

3 Exodus of foreigners could impact Kuwait's economy



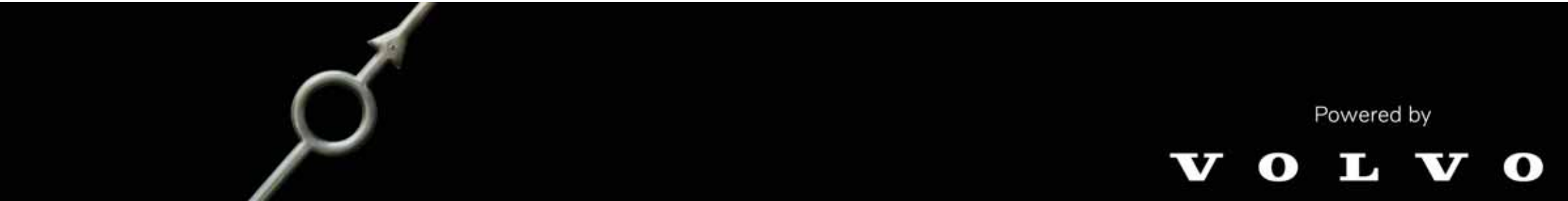
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# Kuwait outlines safety rules for resumption of air travel

## Qatar allows citizens and residents to travel and return anytime

**KUWAIT:** The civil aviation authority has presented a set of rules for the safe resumption of air travel, as Kuwait prepares to open its airport for commercial flights next month while assuaging travel concerns of coronavirus-wary passengers. The protocols encompass measures including random testing of passengers arriving at and departing from Kuwait International Airport, Saleh Al-Fadaghi, deputy director general for airport affairs at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), said in a statement.

The new rules mandate all travelers to wear protective facemasks and keep a hand sanitizer in their possession, besides strictly abiding by social distancing

guidelines, he said. As per the new guidelines, departing passengers are required to provide negative COVID-19 test results before boarding their flights (details on where to undergo the tests have not been made available as of now). Passengers are also instructed to keep hand luggage to a minimum. Fadaghi explained manual checks of tickets have now been scaled back as a result of the pandemic in favor of the more popular digital e-tickets, whose scanning requires no physical contact.

The new measures call on passengers to be present at the airport no less than four hours before departure to ensure a smooth and convenient journey,

added the official. Commercial flights at Kuwait International Airport will resume from Aug 1 after a four-month hiatus, part of a three-stage resumption plan starting at no more than 30 percent capacity.

Meanwhile, Qatar yesterday relaxed restrictions aimed at controlling the novel coronavirus, allowing citizens and permanent residency holders to travel outside the country and return at any time, and residents outside the country to return starting Aug 1. The government communications office (GCO) said arrivals from low-risk countries are required to take a coronavirus test at the airport and sign a formal pledge to adhere to quarantine at home for a week,

state news agency (QNA) reported on its twitter account, citing a statement from GCO.

GCO said the list of low-risk countries will be published on the Ministry of Public Health's website and will be reviewed every two weeks. Travellers from low-risk countries who have obtained COVID-free certificates from an accredited testing center within 48 hours of travelling will not have to take a test at the airport. The measures come as the third phase of a four-phase plan to lift coronavirus restrictions starts at the beginning of August. Qatar has reported 10,7430 coronavirus cases so far, with 160 deaths and 10,4191 recovered. — Agencies

## Fears in India as Kuwait looks to cap expat numbers

**KUWAIT/KOCHI/NEW DELHI:** With no job or savings, Indian electrician Shibhu Clemance had hoped to return to work in Kuwait - until he learned of a proposal to drastically cut back on migrants in the country. The 38-year-old, who lost his job in February due to the coronavirus pandemic, is among more than a million Indians in Kuwait, the largest expat group in the Gulf country of 4.4 million.

But after the coronavirus hit oil prices and local jobs, the country is considering new limits that could force about 800,000 to leave and slash their remittances - a crucial lifeline for families back home. The proposal is in a new bill that would cut the total number of migrant workers in the country by 40 percent and require that the number of Indians should not exceed 15 percent of the Kuwaiti population.

"I came to the Gulf and toiled hard to provide a better life for my children. The COVID-19 crisis and now the new Kuwait law have shattered my dreams," Clemance told Reuters by phone from Mangaf. Before he lost his job in February, he sent 40,000 Indian rupees (\$530) to his wife and two children who live in a cramped house in the southern Indian state of Kerala with his in-laws and six other relatives.

Without a home of his own in Kerala and with little hope of finding work in a state that has been receiving India's largest influx of returning migrants, Clemance fears going back to his family. The government has yet to approve the bill, but the prime minister said last month he wants to cut the expat population of about 3 million.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem has proposed a gradual reduction in foreign workers, starting with a 5 percent cut in numbers and indicated the country needed fewer low-skilled migrants. Parliament will finalize the bill before the current session ends in October, before sending it to the government for approval.

Indians working in Kuwait sent home almost \$4.6 billion in 2017, about 6.7 percent of the country's total incoming remittances that year, according to World Bank data. But a global recession in the wake of COVID-19 has decimated jobs and slashed cash flows. The World Bank estimates remittances to India will drop by 23 percent from \$83 billion last year to \$64 billion this year.

For Litty Shibhu, Clemance's wife, managing the household and taking care of her large family without the monthly transfer from Kuwait has been tough. "We are in real trouble since the money stopped coming ... Every day Shibu calls me and shares his sorrows. I'm planning to sell my gold to help him," the 29-year-old said. "We will virtually be on the street if my husband is compelled to return. I can't even sleep thinking about this." — Reuters

## Pilgrims vie for hajj; king chairs cabinet

**RIYADH:** A Jordanian couple in Saudi Arabia burst into tears of joy to be among the chosen ones for next week's scaled-down hajj pilgrimage, but countless rejected applications have stirred resentment. For the first time in modern history, millions of pilgrims outside Saudi Arabia have been barred from the hajj - a key pillar of Islam and one of the world's largest mass gatherings - because of a coronavirus surge.

The dramatically curtailed hajj pilgrimage in the holy city of Makkah has drawn a huge rush of applicants. Saudi

officials said residents from 160 countries competed in the government-run lottery that many described as an opaque selection process - bringing elation to up to 10,000 people while leaving the vast majority disappointed.

Late Tuesday, Saudi King Salman chaired a virtual cabinet meeting from a hospital office, a day after he was admitted due to gall bladder inflammation, the Saudi Press Agency reported. The cabinet held a virtual meeting, chaired by King Salman "from his office at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh," SPA said on Twitter. In the meeting, the cabinet discussed arrangements for the forthcoming hajj pilgrimage. The report was accompanied by footage from the spacious office in the hospital where the king presided over the meeting from

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RIYADH: A handout picture provided yesterday shows King Salman bin Abdulaziz chairing a virtual cabinet meeting from his office at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital late Tuesday. — AFP

## Airborne virus likely infectious

**WASHINGTON:** Scientists have known for several months the new coronavirus can become suspended in microdroplets expelled by patients when they speak and breathe, but until now there was no proof that these tiny particles are infectious. A new study by scientists at the University of Nebraska that was uploaded to a medical preprint site this week has shown for the first time that SARS-CoV-2 taken from microdroplets, defined as under five microns, can replicate in lab conditions.

This boosts the hypothesis that normal speaking and breathing, not just coughing and sneezing, are responsible for spreading COVID-19 - and that infectious doses of the virus can travel distances far greater than the six feet (two meters) urged by social distancing guidelines. The results are still considered preliminary and have not yet appeared in a peer-reviewed journal, which would lend more credibility to the methods devised by the scientists.

The paper was posted to the medrxiv.org website, where most cutting-edge research during the pandemic has first been made public. The same team wrote a paper in March showing that the virus remains airborne in the rooms of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, and this study will

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MEXICO CITY: A city gardener works next to a mural showing a health worker wearing a facemask with the symbol of fictional superhero Superman on Tuesday, amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Pakistanis risk plasma transfusions

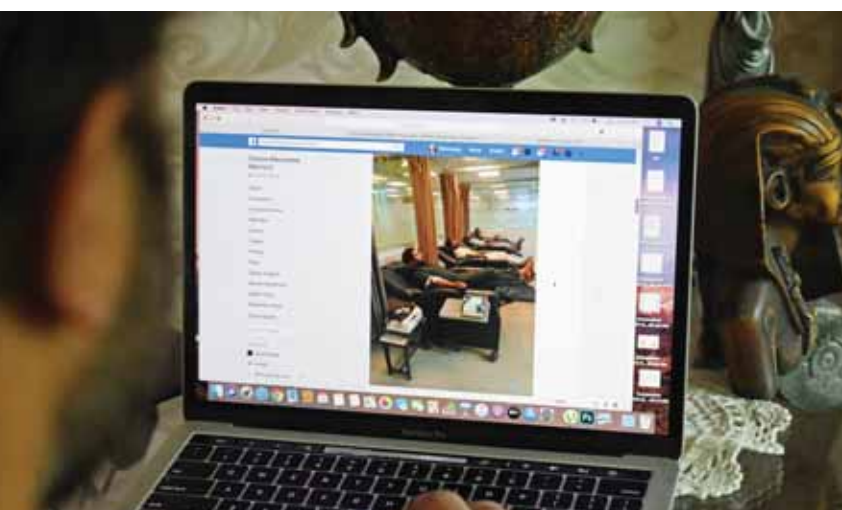
**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistanis with COVID-19 are risking their lives and navigating a shady black market to get blood plasma transfusions, despite scant medical proof about the remedy's effectiveness. Convalescent plasma treatment, where the antibody-rich part of the blood from a recovered patient is transfused to a coronavirus sufferer, is growing in popularity across Pakistan amid widely circulating claims of success on social media.

Like some other nations, Pakistan is conducting medical trials on the treatment,

which has shown promising signs but is far from proven. But with lengthy wait times and uncertain access, people are turning to the black market and private clinics, where there are no guarantees about the safety or origin of the blood product. "It's all born out of desperation because everyone wants to believe there is an answer to this (coronavirus) question," Fareeha Irfan, a public health specialist, told AFP. "It is easy to exploit the people who are not very well versed in what's going on in the scientific world. It is very easy to coerce them."

Pakistan has declared about 260,000 cases of coronavirus and some 5,500 deaths. With low testing rates, the true figure is thought to be considerably higher.

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LAHORE: This photo taken on June 28, 2020 shows Zoraiz Riaz Syed using his laptop as he runs the Facebook group "Corona Recovered Warriors" consisting of former COVID-19 patients at his home. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait Amir receives more cables on successful surgery

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a congratulatory cable from Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. In the cable, King Hamad wished His Highness the Amir a speedy recovery after his successful surgical operation. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked King Hamad for his sincere sentiments, wishing him good health, and prosperity for the Kingdom of Bahrain. His Highness the Amir also received a congratulatory cable from Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. In the cable the Bahraini Crown

Prince, also Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister wished His Highness the Amir everlasting good health, wellbeing and speedy recovery after his successful surgical operation. In turn, His Highness the Amir thanked Bahrain's Crown Prince for his sincere sentiments, wishing him good health, and prosperity for Bahrain under the wise leadership of King Hamad Al-Khalifa.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received a cable from King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck on his recent successful surgery. In the

cable, King Bhutan wished His Highness the Amir swift recovery and Kuwait to prosper under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Amir responded in a cable, expressing gratitude and wished King Bhutan good health and progress as well as prosperity for his country. His Highness the Amir received similar cables from Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, Secretary General of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Dr Yousef Al-Othaimeen, as well as Sheikh Mubarak

Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In the meantime, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call from United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressing sincere sentiments and congratulations on His Highness the Amir's successful surgery, wishing him good health and well-being. His Highness the Prime Minister thanked the UN chief and expressed appreciation for the kind sentiments, which reflected on the strong ties between Kuwait and the international organization. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has recorded 60,434 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Tuesday, in addition to 412 deaths. With the exception of 127 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, 50,919 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,103 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 6:00 pm.

Friday prayers resumed at around 1,000 mosques around Kuwait on July 17, with strict social distancing and health precautions observed. Mosques in the so-called 'model residential areas' had reopened their doors for worshippers on June 10 amid strict health precautionary measures. 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.

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.

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.

### 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. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation presented a set of rules for the safe resumption of air travel. The new rules mandate all travelers to wear protective facemasks and keep a hand sanitizer in their possession, besides strictly abiding by social distancing guidelines. Departing passengers are required to provide negative COVID-19 test results before boarding their flights, where they will be instructed to keep hand luggage to a minimum. Manual checks of tickets have now been scaled back as a result of the pandemic in favor of the more popular digital e-tickets, whose scanning requires no physical contact. Passengers must be present at the airport no less than four hours before departure to ensure a smooth and convenient

journey. 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)

### 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

## Airborne virus likely...

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soon be published in a journal, according to the lead author. "It is actually fairly difficult" to collect the samples, Joshua Santarpia, an associate professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center told AFP.

The team used a device the size of a cell phone for the purpose, but "the concentrations are typically very low, your chances of recovering material are small". The scientists took air samples from five rooms of bedridden patients, at a height of about 30 cm over the foot of their beds. The patients were talking, which produces microdroplets that become suspended in the air for several hours in what is referred to as an "aerosol", and some were coughing.

