at home and hope Madrid slipped up but their fading challenge ended with a 2-1 defeat at Camp Nou, despite a brilliant Lionel Messi free-kick. It means Madrid claim their third La Liga title in 12 years, after a relentless run of form since Spanish football resumed on June 11 following the coronavirus pandemic.

Zinedine Zidane's side have won 10 games out of 10 since the restart. They have conceded four goals in that time and never been behind in a match. "For me this is one of the best days in my professional career," said Zidane. "After lockdown and everything, it's astonishing."

Asked if it trumps the Champions League titles Madrid won in his first spell as manager, Zidane said: "This is better than anything. It takes a tremendous effort to win La Liga. After 38 matches, you have more points than anyone else. It's bloody fantastic."

Madrid have also been awarded five penalties during the run-in, some of them controversially, and this one caused a stir too as Sergio Ramos tried to roll the ball to Benzema, who finished, but had entered the area too early.

Much to Villarreal's irritation, Madrid were allowed to retake and this time Benzema made no mistake, before Vicente Iborra headed in what proved a late consolation.

"It's a prize for all the work we've done, this is the reward," said Ramos. "We have one more match and we want to win 11 out of 11."

SETIEN UNDER PRESSURE AT BARCA

After three months away, Barcelona had returned

sitting top of the table but draws with Sevilla, struggling Celta Vigo and Atletico Madrid allowed Madrid to take charge.

Barca were also in first place when they sacked Ernesto Valverde in January and while the club's problems go deeper than their coach, Quique Setien's position will come under scrutiny.

"Things have to change," said Messi. "Everyone here in the club will be feeling very angry about what has happened this season and that's normal. The players feel like that too." Messi added: "We have to be self-critical, starting with the players, but across the whole club."

Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu said

“

It's bloody fantastic

”

this week that Setien will remain in charge for next month's Champions League tie against Napoli but the coach's decision to leave Luis Suarez out of the starting line-up for a second consecutive game will raise questions.

Yet few could argue Madrid deserve the title and it was fitting that Benzema delivered it, his double taking his tally for the season to 26 in all competitions. His first came after 28 minutes when Casemiro stole possession in midfield and freed Luka Modric. He slid through Benzema, who fired through the legs of Sergio Asenjo.

Ramos had scored five goals himself since the restart and could have had a sixth after he was



VALDEBEBAS: Real Madrid's players celebrate winning the Liga title after the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid CF and Villarreal CF at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid, on July 16, 2020. — AFP

tripped by the dangling leg of Sofian Chakla. But his ploy to tee up Benzema backfired when his teammate encroached too early. Benzema converted the re-take.

Iborra headed in Mario Gaspar's cross to set up a nervy finish but Barcelona were still being held by Osasuna. Messi's curling free-kick into the top corner had cancelled out Osasuna's opener from Jose Arnaiz, once of Barca B.

But Osasuna had a final trick up their sleeve as

Roberto Torres finished at the back post to wrap up Barca's miserable night at the end of a turbulent season. Real Mallorca's hopes of survival are over after they lost 2-1 at home to Granada but Alaves guaranteed their safety by winning at Real Betis. With Espanyol already down, the final relegation spot will be between Celta Vigo, who lost 3-2 to Levante, and Leganes, who beat Athletic Bilbao 2-0. Leganes are a point behind and play on Sunday at home to Real Madrid while Celta visit Espanyol. — AFP

Stokes says his success is more than just 'instinct'

MANCHESTER: Ben Stokes said he was now more than just a purely instinctive cricketer after the all-rounder's latest superb century left England strongly-placed in the second Test against the West Indies.

Stokes top-scored with 176 in England's first innings 469-9 declared, before the West Indies reached 32-1 at the close of Friday's second day at Old Trafford. This was the second-highest of Stokes's 10 Test hundreds, behind his blistering 258 against South Africa at Cape Town in 2016. But, more significantly, it was also his fourth Test century since the start of 2019, during which time the left-hander has averaged over 52 — the sign of a world-class batsman.

As was the case with his stunning 135 not out during a remarkable one-wicket win in the third Ashes Test against Australia at Headingley last year, Stokes had the discipline to play himself in against accurate bowling before picking the right moment to up the tempo.

He found a fine ally on Friday in Dom Sibley, the opener's 120 his first Test century in England. But with Sibley batting sedately — his hundred took the best part of eight hours — there was a danger of England getting bogged down in a match they need to win to level the three-Test series at 1-1.