The team managed to collect microdroplets as small as one micron in diameter. They then placed these samples into a culture to make them grow, finding that three

## Pakistanis risk plasma...

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The Pakistan Society of Hematology said plasma hype had led the public - and even some health professionals - to believe the therapy was standard treatment for the virus. "Use of convalescent plasma can sometimes lead to life-threatening transfusion reactions and transmissions of infections," the society said.

Nawaz Murad, a lecturer from Lahore, said doctors advised him to organize plasma therapy

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-ehealth.com>. The ministry had closed all private clinics and medical centers effective March 22, 2020 until further notice.

### Mental health assistance

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

Dr Rashed Al-Sahh: on Monday and Wednesday 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Call 9797-6168.

Dr Fahad Al-Tasha: daily from 8:00 pm - 12:00 am. Call 9904-8258.

Dr Othman Al-Asfour: daily 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Call 9938-5350.

Dr Mohammed Al-Khaldi (head of this team): daily 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Call 9903-6470.

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

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

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

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

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

For information and other concerns, call 9401-4283.

## Pilgrims vie for hajj; king...

### Continued from Page 1

behind a large desk. He thanked all those who had enquired about his health, SPA said.

"With so many applicants, we hardly had a one percent chance of being selected," said a Riyadh-based Jordanian engineer, 29, selected for the pilgrimage along with his 26-year-old wife, a health worker. "We were shocked and overjoyed." Also among the chosen few is Nasser, a Riyadh-based Nigerian expat, euphoric at winning what he called the "golden ticket" to hajj. "This feeling cannot be described," he told AFP.

But the Jordanian engineer, who declined to be named, said he felt compelled to delete his social media post announcing his selection, fearing he and his wife would attract the ire and envy of rejected applicants. Pilgrims typically wait for years to be chosen through a strict quota system for hajj, which last year drew some 2.5 million people. Saudi authorities initially said only around 1,000 pilgrims residing in the kingdom would be permitted for hajj, but local media reports say as many as 10,000 will be allowed.

The hajj ministry has fielded a deluge of anguished queries on Twitter. "Why reject me without giving a reason?" a woman asked the ministry, posting a screenshot of her rejected online application. "Everyone around me has been declined." Two widows, a Nigerian and an Egyptian working in the kingdom, furiously speculated whether they had been denied the chance to attend the ritual because they had not registered a male guardian to accompany them. Others wondered if several slots had been reserved for diplomats and business and royal elites.

The ministry, which did not respond to AFP's request for comment, said Saudi pilgrims were selected from a pool of health practitioners and military personnel who have recovered from COVID-19. One man, who said he had survived the disease, tweeted: "I am a health practitioner and I had contracted coronavirus... I don't understand why I was not chosen."

The government invited online applications from foreign residents, saying they would make up 70 percent of the pilgrims, but did not explain how many applied or how they were picked. "Saudi authorities kept the selection process highly opaque since it is a sensitive matter," Umar Karim, a visiting fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London, told AFP. "Keeping it hidden from public scrutiny is meant to generate less noise about who got selected and who didn't."

Just a week before the hajj, an annual global media event, it remained unclear whether it would be open to the foreign press. For Saudi Arabia, curtailing the hajj was a decision fraught with political and economic peril. Selecting a few from a vast pool of contenders risks further roiling public sentiment. To be among the chosen ones adds an aura of religious prestige to this year's pilgrimage, applicants say.

Despite the pandemic, many pilgrims consider it is safer to participate in this year's ritual without the usual colossal crowds cramming into tiny religious sites, which make it a logistical nightmare and a health hazard. Even in a regular year, the hajj leaves pilgrims exposed to a host of viral illnesses. "A lot of people want to do the hajj this year as it will likely be less burdensome and more organized due to a smaller crowd," said Karim.

Authorities said pilgrims will be tested for coronavirus before arriving in Makkah and are required to quarantine before and after the ritual. Pilgrims will be provided with bottled holy water from Makkah's Zamzam well and sterilized pebbles for a stoning ritual, they added. — AFP

of the 18 samples tested were able to replicate. For Santarpia, this represents proof that microdroplets, which also travel much greater distances than big droplets, are capable of infecting people. "It is replicated in cell culture and therefore infectious," he said.

The potential for microdroplet transmission of the coronavirus was at one stage thought to be improbable by health authorities across the world. Later, scientists began to change their mind and acknowledge it may be a possibility, which is the rationale for universal masking. The World Health Organization was among the last to shift its position, doing so on July 7. "I feel like the debate has become more political than scientific," said Santarpia. "I think most scientists that work on infectious diseases agree that there's likely an airborne component, though we may quibble over how large."

Linsey Marr, a professor at Virginia Tech who is a leading expert on aerial transmission of viruses and wasn't involved in the study, said it was rare to obtain measurements of the amount of virus present in air. "Based on what we know about other diseases and what we know so far about SARS-CoV-2, I think we can assume that if the virus is 'infectious in aerosols,' then we can become infected by breathing them in," she said. — AFP

as a last-ditch attempt to save his father, rapidly deteriorating from COVID-19. Frantic, he turned to Facebook, where he found a donor within hours. To complete the treatment quickly, the family did not get the blood screened, leaving open the risk of infections such as hepatitis or HIV. "Of course it was worth the risk, there was no other option but to get the transfusion done as soon as possible," Murad told AFP. "It was not a normal situation, my family were under immense stress."

The donor provided his plasma for free, but Murad paid the equivalent of about \$100 to a doctor to provide the transfusion at home. Some private clinics are reportedly charging up to \$300 in the impoverished country. — AFP



## Local

# Exodus of foreigners could impact Kuwait's economy

## Real estate industry to bear the brunt

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** An 'unprecedented exodus' of foreigners from Kuwait following jobs losses, financial crises and health insecurity triggered by the global pandemic will have far-reaching implications on Kuwait's economy in the medium-term, impacting real estate, consumer and retail sectors the most.

"The coming months will witness a significant downturn in economic activity in many key sectors in Kuwait if a new residency law proposal becomes a reality. If the law is passed, nearly 2 million foreigners will have to leave the country, impacting the agility of the country's economy in the medium-term," said Abdulkareem, a financial analyst working with an audit firm in Kuwait.

According to travel industry officials, the real impact will be felt only once commercial flights resume international operations on August 1. Currently, only chartered and special flights are flying out of Kuwait's airports.

While the country's real estate industry bore the brunt of this 'exodus', other sectors like construction, consumer, hospitality and tourism are also feeling the pinch of the downturn inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

"Sincerely thank Almighty God for making my destiny in Kuwait as an Equater," Indian expat Sajeev Koshy posted on his Facebook page along with a picture in PPE gear from Kuwait International Airport's departure gate minutes before his flight took off from Kuwait. Koshy, who worked with EQUATE Kuwait, bid farewell to Kuwait after working in the country for 25 years. More than 158,000 expatriates are estimated to have left Kuwait over the past three months, while many others are packing their bags to leave the country soon.

The government has proposed a legislation to

streamline the population in the country and resolve the demographic imbalance. Foreigners number around 3.35 million and formed 70 percent of the country's population of around 4.8 million at the beginning of 2020. The government is weighing a proposal to introduce a quota system for expat communities with a view to regulating their numbers. If the draft law becomes legislation, around 2.5 million foreigners will have to find their way out of the country in the coming years.

The government reportedly cancelled around 154,000 work permits of foreigners earlier this year. Another 40,000 expats outside the country did not renew their residency and an estimated 30,000 expats without valid residencies had left the country, making use of the amnesty program announced by the government in April.

### Private sector not consulted

Thousands of people working in small businesses such as restaurants, hotels, barbershops and beauty parlors, garment and textile shops and gold and jewelry shops either lost their jobs or had their wages halved, forcing many of them to take the painful decision to leave the country.

A good number of expatriate taxi and bus drivers, one of the worst sectors affected by the crisis, are also planning to leave. Taxi and bus services remain closed and it is unclear when they will be allowed to operate again.

"A glaring impact of this exodus may probably be felt in the apartment sector in the country. Thousands of flats are lying vacant today, mostly in expat neighborhoods like Jleeb, Salmiya, Fahaheel, Mangaf and Riggae. And we don't expect any pickup in demand anytime soon," said Jalaluddeen, a property market expert.

Meanwhile, many expat families residing in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh are shifting to other localities such as



KUWAIT: An aerial view showing residential and commercial buildings in Kuwait City.

Salmiya and Riggae amid speculation that the authorities are planning to raze apartment buildings in the area ahead of building a new residential city. Many landlords offered some rent relief, some as much as 50 percent off monthly rent to stem the exodus. But many others did not reduce rents at all.

While a majority of citizens support the government initiative to curtail the population of foreigners, a few have raised concerns over the practical difficulties involved in drastically reducing expat numbers. They point out the inevitability of utilizing expat manpower in certain sectors like domestic labor, driving, construction and manual labor.

"A massive reduction in expat population will have

serious repercussions on Kuwait's economy, particularly on the real estate, consumer and construction sectors. The retail sector will also be affected badly with shopping malls and supermarkets taking a substantial sales hit," said an expert who did not want to be named.

Secretary of the Real Estate Union Qais Al-Ghanim has expressed his dissatisfaction over the decisions being taken without consulting the private sector. Real Estate Development Company Vice President Sulaiman Al-Mudyan recently said it is a difficult task and the proposal to attain a proportion of 70 percent citizens and 30 percent expats in the population structure appears unrealistic.

## MP Adasani asks premier over US lawsuits

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Opposition MP Riyadh Al-Adasani yesterday asked His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah about what the government has done toward lawsuits filed last week by US Justice Department against former Kuwaiti defense officials.

Adasani said the US Justice Department through its offices in California filed several law-

suits to recover over \$100 million that were allegedly embezzled by former officials in the Kuwaiti defense ministry between 2009 and 2016.

Adasani said that the former high-ranking Kuwaiti officials used the defense ministry military attaché office in London to open at least six unauthorized bank accounts in the United States and transferred over \$100 million to them from Kuwaiti public funds.

He also said the US is seeking to recover \$104.38 million suspected to have been used in money laundering operations. The lawmaker asked the prime minister to provide him with copies of the correspondence exchanged between government officials over procedures taken regarding this case.

The US Justice Department said last week it has filed seven lawsuits seeking the forfeiture of real estate, a private jet, a yacht and additional assets

purchased with public funds allegedly embezzled by former high-level officials in Kuwait's ministry of defense, part of which were transferred to California bank accounts operated by the son of a convicted felon.

In order to disguise the nature of the bank transfers, some of them were falsely described as being intended for military purposes, the Justice Department said on its website. According to the complaints, these funds were actually transferred to several California entities that had no business or contractual relationship with the ministry of defense.

The funds in the bank accounts were used to purchase or contribute to the improvement of a parcel of land in Beverly Hills known as "The Mountain," three homes in Beverly Hills, a penthouse and an apartment in Westwood, a private jet, a yacht, a luxury sports car and approximately

\$40,000 worth of memorabilia of boxer Manny Pacquiao, it said.

Adasani recalled that he had raised several issues with suspected corruption armament deals, the Eurofighter aircraft and Caracal helicopter deals, in addition to the suspected corruption in the Airbus deal and the alleged graft case involving former social security agency chief. The lawmaker also called for more in-depth investigation into the alleged corruption in the ports fund and the Malaysian sovereign fund and others.

In the meantime, MP Mohammad Al-Dallal yesterday submitted a proposal calling for a comprehensive investigation into suspected irregularities into state land distributed to people to encourage agricultural production. The lawmaker's call came a few days after the court of cassation decided to nullify the allotment of around 400 parcels of state land for violating the rules.

### News in brief

#### Eid holiday begins Thurs

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced on Tuesday Eid Al-Adha holiday would be for five days. The Eid break will begin on Thursday July 30, 2020 end on Monday August 3, 2020, as work will resume on Tuesday August 4, 2020, CSC said in a statement.

#### Phone call

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Tuesday received a visual phone call from Comoros Foreign Minister Mohamed El-Amine Souef, on bilateral relations and ways of enhancing them. Both ministers also discussed joint cooperation against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), regional and international happenings as well as issues of common interest.

#### Suspects arrested

**KUWAIT:** Police arrested three Asian men suspected of causing an Egyptian man's death in a hit-and-run incident reported outside a Wafra farm two weeks ago. The victim reportedly tried to stop the suspects from leaving in a truck that they've loaded with steel bars they stole from the property where he worked. He fell under the truck's tires and died as they drove away from the scene, the Interior Ministry said.

#### Eighteen flights

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that 18 flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 3,510 passengers. They included seven flights to Egypt, four flights to India, two flights to the UAE, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Pakistan, one flight to Lebanon, one flight to Bangladesh, and one flight to Sudan.

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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A fruit vendor wearing a face mask waves for the camera as he waits for clients at a market in Kuwait City, on July 20, 2020 amid the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic crisis. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Parents who fail to vaccinate children face fines, jail time

KUWAIT: Parents who fail to vaccinate children in their care face fines and jail time. Head of the Child Rights Protection Office at the Ministry of Health Dr Mona Al-Khawari warned that Kuwait law, Article 83 of the Child Protection Law No. 21/2015 stipulates that "Without prejudice to any more severe penalty stipulated by another law, each parent, guardian or whoever is legally responsible for the care of a child, who has not initiated immunization with vaccines against infectious and childhood diseases in accordance with the regulations and instructions issued by the competent medical authorities, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months, and/or a fine not exceeding KD 1,000." Parents have a grace period of 14 days to vaccinate or face the legal consequences. Vaccinations are provided for all children in Kuwait through government hospitals.

## NBK Academy celebrates wave 23 program graduates

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) celebrated the graduation of NBK wave 23 program for newly hired employees who have successfully met the admission criteria for this intensive Academy Program that is especially designed for young Kuwaiti university graduates. The program activities were completed through blended learning, in line with the measures taken to fight coronavirus (COVID-19) and to keep trainees safe.

The Academy's training program, that included 19 trainees, covered various areas of the banking industry such as banking principles, risk management, financial accounting, marketing, negotiation, consumer and commercial lending. Moreover, the participants went through training related to creativity and innovation, design thinking and data analysis. Indeed, the program focused on acquainting trainees with work principles and ethics, NBK core values, as well as intensive behavioral skills courses.

It is worth noting that the Academy program content undergoes continuous reviews and additions in order to keep it up to date with the latest international researches and studies related to the banking sector. The NBK Academy Program, that was launched 12 years ago, has been supporting NBK's strategy to employ, train and develop the professional skills of newly graduated Kuwaiti talents, in addition to attracting them to work in the financial services industry.

The Academy reflects NBK's vision to support sustainable human capital development as one of its top strategic priorities and a shared responsibility between the various governmental institutions and the private sector. The NBK Academy was inaugurated in 2008 with the aim to pave the way for new Kuwaiti graduates to join the banking services sector. The Academy provides graduates with the best training programs developed in cooperation with leading international institutions to meet the demands of the labor market.



## Kuwait calls on ending Israeli crimes in Palestine

KUWAIT: Kuwait called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to immediately end Israeli crimes and violence against Palestinians, especially that the world is facing the threat of the coronavirus pandemic. The remarks came in written speech, presented by Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, during the UNSC's session on the situation in the Middle East late Tuesday. Kuwait and other Arab countries have boosted their efforts to stand in the face of Israeli escalation in the past few months, as the world was trying to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, said Otaibi.

Meanwhile, he noted that in June, UNSC's member-states warned Israel against annexation and considered it a violation of the international law. Israel continues to expand settlements, violating UN resolution 2334, and it is also preventing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, he added. The Kuwaiti diplomat affirmed that Israel will take the opportunity in every global crisis to escalate attacks against Palestinians, calling on UNSC to exert further efforts to bring Israel to justice. He also called on ending arrest operations, destroying Palestinian buildings, protect Palestinians against the crimes of settlers and end the 13-year siege on Gaza. Otaibi underlined the importance of expanding the work of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). He reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to the views of the Arab and Islamic World on the peace process and the two-states solution and having an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. —KUNA

## Egypt, Kuwait coordinate on labor issues

CAIRO: Egypt's Minister of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Nabila Makram confirmed that there is a continuous follow-up to all inquiries received, including the possibility of Egyptians renewing their expired Kuwaiti residency visas, in addition to clarifying the status of Egyptian Kuwait Airways employees who were reportedly included in the company's recent layoffs. She communicated with the relevant authorities in Kuwait, adding that Kuwaiti authorities indicated that residencies' renewal and fees' payment during this phase will be done online, noting companies can register online to renew visas of their employees. Regarding Egyptian Kuwait Airways employees whose services were ended, she said that she had contacted the relevant officials in Kuwait, as the company explained that it had given them three months' salary each after termination.

In my view

## Women, main pillar of society

By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com



No matter how the woman is held in any society, be it at a higher status or any different fashion, she can never be ignored and forgotten. I do believe that those who treat women badly are not in their sane state of mind, because you will later find this person begging for forgiveness, claiming he did not mean or want to do what he did. Even more than that, he promises not to do it again, only to repeat the exact act, and the cycle goes on.

The woman feels most of the time she is between an anvil and a hammer, because of the stigma some societies place on the divorced woman in particular. Although it is changing somehow, yet the word "divorced" is still very heavy in many patriarchal communities.

Many people unfortunately forget that the woman is actually the main pillar of the society, due to her role of raising its members and getting them into various activities of the society. I believe that the saying "Behind every great man is a woman" is true and to the point. When one marries, you hear him say, "I got my second half", as if he was missing something! Now, don't believe that the woman constitutes half of the society [and may be more]?

The woman's role is not limited to just doing household chores. In fact she is the source that shapes and directs the society in all its aspects through the way she brings up her children. There are many examples of women who were successful in their homes and laboratories early on.

All of us know the disease diabetes mellitus. Do you know that the discovery of insulin was inspired by a woman, who was a doctor suffering from diabetes? Her husband wanted to find some treatment to make her more comfortable and ensure she leads a normal life. The discovery was made in 1921-22 at the University of Toronto, and I hope that there will be an opportunity to talk about their story.

The woman's role in society varies according to her place, because it brings different responsibilities. Of course, the first and most notable function is motherhood, and with it she gained the description of generations-raiser, because she bears the responsibility of caring for children and bringing them up as the building bricks of the society, and they in turn reflect the effects of her upbringing through their acts in the society.

Let us remember that women opened closed doors and played many roles in politics and led major countries around the world, besides in other capacities. Women proved to be brilliant in medicine, for example, and mega projects are being managed by women engineers. We must wake up to the fact that women have the exact rights as their brothers and we should be supporting them in every way possible.

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## Hundreds of bodies recovered from Bolivian streets, homes



BANDA ACEH: Gravediggers wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) carry the coffin of a COVID-19 coronavirus victim during a burial at a cemetery in Banda Aceh. —AFP

# Cybercriminals target COVID research

## Two Chinese indicted; hundreds of companies hacked

WASHINGTON: Two Chinese nationals have been indicted for seeking to steal COVID-19 vaccine research and hacking hundreds of companies in the United States and abroad, including defense contractors, the US Justice Department said Tuesday. Li Xiaoyu, 34, and Dong Jiazhi, 33, also targeted human rights activists in the United States, China and Hong Kong, Assistant Attorney General John Demers said.

The indictment comes amid rising tensions between the global superpowers fueled by the coronavirus pandemic which President Donald Trump blames on China. Li and Dong, who are believed to be in China, acted in some instances “for their own personal gain” and in others for the benefit of China’s Ministry of State Security, Demers said at a news conference. “China has now taken its place, alongside Russia, Iran, and North Korea, in that shameful club of nations that provide a safe haven for cyber criminals,” Demers said.

The Justice Department said Li and Dong, who were classmates at an electrical engineering college in Chengdu, have been engaged in a computer hacking campaign for the past 10 years. They have targeted companies in the United States, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, and

Britain, it said. “Targeted industries included, among others, high tech manufacturing; medical device, civil, and industrial engineering; business, educational, and gaming software; solar energy; pharmaceuticals; defense,” it said.

“More recently, the defendants probed for vulnerabilities in computer networks of companies developing COVID-19 vaccines, testing technology, and treatments,” it said. Justice Department officials said that Li and Dong targeted biotech companies in California, Maryland, Massachusetts and elsewhere but did not appear to have actually compromised any COVID-19 research.

### Dissidents targeted

The Justice Department said they also targeted “non-governmental organizations, and individual dissidents, clergy, and democratic and human rights activists in the United States and abroad, including

Hong Kong and China.” According to the indictment, Li and Dong supplied the Ministry of State Security with passwords for personal email accounts belonging to Chinese dissidents, a Hong Kong community organizer, the pastor of a Christian church in Xian and a former Tiananmen Square protester.

Among the material allegedly stolen were emails between a dissident and the Dalai Lama’s office. The pair were accused of stealing source code from software companies, information about drugs under development from pharmaceutical firms and weapons designs and testing data from defense contractors.

Targeted foreign companies were not identified by name. But according to the indictment they included a Dutch electronics firm, a Swedish gaming company, a Lithuanian gaming company, a German software engineering firm, a Belgian engineering software company, an Australian defense contractor, a South Korean shipbuilding firm, a Spanish elec-

tronics and defense firm and a British artificial intelligence and cancer research company.

Li and Dong allegedly stole information from defense contractors regarding military satellite programs, military wireless networks and communications systems and microwave and laser systems. The indictment was returned by a grand jury in the Eastern District of Washington state on July 7 but was only unsealed on Tuesday. Li and Dong were charged with conspiracy to commit computer fraud, conspiracy to commit theft of trade secrets, wire fraud, unauthorized access of a computer and identity theft.

China accused the United States last month of smearing Beijing following allegations that Chinese hackers were attempting to steal coronavirus research. The claims exacerbated tensions between the two countries, which have traded barbs over the origin of the pandemic that has killed more than 600,000 people since it emerged in China late last year. “China expresses strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to such smearing,” foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said. “Judging from past records, the US has carried out the largest cybertheft operations worldwide,” Zhao said. — AFP

## Chinese COVID-19 vaccine starts final tests in Brazil

BRASILIA: A Chinese-made vaccine against the new coronavirus entered the final stage of testing Tuesday in Brazil, where volunteers received the first doses of what officials hope will be a game-changer in the global pandemic. The vaccine, developed by private Chinese pharmaceutical firm Sinovac Biotech, became the third in the world to enter Phase 3 clinical trials, or large-scale testing on humans—the last step before regulatory approval.

“We’re living in unique and historic times, and that’s why I wanted to be part of this trial,” said the 27-year-old doctor who received the first dose at the Clinical Hospital of Sao Paulo. Her name was withheld for confidentiality. Around 9,000 health workers across six Brazilian states will receive the vaccine, known as CoronaVac, in two doses over the next three months under the study. Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria said Monday initial results were expected within 90 days. Sinovac is partnering with a Brazilian public health research center, the Butantan Institute, on the trials.

If the vaccine proves safe and effective, the institute will have the right to produce 120 million doses under the deal, according to officials. Brazil is the second-hardest-hit country in the coronavirus pandemic, after the United States. Its death toll surpassed 80,000 Monday, and it has registered 2.1 million infections. Because the virus is still spreading quickly in the South American country, it is seen as



SAO PAULO: A volunteer receives the COVID-19 vaccine during the trial stage of the vaccine produced by the Chinese company Sinovac Biotech at the Hospital das Clinicas (HC) in Sao Paulo state, Brazil. —AFP

an ideal testing ground for vaccine candidates.

Brazil is also helping carry out Phase 3 testing of another experimental vaccine, developed by Oxford University and pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca. It has a similar deal to produce that vaccine domestically if it is successful in tests, which are also being carried out in Britain and South Africa. Brazilian health regulators announced Monday they have also authorized Phase 1, 2 and 3 trials of two more vaccines, developed by US firm Pfizer and Germany’s BioNTech.

Researchers worldwide are racing to develop and test a vaccine for the virus. There are more than 150 projects so far. Studies published Monday in British medical journal The Lancet found two vaccine candidates were safe and produced an immune response in Phase 2 trials: the Oxford vaccine and another Chinese-made vaccine, developed by pharmaceutical firm CanSino Biologics and the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology. — AFP

## Madagascar hospitals ‘overwhelmed’ by coronavirus surge

ANTANANARIVO: Hospital officials in Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo say they are struggling to cope with a rush of coronavirus patients despite the distribution of a herbal drink touted as a remedy by the president. President Andry Rajoelina has been promoting an infusion derived from artemisia—a plant with proven anti-malarial properties—as a homegrown cure for COVID-19. He has brushed off warnings by the World Health Organization (WHO) that there are no published scientific studies of the drink—which has been called Covid-Organics—and that its effects have not been tested.

But COVID-designated hospitals in Antananarivo warn they are starting to run out of beds. “We are now only accepting severe cases,” Andohotapenaka Hospital director Nasolotsiry Raveloson told AFP on Tuesday. “The number of cases is increasing more and more,” he explained. “We now have 46 severe cases and so we only have four spaces left.” At Joseph Raseta Befelatanana Hospital, director Many Randria said the facility was “overwhelmed”.

“It is impossible to free up spaces for the moment,” he said. The head of Anosiala University Hospital, Rado Razafimahatratra echoed the concerns, noting that the facility was “constantly overwhelmed”. To date the Indian Ocean island-nation of Madagascar has recorded 7,548 coronavirus

cases, including just 65 deaths. Infections have spiked over recent days, however, raising concern in a country where three-quarters of the population live on less than \$1.90 per day, according to the World Bank.

**‘Notable flare-ups’**

In a letter on Monday, the health ministry made an “urgent appeal” to development agencies to support its “fight” against coronavirus. “Over the past weeks, the COVID-19 epidemic has evolved in a very critical way in Madagascar with notable flare-ups in certain regions, particularly in Antananarivo,” said the letter. The ministry asked for oxygen bottles, 227 ventilators, 2.3 million face masks, 697,000 pairs of gloves and 533,200 medical blouses.

Government spokeswoman Lalatiana Rakotonirafy said the state was aware it faced “certain shortages” but was working hard to “find solutions”—citing new treatment centers in the capital and eastern city of Toamasina. “Two factors have contributed to the spread of this disease,” said health department official Zely Arivelo Andriamanantany on local television. “Firstly... people took CVO (Covid-Organics) and then didn’t respect social distancing. Secondly, CVO only guarantees protection for two to three weeks,” he said.