Stokes, however, ensured that did not happen. Having gone to a hundred in, by his standards, a restrained 255 balls, Stokes needed a mere 46 more for the third fifty of his innings as he punished a new ball being deployed by a tiring West Indies pace attack.

It was a sublime mixture of both skill and match



MANCHESTER: England's Ben Stokes plays a shot as West Indies' Shane Dowrich (R) keeps wicket during play on the second day of the second Test cricket match between England and the West Indies at Old Trafford in Manchester, north-west England on July 17, 2020. — AFP

awareness, the latest Stokes has displayed since being acquitted of an affray charge in 2018 after an incident outside a nightclub that saw him miss an Ashes tour and threatened to end his England career completely.

Stokes, who last week deputised as captain for Joe Root after England's regular skipper missed a four-wicket loss to the West Indies following the birth of his second child, was once more proving himself to be a leader even if he was now back among the ranks.

'UNDERSTAND MY GAME'

"Numbers, figures...I don't really care," said

Stokes, who shared a fourth-wicket stand of 260 with Sibley that rescued England from a top-order collapse. "The main number for me is how many wins," he said.

"I was more buzzing that I faced 300 balls than I was when I got to my hundred, that's something I never thought I'd be capable of doing." The 29-year-old Stokes, now in his 65th Test, added: "Being an instinctive player is great but there's time in the past where I've let how I'm playing at the time affect me, thinking I can play some big shots and I'd be alright. "I feel at an age and an experience level where I really understand my game pretty much all the time and I try not to get carried away." — AFP

West Ham's Moyes proves again he's a man for crisis

LONDON: West Ham United are not mathematically safe from relegation but barring something extraordinary their manager David Moyes has completed his second rescue job at the club in two years.

Friday's 3-1 home win over Watford should be enough to ensure the Hammers remain in the top flight — and this time Moyes will surely be shown more gratitude by the club's owners. Two years ago, having picked up the pieces in the wake of Slaven Bilic's sacking, Moyes was shown the door after securing survival with two games to spare and finishing 13th.

Admittedly then the Scot was on a short-term contract, and West Ham believed Manuel Pellegrini could take them to the next level — a belief that proved an illusion. West Ham finished 10th last season under the Chilean but, despite a large outlay in the transfer market, found themselves in all-too-familiar territory last Christmas.

Pellegrini was sacked after a 2-1 defeat by Leicester City left them in 17th spot, one point above the relegation zone. Moyes was not a popular choice among the West Ham

faithful, but he answered the call and once again the Scot has galvanised the team, even if results have hardly been spectacular.

In fact, when West Ham lost their first two games after the restart of the Premier League, it meant they had lost seven of their last nine and relegation appeared likely. Since then, however, wins over Chelsea, Norwich City and now Watford mean they are six points clear of the bottom three with two games left and they also boast a healthy goal difference compared to the teams below them.

Moyes is unlikely to be shown the door this time. He looked a relieved man after first-half goals by Michail Antonio, Tomas Soucek and Declan Rice proved sufficient to see off a Watford side in a crucial relegation tussle.

"We started the game brilliantly well," Moyes, who made his name at Everton before an all-too-short spell at Manchester United as Alex Ferguson's successor, told Sky Sports. "Tonight we stood up to everything we got. First half performance was excellent and so was the second half on a defensive point of view."

Moyes refused to say West Ham were safe, but acknowledged they were now in "a good position". "They say you need 40 points to stay up and we have 37, so if we can get another win we can say we did it off our own back and didn't need anyone else to help us." — Reuters

BCCI ordered to pay former IPL champions \$640m

NEW DELHI: A court has ordered India's cricket board to pay more than \$640 million to former Indian Premier League champions Deccan Chargers for illegal termination of the franchise.

The Chargers, which were owned by the Deccan Chronicle newspaper group, were kicked out of the IPL in 2012 by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for financial breaches.

The action was taken a day before the team's deadline to settle matters however. And the Bombay High Court ruled Friday that the termination was illegal and premature, a legal representative of Deccan Chronicle told AFP.

"They have been directed to pay 48 billion rupees (\$640 million) plus taxes which might amount to about 80 billion," the legal representative said on condition of anonymity.