The government, meanwhile, has blamed the rise in cases on “increased testing capacity”. “Positive COVID-19 cases did not take CVO or only took it sporadically, without following the prescribed dosage,” said official documents sent to AFP on Tuesday. “Almost systematically, within the same family unit, those who result positive were not drinking CVO—or at least not regularly—while those who tested negative were taking the solution (and) remained negative despite living together without necessarily social distancing.” — AFP



## International

# Hundreds of bodies recovered from Bolivian streets, homes

## Mexico's coronavirus death toll passes 40,000

**LA PAZ:** Bolivian police said they recovered more than 400 bodies from streets and homes over a five-day period, with 85 percent of the dead believed to have had coronavirus. A total of 191 bodies were recovered in the Cochabamba metropolitan area alone from July 15-20, with another 141 collected in La Paz, national police director Coronel Ivan Rojas told journalists.

In the country's biggest city, Santa Cruz, authorities recovered 68 bodies. The Santa Cruz metropolitan area is the worst affected by coronavirus in Bolivia and accounts for almost half of the country's more than 60,000 cases. Some 85 percent of the bodies were "positive cases for COVID-19 and cases with COVID symptoms, so they will be recorded as suspected cases," said Rojas.

The rest died of "other causes, meaning death from an illness or a violent cause," he added. According to the national epidemiological office, the western regions of Cochabamba and La Paz are experiencing a "very rapid increase" in coronavirus cases. Andres Flores, director of the Forensic Investigations Institute, said

that between April 1 and July 19 more than 3,000 bodies that were recovered outside of hospital settings had been identified as either confirmed or suspected coronavirus cases. Bolivia has recorded more than 2,200 confirmed coronavirus deaths among its 11 million population.

### Mexico's virus death

Meanwhile, Mexico has passed 40,000 deaths from the novel coronavirus pandemic as the country, which has the fourth-highest COVID-19 death toll in the world, struggles to contain the disease. A daily technical report recorded a total of 40,400 deaths from the virus, after adding 915 more fatalities in the last 24 hours. The first case in Mexico was detected on February 28. This week President Manuel Lopez Obrador

vowed to improve health standards in the nation to help its combat the virus threat. He pledged to protect those vulnerable to COVID-19, including tackling "diseases caused by hunger and poverty," launching "a permanent campaign" to promote healthier eating and lifestyles,



**COCHABAMBA:** Health workers carry the coffin of a COVID-19 victim from the San Jose nursing home in Cochabamba, Bolivia. — AFP

and treating hypertension, diabetes and obesity as a priority. "We want to remember those who died from the COVID-19 pandemic, and send a loving, fraternal hug to their relatives, to their friends,"

Lopez Obrador said in a video released on social media. Mexico, with 127 million inhabitants, has the second-highest death toll in Latin America after Brazil, which has 80,000 deaths. — Agencies

## Federal crackdown in Portland reenergizes protesters

**PORTLAND:** Standing in front of a huge crowd, 21-year-old Teal Lindseth marches briskly through downtown Portland shouting into a bullhorn. "Tell me what democracy looks like," she cries out as more than a thousand demonstrators respond: "This is what democracy looks like." Their voices boom through blocks of high-rises and boarded-up storefronts in the city located in the western US state of Oregon.

Earlier protests in Portland—and much of the United States—to denounce racism and police brutality following the death of African-American man George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer, began losing steam at the start of July. But then reports emerged of camouflaged federal officers snatching up Portland protesters in unmarked vehicles. Now, the demonstrations have ramped up, with thousands showing up daily to face off with police well into the night.

The agents, deployed from the Department of Homeland Security, have used tear gas, rubber bullets, flashbangs, and other munitions to

disperse the nightly crowds. "Right or left, I think here in the Pacific Northwest, we're all very much opposed to the federal government taking over our streets," said Carlos, a demonstrator marching late Monday who asked to be identified only by his first name. "When you send federal troops here, you're incensing the entire region."

Carlos, like Lindseth, is an African American in his early 20s who carried a megaphone to whip up the crowd. "I'm hesitant to call myself a leader," he told AFP. "I just speak up whenever the crowd seems directionless." The nightly protests begin with assemblies and marches and often end with participants getting trampled, beaten, and pepper-sprayed by local police. The Portland Police Bureau says it is responding to criminal activity—namely demonstrators chucking rocks and water bottles at officers, as well as shining flashlights and lasers at them.

President Donald Trump for his part says the federal law enforcement forces are there to restore order, describing the protesters as "anar-



**PORTLAND:** Teal Lindseth reacts to tear gas after federal officers dispersed protesters from in front of the Mark O Hatfield US Courthouse in Portland, Ore. — AFP

chists and agitators" and threatening to send federal officers to more US cities. One video posted to social media July 12 shows a protester being shot in the face with a rubber bullet and bleeding profusely. The protester had to undergo reconstructive surgery and is making a full recovery, according to The Oregonian.

### 'Feds go home'

A few days later, another video on social media emerged of two federal

agents jumping out of an unmarked minivan and snatching up a protester as he backed away with his hands up. Perhaps the most surreal image was that of a naked woman—dubbed "Naked Athena"—who wore only a hat and face mask several nights ago as she faced off with police who responded by shooting pepper balls at her feet. The unidentified woman performed some ballet moves and sat briefly on the ground, in front of a police line, before disappearing. — AFP

## Trump shifts rhetoric; urges mask-wearing, warns of 'the worst'

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump, in a shift in rhetoric and tone, encouraged Americans on Tuesday to wear masks if they cannot maintain social distance and warned that the coronavirus pandemic would get worse before it got better. In his first press briefing in months focused on the outbreak, Trump urged young people to avoid going to crowded bars and maintained that the virus would disappear at some point.

Trump's remarks were a change in strategy from his robust emphasis on reopening the U.S. economy after its long, virus-induced shutdown and represented his first recent acknowledgement of how bad the problem has become. "It will probably, unfortunately, get worse before it gets better - something I don't like saying about things, but that's the way it is," Trump told reporters.

Nearly 142,000 people have died in the United States from the highly contagious respiratory illness COVID-19, the most of any country. The Republican president, who downplayed the virus in its early stages and once referred to mask-wearing as politically correct, has been reluctant to wear a face covering himself. He wore one for the first time in public during a recent visit to a military hospital but has otherwise eschewed putting one on in front of the press.

Mask-wearing has become a partisan issue, with some supporters of the president arguing that requirements to wear one infringe on their civil liberties. Few people wore masks at Trump's first rally since the pandemic in Tulsa, Oklahoma, earlier this summer. As coronavirus cases skyrocket across the country, including in politically important states such as Florida, Texas and Arizona, Trump, who is trailing Democrat Joe Biden in opinion polls ahead of the Nov. 3 election, on Tuesday showcased a new position on the importance of covering mouths and noses.

"We're asking everybody that when you are not able to socially distance, wear a mask, get a mask. Whether you like the mask or not, they have an impact. They'll have an effect. And we need everything we can get," he said. Trump said he was getting used to masks and would wear one himself in groups or when on an elevator. "I will use it, gladly," he said. "Anything that potentially can help ... is a good thing."



**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump holds a mask as he speaks during the renewed briefing of the Coronavirus Task Force in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House. — AFP

A Biden campaign spokeswoman said Trump's assertion that his administration has had a "relentless focus" on COVID-19 was preposterous.

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, said in an interview with CNN that Trump's new embrace of mask-wearing was a recognition of his mistakes in dealing with the coronavirus. "This is not a hoax - it is a pandemic that has gotten worse before it will get better because of his inaction, and in fact clearly it is the Trump virus," Pelosi said. Trump referred to the virus as the "China virus." The novel coronavirus outbreak began in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

### Strategy change

Trump conducted the briefing on his own, without doctors or other members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force. His subdued tone contrasted with his previous calls to reopen the economy along with praise for Republican governors who did so and criticism of Democratic governors who implemented tough restrictions in their states. The strategy shifts come amid tension within his senior staff about the best way to discuss the virus with the American public and frustration among doctors on the task force that their advice is not being heeded. The reopening has gone too quickly in some states, leading to spikes in cases and an ever-increasing number of deaths. Following Trump's initial lead, some Republican governors have also resisted rules requiring that their populations wear masks. — Reuters

## US presence cause of insecurity: Khamenei tells visiting Iraq PM

**TEHRAN:** Iran's supreme leader told Iraq's visiting premier on Tuesday that Tehran will not interfere in Baghdad's relations with Washington, but warned that the US presence next door to the Islamic republic was a cause of insecurity. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi of Iraq met Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the Iranian capital during his first trip abroad since taking office. "Iran will not interfere in Iraq's relations with America but expects Iraqi friends to know America and realise that their presence in any country causes corruption, ruin and destruction," the Iranian leader said, according to his official website.

"The Islamic republic expects... (the Iraqi) parliament's decision to expel the Americans to be adhered to since their presence is a cause of insecurity," Khamenei pointed to the US killing of Iran's top general Qasem Soleimani in a January drone strike in Baghdad, after which parliament voted to expel US troops. "They killed your guest in your house and blatantly confessed to it." Iran "will never forget this and will certainly deal a reciprocal blow to the Americans", Khamenei said.

Iran retaliated for Soleimani's death days after by firing a volley of missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq, but US President Donald Trump opted against responding militarily. While the attack on the western Iraqi base of Ain Al-Asad left no US soldiers dead, dozens suffered brain trauma. According to Khamenei, Iran was opposed to "whatever may weaken the Iraqi government" in contrast to the US, which he said did not want "an independent, strong Iraqi government elected by popular vote".

Kadhemi had been scheduled to visit Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia as his first trip abroad, then quickly follow it up with a trip to Tehran, in a carefully calibrated balancing act. The Saudi leg was postponed after King Salman was hospitalised on Monday. Baghdad has often found itself caught in the tug-of-war between Riyadh, Tehran and Washington, which Kadhemi is also set to visit within weeks. Kadhemi rose to the premiership in May after serving as head of Iraq's National Intelligence Service for nearly four years. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Shootout at Chicago funeral

**CHICAGO:** A shootout outside a funeral parlor left 14 people wounded Tuesday in Chicago, as President Donald Trump threatens to send federal agents to a handful of US cities led by Democratic mayors. The incident started when occupants of a vehicle "began firing at attendees of a funeral. At that time the attendees of the funeral exchanged fire," Chicago deputy police superintendent Eric Carter told reporters. Shootings have become breathtakingly normal this summer across the United States. A total of 63 people were shot and 12 killed over the weekend in Chicago in ongoing gun violence, according to local media. Carter said 14 people were wounded in Tuesday's shooting, but did not specify the degree of severity. — AFP

#### Colombia helicopter crash

**BOGOTA:** The Colombian army said nine soldiers were killed and six wounded after a military helicopter went down Tuesday in the country's southeast during an operation against guerrillas. The Black Hawk helicopter went down with 17 people aboard on a stretch of the Inirida River, in the country's southeastern Guaviare jungle region. "Unfortunately, we have found the bodies of nine of our personnel," a military spokesperson said on Twitter. The military did not say if the helicopter crashed or was shot down. Neither did it say anything about the other two soldiers who had been aboard the helicopter. President Ivan Duque lamented on Twitter what he described as "an accident," and said the soldiers aboard the helicopter were supporting "operations against illegals." — AFP

#### US' Esper to visit China

**WASHINGTON:** US Defense Secretary Mark Esper plans to visit China for talks on how to improve two-way communications in a crisis as geopolitical tensions between the superpowers rise and concerns mount over a potential South China Sea flashpoint. Esper said Tuesday that he hopes to make the trip before year-end to "establish the systems necessary for crisis communications and reinforce our intentions to openly compete in the international system in which we all belong." Last week, the United States formally declared Beijing's pursuit of territory and resources in South China Sea as illegal, explicitly backing the territorial claims of Southeast Asian countries against China's. It has also downgraded relations with Hong Kong after China implemented a new security law in violation of its promises of autonomy for the territory. — AFP

#### Egypt dissident fights extradition

**BARCELONA:** Cairo is seeking the extradition from Spain of an Egyptian businessman and dissident, the justice ministry said Tuesday, on grounds of fraud and money-laundering that he claims are politically motivated. The Egyptian embassy had in 2019 filed a request for the extradition of Mohamed Ali, who has been living in Barcelona for two years, with his case "pending resolution" at Spain's National Court, the ministry said. According to court documents seen by AFP, Egyptian prosecutors say he is guilty of tax fraud to the tune of 135 million Egyptian pounds (\$8.4 million/7.4 million euros) and of laundering some 4.0 million Egyptian pounds. The allegations relate to the purchase and sale of property and vehicles between 2006 and 2018. — AFP



## International

# Australia posts record number of new coronavirus infections

## ‘Australia entering a critical new phase,’ Authorities warn

**MELBOURNE:** Australia reported a record 502 new coronavirus infections yesterday, nearly four months after the epidemic initially peaked, with authorities warning the country was entering a critical new phase. Most of the new cases were reported in the southeastern state of Victoria, where authorities have struggled to bring an outbreak in Melbourne under control despite an almost two-week lockdown in Australia's second-biggest city. Australia's new coronavirus infections previously peaked on March 28 when 459 cases were reported, according to data compiled by AFP.

Australia had since appeared to bring the virus under control and had eased restrictions. Like neighboring New Zealand, it had won plaudits for its pandemic response. Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews announced 484 new cases and two more deaths in the state yesterday, bringing its total of active cases to just over 3,400. Australia has now recorded almost 13,000 cases of the virus and 128 fatalities in a country of about 25 million.

Melbourne residents will be required to wear masks outside from midnight-making the city the first place in Australia to mandate face coverings in public-in a new effort to slow the virus spread. But Andrews said “further behavior change” would still be required after analysis showed almost nine in 10 people recently diagnosed with coronavirus did not self-isolate between feeling sick and getting tested. Just

over half of the new patients also failed to stay at home while waiting for their test results, he added, saying authorities believed insecure work conditions were a key driver of the trend.

Andrews said casual workers across a range of industries, who do not get sick-leave provisions, were worried about “feeding their kids, paying their bills”, but could apply for a Aus\$1,500 (\$1,070) hardship payment if they contract the virus. There are growing fears about the virus spreading through vulnerable populations after outbreaks at several nursing homes, while inmates at six prisons have been confined to their cells after a guard tested positive. The outbreak has left Australia rattled and dampened hopes of a speedy economic recovery.



### Virus death toll mounts

#### ‘Most critical’

An inquiry into how the virus spread in Melbourne heard this week that many cases were likely linked to infection control breaches at hotels used to quarantine residents returning from overseas. Victoria has effectively been sealed off from the rest of the country in an effort to contain the virus, but new cases have been detected in neighboring New South Wales state.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian described the coming weeks as “the most critical” since the height of the last lockdown, when the state held the mantle of Australia's hardest-hit region. Several clusters have emerged in Sydney, which health offi-



MELBOURNE: People wearing face masks cross the normally busy Burke Street Mall in Melbourne. — AFP

cials believe sprung up after an infected man from Melbourne visited a popular pub. “We are not out of the woods by any stretch, quite the opposite,” Berejiklian told a press conference. “We remain on high alert and we have some level of anxiety as to the extent of community transmission.”

Berejiklian said new restrictions would come into force Friday to tighten rules for bars, cafes, weddings

and funerals, warning they could still be extended further. “A lack of compliance now has made us go down the compulsory path and we don't apologize for that,” she said. New South Wales reported 16 new cases yesterday, with one each also detected in Queensland and South Australia states. No significant outbreaks have been detected in less-populated regions for weeks.— AFP

## Bangladesh in crisis; South Asia battles monsoon rains

**DHAKA:** Deadly flooding will persist in Bangladesh for the next 10 days, officials warned yesterday, as South Asia battles torrential monsoon rains which have already pounded the region for weeks. In flood-prone Bangladesh-where almost one-third of the impoverished nation is underwater-officials warned of an extended disaster in one of the worst deluges in recent years. “The flood has been going on for at least 20 days,” the deputy chief of Bangladesh's Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre, Uday Raihan, told AFP, adding that flooding usually lasted two weeks. “And it is likely continue for another 10 days due to heavy rains in Bangladesh and India.”

The annual monsoon is critical for replenishing water supplies, but also wreaks havoc across vast swathes of the densely populated region, causing widespread death and damage. At least 81 people have died in Bangladesh, mostly from drowning, officials said, with almost three million people hit by the

natural disaster through flooded homes and inundated communities. In Srinagar, a rural town just outside the capital Dhaka, some villagers fled to evacuation centers while others slept on boats and rafts made out of banana trunks lashed together with ropes to watch over their flooded homes.

“The last time we saw such flood was in 1998. We haven't seen such dangerous floods since then,” Sheikh Moslem, 66, told AFP. Sufia Begum, 40, said the flood levels were up to her neck. “I am more worried about my two cows,” she told AFP as she looked at her submerged home and cowshed. “They are my only source of income. I can't leave them here.” In India's northeastern state of Assam, conditions eased as the death toll since the start of July edged up to 58 people.

Many villagers whose homes were not fully submerged said they preferred to stay with their belongings despite the difficult conditions, and were being given food and water supplies from the government and local aid agencies. “There is ankle-deep water inside our home. We will stay here until it's not manageable,” Anima Begum, 40, told AFP from the Morigaon district in Assam. At Assam's World Heritage-listed Kaziranga National Park, 116 animals have died so far, including nine rare one-horned rhinos.

In neighboring Nepal, the government issued a fresh warning about rising river levels for the next



DHAKA: A man rides a cycle rickshaw through a water-logged street after a heavy downpour in Dhaka. — AFP

three days as rescuers searched for 51 people missing in landslides and floods. “Rescue and relief efforts are going on and we are on alert for areas at risk,” Nepal's National Emergency Operation Centre chief Murari Wasti said. At least 84 people have died in Nepal as multiple landslides ravaged the Himalayan nation's hill districts while incessant rainfall since Sunday has inundated parts of the southern plains.—AFP

## China says US ordered closure of Houston consulate

**BEIJING:** The United States has ordered China to close its Houston consulate, Beijing said yesterday, marking a dramatic escalation in diplomatic tensions between the feuding superpowers. The move comes as the world's two biggest economies have crossed swords on a growing number of fronts, from trade to Beijing's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and its policies in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and the South China Sea.

“China urges the US to immediately withdraw its wrong decision, or China will definitely take a proper and necessary response,” said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin, adding Beijing was told Tuesday that the consulate would have to close. “It is a political provocation unilaterally launched by the US side, which seriously violates international law... and the bilateral consular agreement between China and the US,” Wang said.

He added that China “strongly condemns” the “outrageous and unjustified move which will sabotage China-US relations”. According to local media in Houston, firefighters and police were called to the consulate building on Tuesday evening on reports that documents were being burned in the building's courtyard. The Twitter feed of the Houston police force said smoke was observed, but officers “were not granted access to enter the building”.

#### Diplomatic row

The Chinese Consulate in Houston was opened in 1979 - the first in the year the US and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations, according to its website. The website says the office covers eight southern US states-including Texas and Florida-and has nearly one million people in the area registered at the consulate.

There are five Chinese consulates in the US, as well as an embassy in Washington. President Donald Trump's administration has ramped up pressure on China on a wide range of issues, imposing sanctions on Chinese officials over policies in Tibet and Xinjiang. The United States has led denunciations of the treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, a far west region where an estimated one million Uighurs and other ethnic groups are believed to have been held in re-education camps.—AFP

## Chatbots, motorbikes: Southeast Asia's HIV centers adapt to virus

**BANGKOK:** Five days after a coronavirus lockdown was imposed in Manila, charity LoveYourself hired 20 former motorcycle taxi riders, gave them a crash course on HIV and sent them off to deliver life-saving medication after signing confidentiality agreements. The restrictions on movement and a lack of public transport in the city meant many of the charity's 6,000 clients could not get to its centers for medication, tests and other services, said LoveYourself senior program manager Danvic Rosadino. The centre also added more staff to run its hotline and social media platforms, introduced chatbots, and launched a pilot self-test program so people at risk could test for HIV in their homes, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “Everyone was anxious - about getting COVID, but also about not having access to HIV medication and other services. So we had to act quickly to ensure none of our essential services were disrupted at this crucial time,” he said.

“At the same time, maintaining confidentiality was very important: medications were packed in plain brown paper bags, drivers were discreet and sometimes met clients outside their homes if they didn't want deliveries at home.” Lockdowns globally have prevented people with HIV from getting treatment - and potentially putting their compromised immune systems at risk if they contract COVID-19, according to HIV/AIDS groups concerned about a surge in infections after the coronavirus.

They also faced harassment from authorities, and fear that the collection of health data in relation to the coronavirus will expose their HIV status and open them up to more discrimination. “During the lockdown, people had to show identity documents and doctor's notes to get their medication,” said Richard Bragado, program head of the People Living With HIV Response Centre in Manila. “That made their HIV status public, and led to some instances of harassment and public shaming,” he said.

#### Missing targets

About 38 million people worldwide are currently infected with HIV, with the AIDS pandemic killing nearly 35 million people worldwide since it began in the 1980s. In the Asia-Pacific region, about 5.8 million people are living with HIV, with 3.5 million on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment that helps lower viral levels so the virus is not transmissible and prevent full-blown AIDS. Thailand had



BANGKOK: A traditional Thai tuk tuk drives under a heavy downpour on a street in Bangkok. — AFP

about 470,000 people living with HIV last year, according to UNAIDS. The Philippines had nearly 100,000 cases, while Indonesia reported 640,000 in 2018. The lockdowns and border closures imposed to stop COVID-19 are impacting the production and distribution of medicine, leading to supply issues and cost increases, and stalling progress on new infections, according to UNAIDS.

“In the last decade, declines in new HIV infections have stalled in Asia Pacific, although declines have been reported in some Southeast Asian countries,” said Eamonn Murphy, director of the UNAIDS regional support team for Asia and the Pacific. “Key 2020 global targets will be missed - COVID-19 risks exacerbating the situation.” The loss of jobs and income is partly responsible. The International Labor Organization estimates that nearly half the world's workforce is at risk of losing livelihoods.

SWING, a Thai HIV non-profit for sex workers, began providing meals to some of the estimated 200,000 sex workers who had no income during the lockdown, said co-founder Surang Janyam. Many also lost their homes, she said. In a survey in April of young people living with HIV in Asia Pacific, nearly half the respondents said lockdowns had led to a loss of jobs and income - particularly for sex workers, daily-wage earners and those in entertainment and hospitality.

Of those on ARV treatments, about half said the lockdowns had posed a challenge in getting their medication, with nearly a fifth saying they did not have refills on hand. Many said they also experienced delays or disruptions in accessing HIV prevention services and psychological support. In Bangkok's Pulse Clinic, which provides HIV services, founder Deyn Natthakhet Yaemim ramped up home deliveries of medications and test kits, as well as online counseling.—Reuters

### News in brief

#### Mumbai deploys ‘smart helmets’

**MUMBAI:** As coronavirus infections climb in Mumbai, authorities in India's worst-hit city are turning to high-tech “smart helmets” to speed up screenings and identify suspected cases in the financial capital's densely-populated slums. The portable thermoscanners-previously deployed in Dubai, Italy and China-enable health workers to record the temperatures of dozens of residents per minute and could emerge as a key weapon in Mumbai's quest to eradicate the virus from the city of 18 million. “Traditional screening methods take a lot of time. You go to a slum with 20,000 people and it takes you three hours to screen 300 people,” said Neelu Jain, a medical volunteer affiliated with the non-profit group Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana. “But when you use these helmets, all you have to do is ask people to come out of their homes, face them and you can screen 6,000 people in two-and-a-half hours,” she said.— AFP

#### Facebook slaps disclaimer

**WASHINGTON:** Facebook placed an informational disclaimer Tuesday on a post from President Donald Trump claiming mail-in voting would lead to a “corrupt” election. The move, without removing the post, appears to follow through on the social network giant's pledge to step up efforts to fight misinformation, including from world leaders, shifting slightly from its hands-off policy on political speech. Trump wrote on his page that mail-in voting, unless changed by the courts, “will lead to the most CORRUPT ELECTION in our Nation's History!” and added the hashtag #RIGGEDELECTION. Facebook added an information tag which said, “Get official voting info on how to vote in the 2020 US Election” with a link to the government-sponsored USA.gov page on how to cast ballots.—AFP

#### Residents urged to stay home

**TOKYO:** Tokyo's governor yesterday urged residents of the Japanese capital to stay at home during an upcoming four-day holiday weekend, as the number of new local coronavirus cases surged. The city is on its highest coronavirus alert level, with experts warning infections appear to be spreading rapidly and widely. “The infections are spreading not only among young people but also among middle-aged and older people,” Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said during a meeting with infectious disease experts. “I'd like to ask (Tokyo residents) to refrain from going out as much as possible, especially elderly people and those with pre-existing conditions,” she said ahead of the holiday weekend. Tokyo hit a new daily record of 293 cases last week, and the figure has stayed above 200 in recent days.— AFP

#### ‘Middleman’ suffers knife injuries

**VALLETTA:** The self-confessed middleman in the murder of Maltese anti-corruption journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was in critical condition yesterday with knife injuries to his throat and torso, authorities and local media said. Melvin Theuma, a former taxi driver, was granted a presidential pardon in November to refrain from going out the car bomb murder which shocked in the Mediterranean island in October 2017. His evidence so far has implicated top businessman Yorgen Fenech, the alleged mastermind who was arrested in late November and accused of complicity in the murder.—Reuters



THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2020

# Business

## UAE's migrant workers fret over future

### Coronavirus crisis takes a heavy toll on Gulf economies

**DUBAI:** When Kapil left his Nepali village for an airport job packing cargo in the United Arab Emirates, he thought he was securing a future for himself and his family. But less than a year after arriving in the Middle East trade and tourism hub, he questions whether it was the right decision after learning there would be no work this month.

"I'm totally hopeless," said 29-year-old Kapil, whose wife and five-year-old son are in Nepal.

The coronavirus crisis has taken a heavy toll on the economies of the oil-rich Gulf, heavily reliant on low-paid foreign workers. They are the backbone of the Gulf economies, taking jobs in construction, services and transport, and are now facing the realities of the pandemic.