"We haven't received the judgement copy yet, only after reading we will decide next plan of action," Hemang Amin, the interim chief executive of the BCCI, was quoted as saying by the Economic Times newspaper.

In 2017, the Kochi Tuskers Kerala team won a similar arbitration case over its termination six years earlier. The IPL is the world's most popular Twenty20 league but has been plagued by controversy since it started in 2008, with corruption and match-fixing cases often taking centre-stage. A spot-fixing scandal in 2013 led to the Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals being suspended for two seasons. — AFP

Arteta has 'faith' in Arsenal despite spending fears

LONDON: Mikel Arteta insists he has "full faith" in Arsenal's board despite recently admitting he is worried about the club's spending power. Gunners boss Arteta raised eyebrows after this week's win against Liverpool when he said it was a "big concern" that he may not be given the finances to mount a Premier League title challenge.

His side are preparing for a fourth season out of the lucrative Champions League and their cashflow has also been hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

Arsenal may even find themselves without Europa League revenue as they sit ninth in the table with two games remaining after Saturday's FA Cup semi-final against Manchester City at Wembley.

Speaking in April, director Josh Kroenke said the club are currently operating a "Champions League wage bill on a Europa League budget".

Yet, with head of football Raul Sanllehi and technical director Edu overseeing recruitment at Arsenal, Arteta is adamant he still has a good relationship with the club's powerbrokers. "I have full faith. I have a really good relationship with Raul, with Edu, with Vinai (Venkatesham, managing director) and direct contact with the owners," Arteta told reporters on Friday.

"We know what we want to do. That's not the issue, for sure. There are many different aspects. "Obviously the financial one, depending on where we finish, is one. Depending on the future of a few players and obviously depending on the transfer market.

"We don't know the type of transfer market we are going to find. It is something unique, it never happened and there are a lot of question marks around that." Arteta also revealed he is in regular contact with Arsenal's United States-based owner Stan Kroenke.

Asked if his questioning of Arsenal's financial options was a veiled warning about his own future plans, Arteta said: "That was misinterpreted. It wasn't my intention. "We work so closely with everyone at the club, with the owners to put the plan that we need to take the club forward. Everybody has the same ambition, we are in all of this together.

"But if you ask me if I know right now what do I have and how can I do it, I'm sorry but I don't know because there are a lot of questions that we cannot resolve right now with the situation we have.

"It's not about sending a message, we all have the same objective which is to try to bring the club back as quickly as possible, fighting with the top teams in the country and in Europe.

"I speak with them and I have a really good and open relationship. That's why when you mention that I am surprised because I don't need to do that." —AFP

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15 Real Madrid clinch 34th La Liga title with game to spare



15 Stokes says his success is more than just 'instinct'



LEEDS: Leeds United supporters gather outside their Elland Road ground to celebrate the club's return to the Premier League after a gap of 16 years, in Leeds, northern England on July 17, 2020. — AFP

Leeds promoted to Premier League

‘We’ve been in the doldrums for 16 years’

LONDON: Leeds United were promoted to the Premier League on Friday after West Bromwich Albion's 2-1 defeat at Huddersfield ensured the Championship leaders will end their 16-year exile from the top-flight.

Marcelo Bielsa's side were able to celebrate promotion without kicking a ball as second placed Albion's failure to take three points guaranteed Leeds will finish in the top two. "We are back. Leeds United are Premier League," the club said on their Twitter account moments after the final whistle.

Leeds are five points clear at the top and they can clinch the Championship title with a draw against Derby at Pride Park today. Albion's defeat means third placed Brentford will reach the top-flight for the first time in 73 years if they win their last two games.

A tense 1-0 win over Barnsley at Elland Road, secured by Michael Sollbauer's own goal, had moved Leeds to the brink of promotion on Thursday. Now they can look forward to renewing old rivalries with Manchester United and Chelsea next season.

"It's unbelievable and it's still not sunk in," Leeds captain Liam Cooper said. "Our club, our fans and our players have sacrificed so much. We've been in the doldrums for 16 years. To lead this team to promotion back to where we know we've always be-

longed is unbelievable. We deserve it. We've been the best team all season."

Bielsa has earned iconic status in west Yorkshire after the Leeds boss finally put his club back on the football map. Midfielder Kalvin Phillips saluted Bielsa's contribution, saying: "When the manager first came in I never thought I would be in this position two years down the line."



We're back!