Reuters spoke to over 30 workers like Kapil in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah, who all said they are now enduring hardship due to coronavirus. Many have racked up debt and would go hungry without the help of charities as they wait for work and to be paid. Some said they found little reason to stay without work and wanted to return to their home countries despite being owed months of wages; hundreds of thousands have already left. The treatment of migrant workers in the Gulf has come under greater scrutiny, with human rights groups saying conditions have deteriorated because of the pandemic.

In the UAE, most attractive because of the economic opportunities it offers, there is no social safety net for foreigners, who make up about 90 percent of the population. A laundry service worker from Cameroon told Reuters he had not been paid in months and was now selling fruit and vegetables on the street earning 30 to 40 dirhams a day (\$8-\$11).

The UAE government communication office did not respond to emailed questions about migrant worker welfare. In May, the UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan said the Gulf state was committed to protecting the rights of all

workers, state news agency WAM reported.

#### Debts

Those in blue collar jobs are the most vulnerable. They are paid low wages, work long hours and often live in cramped dormitories that have been coronavirus hotbeds. Many also pay fees to recruiters in their home country, a practice common for low paying jobs in the Gulf. Kapil, who said he paid a recruiter 175,000 Nepali rupees (\$1,450) for his UAE job, is not sure when he will work again. His



#### Blue collar jobs are the most vulnerable

employer told staff they would only be paid when they worked and it was unclear whether there would be any work next month, he said. Kapil said he had been earning around \$600 a month - six times more than his teacher salary in Nepal - working up to 12 hours a day, six days a week at the airport. He said not working had left him stressed and unable to provide for his wife, child and elderly parents in Nepal.

Kapil, who showed his employment contract and other documents to Reuters, asked that his full name not be published and his employer not identified over fears he could face repercussions. Arriving in the UAE last October, Kapil thought he would work at the airport for a few years before finding a better job, possibly using his teaching skills. Now he just



**DUBAI:** In this file photo, foreign workers wearing scarves to protect their faces, stand in line to board a bus transporting them to their workplace, during the novel coronavirus pandemic crisis, in Dubai. —AFP

hopes to work until the end of the year to pay back his loans. "The global economy is getting worse and it's affecting each and every business ... I think during this time it's hard to find any other job."

#### Unpaid wages

No official statistics of how many people have left the UAE are available. But at least 200,000 workers, mostly from India but also from Pakistan, the Philippines and Nepal, have left, according to their diplomatic missions. Sectors like construction and retail were struggling even before the crisis, which exacerbated hardship for workers already exposed to payment delays.

Mohammed Mubarak has not been paid for around 11 months for security work at a Dubai theme park. "The company doesn't know when they'll be able to pay us, and we are suffering," the Ghanaian said. Government coronavirus restrictions that forced many businesses to shutter for weeks began to ease in May. Shopping centers, water parks, bars and restaurants - all staffed by migrant workers - are once again open, raising hopes.

Zulfiqar, a Pakistani in Dubai for 12 years, sent his family home early in the outbreak but stayed on hoping for work, sharing a room and what cash he has with a dozen other unemployed men. "Things in Pakistan are also not good," he said. — Reuters

## Resurgent 'techlash' overshadows Silicon Valley earnings

**WASHINGTON:** Big Tech, its hands full with antitrust probes and complaints growing from activists and politicians, turns its attention to quarterly earnings in the coming days expected to show the growing power of Silicon Valley giants. The results may be overshadowed by the array of political and policy issues over privacy, data protection, liability and the dominant role of these companies in the economy.

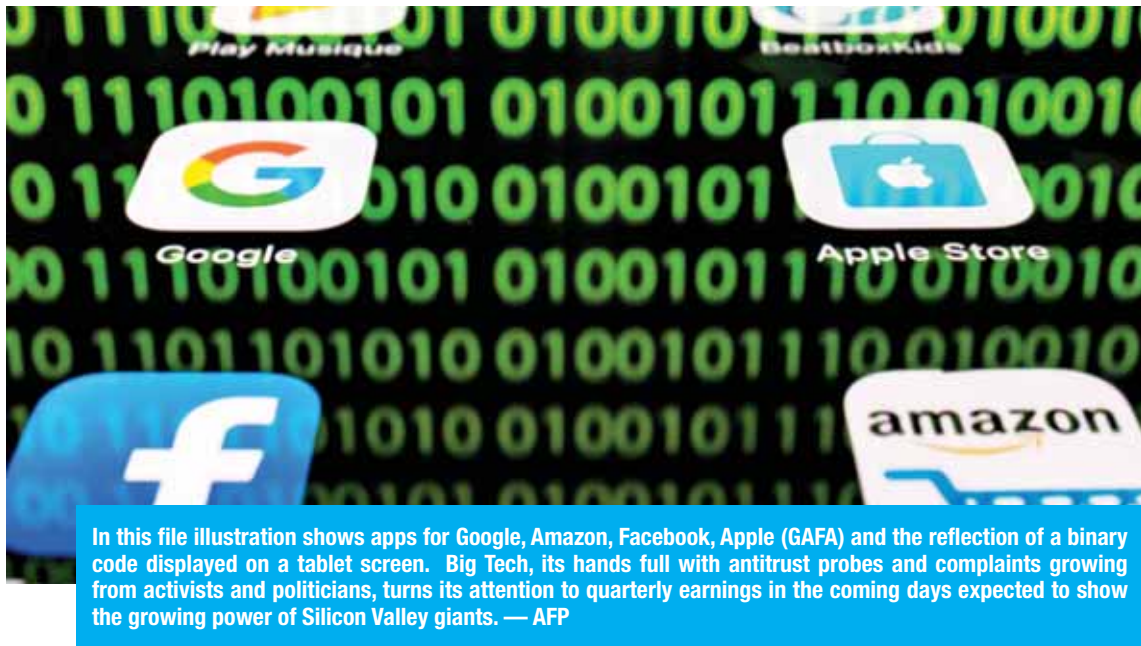
Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Big Tech has offered a lifeline to consumers to stay connected and get needed goods and services. Tech firms "have built up some goodwill and people are thankful for these services," said Bob O'Donnell of Technalysis Research.

Big tech firms "were the only institutions that didn't seem to fail" during the pandemic, said Chris Meserole, deputy director of the Brookings Institution's Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology Initiative. A Brunswick Group survey of consumers in seven countries in May found 70 percent of Americans and 65 percent of Europeans agree that "technology companies have used their size and influence for good in the fight against COVID-19."

But at the same time, three in four of those surveyed said governments "should be more active in regulating technology companies." This is up 14 points in the US since 2018, and largely unchanged among Europeans. Big Tech has helped lift stock values, with the Nasdaq hitting several record highs; Amazon shares have nearly doubled from March lows while Apple and Alphabet have gains some 50 percent. Economist Ed Yardeni noted that six leading tech firms—Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Google parent Alphabet, Facebook and Netflix—had a collective market value of \$6.5 trillion in early July, or a record 25 percent of the Standard & Poor's 500 largest companies.

#### Profiting from crisis?

These Big Tech firms "are among the biggest



In this file illustration shows apps for Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple (GAFA) and the reflection of a binary code displayed on a tablet screen. Big Tech, its hands full with antitrust probes and complaints growing from activists and politicians, turns its attention to quarterly earnings in the coming days expected to show the growing power of Silicon Valley giants. — AFP

beneficiaries of the economic upheaval caused by the (pandemic) and are likely to continue to benefit from its aftershocks well after the crisis is over," Yardeni said in a research note. "That's because their businesses are internet-based, so the more that people's work, education, and entertainment are home-based, the more these businesses thrive."

Quarterly results this week from Microsoft and next week from Amazon, Apple, Alphabet and Facebook will offer more clues on how the sector is faring in the pandemic. Amid a struggling economy, Amazon appears to have boosted its position in e-commerce while expanding cloud computing while Apple has been growing its range of services. Other tech giants appear to be largely weathering the crisis, and growing in some cases, even if Facebook is the target of a growing advertiser boycott seeking more aggressive action on hateful content.

#### Focus on Congress

The spotlight is likely to be on an unprecedented antitrust hearing Monday in Congress featuring the top executives of Apple, Amazon, Facebook and Google. Also looming are the outcomes of federal and state antitrust investigations into major tech platforms which could mean fresh legal battles.

Daniel Ives of Wedbush Securities sees "a poten-

tially rocky road ahead" and that "the overhang of regulatory scrutiny remains a lingering worry" for Amazon, Google, Apple, and Facebook.

"Momentum is building in the Beltway on this hot button antitrust issue," Ives said in a note to clients.

#### More battles

Tech firms face additional pressure including the Trump administration's effort to enable law enforcement access to encrypted content and devices. Officials say better access is needed to fight crime and exploitation, but the companies argue that proposed measures could weaken online security for everyone. Trump and his allies have argued the big social platforms are biased against conservatives, despite his large following. At the same time activists have pressed the companies to be more aggressive in removing incendiary content and misinformation, including from Trump, and 1,000 advertisers have joined a "Stop Hate for Profit" boycott of Facebook.

Meserole said that because of its failure to take action on hateful content, "all the goodwill Facebook had built up in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic went out the window." He said firms such as Apple and Google have remained "good corporate citizens" during the crisis, noting efforts to improve technology for contact tracing. — AFP

Foreigners living in Japan face much higher hurdles for re-entry, such as demonstrating the need to visit dying relatives or be reunited with family in the country.

The EBC's remarks echoed those of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), which has decried the country's "double standard" in reentry requirements. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment on the EBC's claims. Immigration officials have said previously that they are considering ways to ease the ban but are prioritizing contagion controls.

Restrictions to contain the spread of the virus have already helped tip Japan's economy into its first recession in 4-1/2 years, as the country tries to stave off a second wave of infections which has brought total cases to more than 25,000 in the country. — Reuters

## Rich Russians fuel private jet demand to skirt lockdown

**MOSCOW:** For high-flying Russians used to spending summer holidays at Mediterranean resorts or in London penthouses, coronavirus restrictions that closed borders and grounded flights have made international travel a distant dream. Yet many of Russia's super-rich who hold second passports or residence permits abroad have discovered an elegant way of bypassing anti-virus measures to reach second homes in London, Cyprus, Monaco or Nice: private jets.

Privately-operated flights from Moscow's airports more than doubled between April and mid-June, the RBK business news portal reported in late June citing sources at two of Moscow's airports.

Soaring from 400 to 850 per month, a majority of the flights were bound for overseas, RBK reported. Russians skirting the restrictions have to provide evidence that the journey is a necessary work trip or is essential for health reasons, as part of a multi-layered approval process with aviation authorities.

For unlucky Russians who do not own a jet, a handful of companies that rent planes also offer to cut through the red tape of getting permission to fly from the nation's aviation authority, Rosaviatsia.

At the Moscow branch of jet rental agency Leading Charter Technologies (LTC), director Lev Shalayev dressed from head to toe in Gucci, is delighted at the increase in requests to "more than 50" per day. "Many people who used to fly business class are now our customers," he told AFP. He said popular destinations include luxury spots like Nice, Malaga, Alicante and Barcelona. Many clients are flocking to Cyprus, a favourite among Russians for business and leisure.

"Right now, most of our travellers are going on vacation," he said. In planes that seat up to 13, the price of a ticket can start at 4,000 euros (\$4,575), he said. With borders closed, the only way to fly out of Russia is on board flagship carrier Aeroflot, which sells seats on irregular outbound flights returning stranded Russians from abroad. "Since June, Russians have been allowed to fly for medical reasons ... so some medical tourism is developing," said Russian aviation columnist Anastasiya Dagayeva. "For example, you can book a treatment at a Spanish clinic and fly to Spain."

Russian reality TV star and one-time presidential hopeful Ksenia Sobchak alluded to this workabout when she wrote on Instagram that her friends were escaping Russia for foreign seaside destinations. "My friends have already left, some on foreign passports, some due to 'medical needs,'" she said. — AFP

## Japan travel ban hits 85% of firms in Europe: Report

**TOKYO:** Japan's travel ban to stop the spread of the coronavirus has hit a majority of European firms in the country and could prompt those businesses to rethink their future in the world's third-largest economy, a European business lobby said yesterday.

Many countries have imposed travel curbs amid the pandemic but Japan's are among the most strict, effectively banning entry of tourists and visa holders coming from 129 countries. Even permanent res-

idents are restricted entry unless they are granted an exception under humanitarian grounds, while in the United States and Europe, non-citizen residents are allowed to return.

A recent survey by the European Business Council of 376 members in Japan showed that 85 percent had been negatively impacted by the ban, with 44 percent reporting financial losses. The EBC said the travel restrictions run counter to international treaties. "This situation may also trigger some investment disputes against Japan," EBC president Michael Mroczek told reporters.

The way the ban was handled creates an air of unpredictability that may cause CEOs to "rethink their policy regarding Japan," he said. Japan allows its citizens to return to the country if they take a coronavirus test at the port of entry and observe a period of self-quarantine.



## Business

# Ooredoo Kuwait reports revenue of KD 294 million for H1 2020

**KUWAIT:** National Mobile Telecommunications Company K S C P “Ooredoo” (Ticker: OOREDOO) announced its financial results for the half year ended June 30, 2020:

- Consolidated customer base decreased by 3% to 25.9 million in H1 2020, compared to 26.7 million in H1 2019.

- Revenues in KD were impacted by lower sales in Kuwait (substantial support for local customers free of charge), a decrease in Algerian revenue mainly due to the weak economic environment, currency devaluation and price competition and the impact of the Corona virus and related business limitations across all operations. Consequently, consolidated revenue decreased by 5% to KD 294.1 million in H1 2020, compared to KD 310.4 million for the same period in 2019.

- EBITDA decreased by 15% for H1 2020 to KD 99.0 million, compared to KD 115.9 million for the same period in 2019.

- Net profit attributable to NMTC was KD 1.7 million for H1 2020 compared with KD 17.3 million for the same period in 2019, due to the decline in EBITDA.

- The consolidated earnings per share was 3 fils for H1 2020, compared to 35 fils per share earned for the same period last year.

Sheikh Saud Bin Nasser Al-Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors, commented: “The first half of 2020 was a challenging time for everyone around the world, with significant disruptions in our daily lives as communities and government came together to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Ooredoo Kuwait’s (NMTC) key priorities during this period were the health and wellbeing of our employees and customers, the provision of uninterrupted connectivity to support working, studying and socializing from home, and the empowerment of communities most affected by the pandemic.

For example, in Kuwait we offered all workers in the ministries and governmental organizations 5GB of free data a day and unlimited local calls, in support of

their efforts to fight the pandemic, and in Tunisia we launched new nightly data bundles and free mobicash cards.

Our business was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as movement restrictions and retail closures resulted in changes in customer consumption patterns, and monetizable mobile usage shifted to all-inclusive fixed lines services. Therefore, NMTC reported revenues of KD 294.1 million during the first half of 2020, down 5 percent compared to the same period last year. The decline in revenue flowed through to our EBITDA and net profit which were KD 99.0 million (H1 2019: KD 115.9 million) and KD 1.7 million (H1 2019: KD 17.3 million) during H1 2020.

Despite movement restrictions and store closures, our consolidated customer base at the end H1 2020 was a healthy 25.9 million compared to 26.7 million for the same period last year as we focused on extending our digital channels to better serve our customers remotely.

In Kuwait, we maintained the course on our digital strategy and successfully utilized the Ooredoo app and other digital channels to safely engage and serve our customers by offering home deliveries of products and SIM cards across the country.

In Tunisia, revenues increased 7 percent in H1 2020 compared to the same period last year as we maintained our position as the number 1 telecom player by customer market share.

Our performance in Algeria continued to be impacted by challenging economic conditions, intense price competition and currency depreciation as the Algerian dinar depreciated by 3 percent year on year.

In Palestine we continued to grow our user base which was up by 6 percent to 1.4 million customers in H1 2020, and also focused on cost optimisation, resulting in a 17 percent increase in EBITDA to KD 4.8 million for the same time period.

In Maldives we increased our efforts towards digitalization with innovative solutions such as the launch of the first of its kind Digital Centre that contains 24-

hour self-service kiosks that enable customers to purchase SIMs, recharge, pay bills and cash in m-Faisaa digital currency safely and with minimal human contact.”

## Review of operations

The Group’s operational performance can be summarized as follows:

### Ooredoo - Kuwait operations

Ooredoo’s customer base in Kuwait decreased to 2.4 million in H1 2020 compared to 2.5 million for the same period in 2019. Revenues were KD 104.2 million in H1 2020, compared to KD 114.1 million for the same period in 2019. EBITDA decreased to KD 26.7 million in H1 2020 compared to KD 36.0 million for the same period in 2019. Ooredoo Kuwait offered all workers in the ministries and governmental organizations 5GB of free data a day and unlimited local calls, in support of their efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.

### Ooredoo - Tunisia

Ooredoo’s customer base in Tunisia stood at 8.8 million customers in H1 2020. Revenues increased by 7 percent to reach KD 61.8 million in H1 2020 compared to KD 57.5 million for the same period in 2019 reflecting a good business performance in the local market. EBITDA was KD 26.6 million in H1 2020 compared to KD 26.8 million for the same period in 2019.

### Ooredoo - Algeria

Customer base in Algeria decreased to 12.9 million in H1 2020 compared to 13.6 million for the same period in 2019. Business in Algeria was negatively impacted by the devaluation of the Algerian dinar, a weak economic environment and intense price competition. Consequently, revenues decreased to KD 94.1 million in H1 2020, compared to KD 104.9 million for the same period in 2019. EBITDA was KD 31.3 million in H1 2020, down from KD 38.3 million for the same period in 2019. Algerian Dinar depreciated by 3 percent year on year.



### Ooredoo - Palestine

Customer base in Palestine increased by 6 percent to reach 1.4 million customers in H1 2020. Revenue increased by 6 percent to KD 15.1 million in H1 2020, compared to KD 14.2 million for the same period in 2019. EBITDA was strong, increasing 17 percent to KD 4.8 million in H1 2020, compared to KD 4.1 million for the same period in 2019, driven by operational efficiencies across the business.

### Ooredoo - Maldives

Ooredoo Maldives reported a 4 percent decrease in revenues to KD 19.0 million in H1 2020, compared to KD 19.7 million for the same period in 2019. EBITDA was KD 9.7 million in H1 2020 compared to KD 10.9 million for the same period in 2019. Ooredoo Maldives now serves a total of 372k customers.

## Want profits from coffee in China? It’s actually a grind



BEIJING: A closed cafe is seen inside a shopping mall yesterday. — AFP

**BEIJING/SHANGHAI:** Looking outside her Beijing coffee shop where seven other nearby cafes including a Starbucks compete for customers, Huang Ying is simply glad to still be in business. In the 17 years since opening her cafe in the trendy 798 Art Zone district, making money has gotten harder – even before the coronavirus. Rent and labor costs have increased while rival after rival waded into a market that has failed to live up to expectations. “Our profit can’t compare with the old days,” she said. “I raised prices by 10 percent in 2017 but that has done little to offset the jump in costs.”

As a coffee market, China exerts a magnetic pull for Western brands keen to emulate the success of Starbucks Corp which has over 4,400 stores in China and is still expanding. Since last year, Canada’s Tim Hortons has opened about 60 stores in China while Italy’s Lavazza and Sweden’s Wayne’s Coffee have also made forays into the market. Much of the optimism about China’s coffee market potential stems from just how little its consumers drink – just 5.4 cups per capita last year, compared to 341 in the United States and 591 in Western Europe, according to consultancy Euromonitor.

Chinese coffee consumption is growing at an estimated rate of around 5 percent annually, but coffee shop proprietors like Huang say it is more important to take note of the huge jump in outlets and cut-throat pricing. Store openings of specialist coffee and tea shops surged 50 percent in 2018 and 2019, and China now has some 18,350 stores, more than triple the number in 2014, according to Euromonitor. Coffee is also now sold at many convenience stores and fast-food restaurants.

And while a regular-sized latte costs around 30 yuan (\$4.24) in China, it can be as cheap as 4.5 yuan (\$0.60) at some places with the use of discount vouchers. This year’s admission by delivery-focused and coupon-reliant Luckin Coffee that it fabricated \$310 million in sales underscores how the coffee opportunity in China has been exaggerated, analysts said. “Luckin’s fraud proved that even though coffee in China is almost free, the Chinese still don’t drink much of it,” said Beijing-based independent analyst Keso Hong.

Tea is China’s main source of caffeine and outside of China’s biggest cities, buying a branded caffeinated drink to get through the day is not part of everyday life. Bubble tea, which contains tapioca pearls, is also giving coffee a run for its money. Food delivery giant Meituan Dianping received 210 million orders for bubble tea in 2018. “far more than” coffee, it has said without elaborating.

Like Luckin, other domestic chains are struggling to fulfill big dreams. Coffee Box, which focuses on coffee deliveries and raised some \$56 million in funding, has shut or suspended business at dozens of its stores. Grey Box, which offers specialty coffee, said in 2018 it wanted 12 stores in Beijing by end of that year, but has just four. Bruno Caffè has closed most stores and only two remain.

Among western firms, Britain’s Costa Coffee, which is owned by Coca-Cola, has 300 China stores according to its website, despite earlier ambitions to have had 2,500 by 2018. The chains did not respond to Reuters requests for comment. Starbucks, the first big Western brand in the market and now with 20 years in China under its belt, appears to be the only resounding success, having carefully cultivated its image as a premium cafe for young professionals. Some estimates put the US giant’s share of China’s coffee market at as much as 80 percent.

Just this week, Starbucks expanded its Chinese ordering services to multiple Alibaba apps. The newcomers have, however, wisely decided not to go it alone. Lavazza has formed a venture with Yum China, the owner of KFC restaurants in China. Restaurant Brands International’s Tim Hortons said last year it wanted 1,500 stores in China and has gained backing from Tencent Holdings. Wayne’s Coffee signed a 15-year deal with a Chinese master franchisee.

The chains did not respond to requests for comment on their prospects. But even teaming up with a partner is no guarantee of success given the extreme competition, analysts said. “Undoubtedly the coffee market in China will continue to grow and consumers are becoming more habitual coffee drinkers but it is still a hard market to win,” said Ben Cavender at China Market Research. — Reuters

## Results for the first half of 2020



The Board of Directors of National Mobile Telecommunication Company K.S.C.P (“Ooredoo”) is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the company achieved a consolidated Net Profit attributable to shareholders of **KD 1.7 million**, translating to an earnings per share of **3 fils** for the first half of 2020. The revenue for the first half of 2020 reached **KD 294.1 million**.

The Board of Directors of the Company extends its sincere gratitude and appreciation to NMTC (Ooredoo) shareholders, and to the valued customers for their trust and continuous support, and also expresses sincere thanks and gratitude to all employees for their continuous efforts during the past months.

### Customer Base

**25.9**  
Million  
Customers

### Revenue

**294.1**  
KD Million

### Net Profit to NMTC

**1.7**  
KD Million



## Business

# How Tesla defined a new era for the global auto industry

## Projects with Mercedes, Toyota showed clash of cultures

**FRANKFURT/BEIJING/DETROIT:** Tesla Inc's rapid rise to become the world's most valuable carmaker could mark the start of a new era for the global auto industry, defined by a Silicon Valley approach to software that is overtaking old-school manufacturing know-how.

Tesla's ascent took many investors by surprise. But executives at Daimler AG, the parent company of Mercedes-Benz, had a close-up view starting in 2009 of how Tesla and its chief executive Elon Musk were taking a new approach to building vehicles that challenged the established system. Daimler, which bears the name of the man who invented the modern car 134 years ago, bought a nearly 10 percent Tesla stake in May 2009 in a deal which provided a \$50 million lifeline for the struggling start-up.

That investment gave Mercedes engineers an inside view of how Musk was willing to launch technology that wasn't perfect, and then repeatedly upgrade it, using smartphone style over-the-air updates, paying little regard to early profitability. Mercedes engineers helped Tesla develop its Model S luxury sedan in exchange for access to Tesla's partially hand-assembled battery packs, but in 2014 Daimler decided to sell their stake amid doubts Tesla's approach could be industrialized at scale.

Tesla would go on to pioneer new approaches in manufacturing, designs in software and electronic architecture which enable it to introduce innovations faster than rivals, leaving analysts to draw comparisons with Apple. Three people directly involved with the Mercedes side of the collaboration said the brief partnership highlighted the collision of old and new engineering cultures: the German obsession with long-term safety and control, which rewarded evolution, and the Silicon Valley carmaker's experimental approach which

embraced radical thinking and fast innovation.

"Elon Musk has been walking on the edge of a razorblade in terms of the aggression with which he pushes some technologies," said a former Mercedes engineer who worked on the partnership. By contrast, Mercedes and other established automakers are still not comfortable about releasing a new technology, such as partially automated driving, without years of testing.

Tesla did not respond to requests for comment. Investors favor the Tesla model, in an industry undergoing fundamental and dizzying change even though the US carmaker will face an onslaught of competing electric vehicles from established automakers during the next few years. They are putting their money on Musk and his company, even though Mercedes-Benz alone sold 935,089 cars in the first half of 2020, dwarfing the 179,050 delivered

by Tesla in the same period. Today, Tesla is worth nearly \$304.6 billion, more than six times Daimler's 41.5-billion-euro (\$47.7 billion) market capitalization.

### Old school automobile technology overtaken

#### Cultural collision

Daimler and Tesla began collaborating after Mercedes engineers, who were developing a second-generation electric Smart car, bought a Tesla Roadster. They were impressed by the way Tesla packaged batteries, so arranged a visit to Silicon Valley to meet Musk in January 2009 and ordered 1,000 battery packs. The collaboration expanded. At a joint press conference in the Mercedes-Benz museum in Stuttgart in May 2009, Tesla said the partnership would "accelerate bringing our Tesla Model S to production and ensure that it is a superlative vehicle".

For its part, Mercedes wanted to use Tesla's batteries to power an electric version of its compact



**SHANGHAI:** Tesla Inc CEO Elon Musk dances onstage during a delivery event for Tesla China-made Model 3 cars in Shanghai. — Reuters

Mercedes-Benz B-Class. The Tesla Model S would hit the road in 2012. An electric B-Class, arrived in showrooms two years later. Despite having batteries supplied by Tesla, the Mercedes had a shorter operating range after Daimler engineers configured the B-class more conservatively to address their concerns about long-term battery degradation and the risk of overheating, a second Daimler staffer who worked on the joint projects told Reuters.