"He's the best in the world. There's no manager I would rather be under than Marcelo Bielsa. "The Premier League is the best in the world and after 16 years we're back in there." Despite warnings from Leeds owner Andrea Radrizzani to stay at home amid the coronavirus pandemic, Leeds fans gathered outside Elland Road to celebrate, but their emotion was understandable.

pard's first Premier League game in charge. They also suffered a 2-1 loss to United in the League Cup fourth round, while Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team extended their dominant run against the Blues with a 2-0 league victory at Stamford Bridge in February.

Lampard conceded United were largely the better team on those occasions and the Chelsea manager is focused only on getting his side set up right this time. "Knowing the circumstances of the games, fair play we've lost three, that's just a fact, and I'm not into revenge. I just want to win the game in front of us on Sunday," Lampard told reporters on Friday.

"We played some good stuff in the Carabao Cup. We played a very changed team and played some

Leeds are one of England's biggest clubs, with their legion of fanatical fans following them around the country and regularly attracting home crowds of over 30,000 despite years of underachievement.

RICH HISTORY

Their long-awaited return to the top tier completes a turbulent journey that saw them become a laughing stock when they languished in third tier obscurity. Leeds have been away from the Premier League for so long that Twitter and Instagram didn't exist the last time they played in the top-flight.

So it was fitting that Leeds goalkeeper Kiko Casilla took to Twitter to celebrate, writing: "We are BACK! We are in the Premier League! Yessssssssss!"

"Many days dreaming of this Day. We deserve it. Proud of this TEAM, proud of our supporters."

Liverpool midfielder James Milner, who started his career at Leeds, tweeted: "Congratulations LUFC. Back where you belong."

Leeds went through 14 different managers following their 2004 relegation from the Premier League, until the sleeping giant was awoken by former Lazio and Marseille boss Bielsa.

Bielsa has turned the tide at a tortured club infamously labelled the 'Damned United' by novelist

David Peace and forever remembered as 'Dirty Leeds' in the minds of fans who saw their no-holds-barred style in the Don Revie era.

The 64-year-old Argentine led Leeds within touching distance of promotion in his first season, but they crumbled in the final weeks and were beaten in the play-off semi-finals by Derby.

Notorious for working his players so hard in training that they often burn out by the end of the season, Bielsa has benefitted from the coronavirus hiatus allowing his players to come back refreshed for the final furlong of the promotion race.

Champions of England in 1969 and 1974 under Revie, then in 1992 when Howard Wilkinson called the shots, Leeds have a rich history. But since being relegated from the top tier, Leeds have stumbled from financial disaster off the pitch to despair on it.

Describing the club's ascent to the heady heights of the Champions League in the early 2000s, former chairman Peter Ridsdale claimed he had "lived the dream". Their subsequent fall was a never-ending nightmare that hit its lowest ebb in 2007 when Leeds went into administration and were relegated to the third tier for the first time.

No wonder the much-travelled Bielsa, nicknamed El Loco for his intense personality, is so beloved after just two years in charge. — AFP

Lampard tells Chelsea to forget revenge talk against Man Utd

LONDON: Frank Lampard has warned his Chelsea stars not to get distracted by talk of revenge against Manchester United when they clash in today's FA Cup semi-final. Lampard's side have been beaten three times by United already this season.

Chelsea were thrashed 4-0 at Old Trafford in Lam-

good stuff, but you still lose. "And in the league we had a good first half, missed opportunities and they took theirs. "So I think you have to respect the fact that they're a good team, we can all see that in their recent performances, but I'm not overly concerned with the games that have gone by. I just want to win the one in front of us."

United have seen a host of VAR decisions go in their favour recently, including two key calls in their league win at Crystal Palace on Thursday. Wilfried Zaha was denied a penalty just moments before Marcus Rashford put United ahead, with Jordan Ayew also seeing a goal ruled out for offside.

Lampard, whose side are battling United for a top

four finish in the league, admitted the VAR decisions have given a helping hand to their rivals during their recent run.

"There is always a human element to VAR still, of course. Clearly they have to make a decision," Lampard said. "The confusing thing about some of the recent decisions and the one last night (Thursday) is that it's a very clear and obvious decision that is wrong, that didn't get reviewed and changed."

"And a few of those have happened. And that is strange. "I would like to think sometimes you have to be level-headed. Some may go against you or not, but it just seems a period where Manchester United have got a few in their favour with VAR." — AFP