German engineers found that Tesla engineers had not done long-term stress tests on its battery. "We had to devise our own program of stress tests," the second Daimler engineer said. Before starting production of a new car, Daimler engineers specify a "Lastenheft" - a blueprint laying out the properties of each component for suppliers. Significant changes cannot be made once the design is frozen. "This is also the way you can guarantee that we will be profitable during mass production. Tesla was not as concerned about this

aspect," the second Daimler source said.

Daimler's engineers suggested the underbody of the Model S needed reinforcing to prevent debris from the road puncturing a battery pack, the first Daimler engineer said. To quash doubts about safety and security, following a series of battery fires, Tesla raised the ride height of its vehicles, using an over-the-air update, and a few months later, in March 2014, said it would add a triple underbody shield to new Model S cars and offered to retrofit existing cars.

Musk was able to make adjustments quickly thanks to Tesla's ability to burn through more cash during development. "At Mercedes you can make such adjustments every three years at best," the engineer said. The Model S, a four-door electric sedan would go on to outsell the flagship Mercedes-Benz S-Class in the United States in May 2013, and outstrip S-Class deliveries globally by 2017. — Reuters

## Santander head: EU deal paves way for cross-border mergers

**MADRID:** The European leaders' agreement on a massive stimulus plan for their coronavirus battered economies should help kick-start cross-border consolidation in Europe and complete the European banking union, Santander Chairman Ana Botin said.

"What was agreed yesterday (in the early hours of Tuesday) means the opportunity and the probability that we do get a banking union and cross-border consolidation is much higher," Botin told Reuters in a Zoom call. "It will require changes, but I think those changes are much more likely today than they were yesterday," Ana Botin said.

Santander is the eurozone's second-biggest lender in terms of market value. Remarks by Botin echoed comments from European Central Bank vice-president Luis de Guindos, who on Monday said that he expected banks to engage in both national and cross-border consolidation within weeks or months.

Consolidation is seen as inevitable among banks in the eurozone to gain scale, but low valuations and different legal frameworks around countries are hampering any such transactions. Profitability across the euro zone bank sector is low and an economic recession in the region is expected to further dampen the banks' prospects, partly due to also higher loan-loss provisions related to the impact from COVID-19 outbreak.

"What has happened yesterday on the agreement in Europe is a clear stepping stone for the banking union in Europe. And banking union and free transfer of euros across countries is a pre-requisite for cross-border euro mergers and consolidation," Botin said. "I do think it's the time. I do think European banks need scale," Botin said, adding that for now Santander was not interested in taking part.

"As of today, no, with the current rules, no. When the rules change who knows. Even then I think there are others who are more likely to be ahead of us," she said. The agreement between EU leaders paved the way for the European Commission to raise billions of euros on capital markets on behalf of all 27 states, an unprecedented act of solidarity in almost seven decades of European integration.

"It is really important for Europe, I think it is a game changer, this is really a turn in the road, in the right direction," Botin said, adding that this "will be seen in time as key step in the construction of Europe." Botin also that the agreement had diminished and averted the chances a sovereign risk and fragmentation problem in Europe and that the person, the country, who had taken the lead to make this possible was (Chancellor Angela) Merkel and Germany. "We could have hoped for something bigger but not for something better," she said. — Reuters

## Land rights battle inches Kenyan rice farmers closer to title deeds

**NGURUBANI:** When Wilson Kariuki's three younger children finish high school, the Kenyan rice farmer will not have to worry about paying to send them to a university far from home, as he did with his two eldest. Instead, they can attend a new university being built in their home village of Ngurubani, central Kenya, on 100 acres (40 hectares) that the farmers on the Mwea Irrigation Scheme now own after winning a case against the county government in April.

The rice farmers' victory is a sign of the rising awareness of land rights that is driving small-scale farmers around Kenya to demand ownership of the land they live and work on, farmers and land rights activists say.

"This land will benefit our children," said Kariuki, 55. "When they study at a university which is based here, they will help our community solve problems which have been troubling us for years - like the issue of land rights." The farmers had donated portions of their farmland in 2017 for the construction of a medical research center to study water-borne diseases, Kariuki explained.

But the project stalled when Kirinyaga County officials presented the farmers with a title deed that

claimed the land as government property. After lobbying by farmers, local leaders and grassroots groups, the National Land Commission (NLC), an independent government body that manages public land, declared the county government's title illegal and issued a new one to the farmers.

But the battle is not over yet, said Kariuki. He and the more than 50,000 farmers on the irrigation scheme now want the national government to issue them with title deeds to their individual plots of land. With land titles, the farmers would have autonomy from the National Irrigation Authority (NIA), which manages the plantation and dictates what the farmers can grow, how much they produce and what they sell it for.

"Title deeds will help farmers make decisions over their land," said Stephen Mururia, a human rights defender with the Mwea Foundation, a local lobby group.

"For instance, they can decide to switch from rice growing to a more profitable crop," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Previous efforts to convince the government to give the farmers individual title deeds - through meetings with officials and demands from local leaders - always



**NAIROBI:** The rice farmers' victory is a sign of the rising awareness of land rights that is driving small-scale farmers around Kenya to demand ownership of the land they live and work on, farmers and land rights activists say.

end with promises that are never met, Kariuki said. Daniel Nzonzo, head of corporate communication at the NIA, said in a phone interview that "the issue of rice farmers getting title deeds is being considered by the government through the NLC."

"This matter is already with the Senate, who will debate it," he added, without giving a timeline for when the debate might take place.

#### Gaining control

Located some 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of the capital Nairobi, the 30,050-acre (12,160-hectare) Mwea plantation is the largest rice-growing irrigation scheme in Kenya,

with a population of about 50,000. It produces about 90,000 tons of rice each year, or 80 percent of the country's rice supply, according to the National Irrigation Authority.

Each farming family in Mwea has the right to live and work on up to four acres (1.6 hectares) of land under a 99-year leasehold that started when the plantation was established in 1954, according to independent land rights researcher Gladys Gichobi. As the farmers continue their efforts to gain legal ownership of that land, they can look to cases of small-scale farmers in other parts of Kenya who have successfully pushed for title deeds to land they lived and worked on for decades. — Reuters

## Argentina's \$65bn debt deal closer despite standoff

**BUENOS AIRES/LONDON/NEW YORK:** Argentina and its creditors are likely to find a way to seal a \$65 billion debt restructuring deal, analysts said, despite a standoff after bondholders joined forces to reject a government proposal and put forward one of their own.

Three major creditor groups on Monday unveiled a joint counteroffer, the first time the trio had unified, lowering their demands but hardening opposition to a "final" offer the government made in early July. The new proposal closed the gap between two sides' proposals to within around 3 cents on the dollar in terms of valuation, which most said should be bridged in last-ditch talks. The two sides are currently working toward an Aug. 4 deal deadline.

"We expect that negotiations in coming weeks should ultimately lead to an agreement, given the authorities' appetite to avoid a chaotic default that would put the economy in further pain," Morgan Stanley said in a note. The investment bank calculated the creditors' new proposal was valued at around 55.8 points at a 10% exit yield, versus 52.4 points for the government's offer, and that the two sides were "inching closer" to an deal even if more

talks were needed. Argentine over-the-counter bonds rose 0.6% on average on Tuesday after having edged down on Monday.

#### 'Where the rubber meets the road'

Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez and Economy Minister Martin Guzman, who has led the negotiations, have maintained that the government offer was the maximum effort the recession-hit country could make after slipping into default in May. "I trust that the creditors understand that we are making a huge effort with the offer we made and that it is the most we can do," Fernandez said during a video conference on Tuesday hosted by the Americas Society/Council of the Americas.

He added it was impossible to do more with poverty levels at 40 percent, adding his government had inherited a country already in a "very complex situation" of recession and unsustainable debt.

"When we came into government in December, it's like Argentina was in intensive care and with an automatic respirator. And then the pandemic came and the respirator was gone. So now we face the situation that we face," he said. Citi analysts said that the government's position may soften in coming weeks and that the new counterproposal was a "step in bringing together the two positions."

"The authorities have stated that the amended proposal presented in early July will not be modified, but we believe this is mostly a negotiation tactic," the bank added.

A creditor source with knowledge of the talks said that there was confidence both sides could move to find a middle ground between the two pro-



**BUENOS AIRES:** In this file photo, men walk past Argentina's Economy Ministry building during the lockdown imposed by the government against the spread of the new coronavirus, in Buenos Aires. —AFP

posals. "It is now really down to where the rubber meets the road. There is a tiny economic difference between the two proposals. There will have to be give on both sides," the person said, asking not to be named.

The person added that getting a deal done without litigation was in everyone's best interest and that an agreement could be reached in a matter of days if the government was flexible. "If both sides are willing to move, they can make a deal quickly," the person said. — Reuters







# From egg hunter to protector, Malaysian battles to save turtles

A red filter over a light to not disturb the animals shows a green sea turtle attempting to hide from predators after laying eggs.

Aziz Mustafa used to collect turtles' eggs from a Malaysian beach and sell them. But nowadays, he makes a living as a ranger protecting the creatures' nesting sites. His transformation is one success in an uphill struggle to defend the endangered reptiles who swim ashore to the tropical country from the South China Sea to lay their eggs in the sand. Several species, including Green turtles, Hawksbills and Leatherbacks, nest on Malaysia's coasts, where the spectacle of babies hatching and scurrying into the sea has long been a major tourist draw. But their numbers have dwindled dramatically due to worsening maritime pollution, coastal development, and people snatching their eggs, which are a popular local delicacy.

Conservationists have however been making progress. As well as persuading some people like Aziz to change their ways, Terengganu state, a major nesting site, has announced it will ban the trade in eggs. "The turtles and eggs are our national treasure," Aziz, 44, told AFP, after watching a group of the reptiles emerge from the sea and lay eggs on a beach on Redang Island, in Terengganu. "I feel I am their god parent and I want to protect them for future generations. It gives me joy to see the huge turtles returning here to nest." The 20-strong group of females came ashore at night, crawling up Chagar Hutang beach, with Aziz watching alongside several other conservationists.

## 'Voracious appetite'

They dug holes and laid thousands of

eggs, before swimming back into the sea. On the same 350-metre (1,100-foot) beach, one of the busiest nesting sites in Malaysia, baby turtles were hatching and scurrying into the waters. Humans are far from the only threat they face—monitor lizards eat their eggs, while many are gobbled up by sharks and predatory fish as soon as they make it

able. At the same time, Aziz realised there were more benefits for the local community in protecting turtle nests than raiding them, as growing numbers of tourists flocked to the island to see the creatures. "I realised that if these migratory species are protected, the villagers on Redang would be able to sustain their livelihoods," he said. So he started work-



A ranger showing an unhatched green sea turtle egg to volunteers.

into the waters. Aziz, from a poor fishing family on the island, remembers how he used to hide in the bushes by the beach and race out to grab the eggs shortly after they were laid, with brawls often breaking out between rival collectors.

The eggs were then sold to local traders or eaten, and were a key source of protein in limited diets, although that started to change as incomes increased and different food options became avail-

able. At the same time, Aziz realised there were more benefits for the local community in protecting turtle nests than raiding them, as growing numbers of tourists flocked to the island to see the creatures. "I realised that if these migratory species are protected, the villagers on Redang would be able to sustain their livelihoods," he said. So he started work-

ing for University Malaysia Terengganu's turtle research unit to protect the creatures, earning about \$400 a month. He now works with two other rangers and a group of volunteers to safeguard the eggs from poachers and predators like monitor lizards. "Villagers on Redang Island now enjoy a stable income from tourism as a growing number of people want to watch the Green turtles lay eggs," he said.

## Centuries-old tradition

Mohamad Uzair Rusli, a biologist working on saving sea turtles at the university, agreed that giving locals a way to earn money from looking after the creatures was the best fashion to safeguard their future.

But he warned that without tackling the "voracious appetite" for eggs—consid-



A green sea turtle swimming in the waters off the Taaras Beach and Spa Resort on Redang island.



A green sea turtle sleeping after laying eggs on the shore of the Chagar Hutang Turtle Sanctuary.



A volunteer inspecting a green baby sea turtle, retrieved from a nest.

eggs of Leatherback turtles, after their numbers fell dramatically, but not other species commonly found in the state. However, changing a centuries-old tradition will be tough. On a recent visit, eggs were being sold openly at a busy market in state capital Kuala Terengganu, with buyers paying the equivalent of \$12 for 10. Trader Nor Jannah said business



A volunteer digging a green sea turtle nest for unhatched eggs on the shore of the Chagar Hutang Turtle Sanctuary on Redang island.—AFP photos

ered an aphrodisiac by many—the creatures faced an uncertain future. Licensed collectors are still allowed to operate in Terengganu, on the northeast coast of peninsular Malaysia, and the sale of most species' eggs remains legal.

But state authorities have pledged to ban the trade in all turtle eggs by the end of this year, following sustained pressure from conservation groups. Currently Terengganu only prohibits the trade in

was brisk, and brushed off suggestions that eating the eggs was a threat to turtles. "It is impossible turtles will become extinct," said the 32-year-old. "I have been eating and selling turtle eggs since I was 12."—AFP

## Virus forces Nobel to cancel banquet for first time in decades

The Nobel Foundation, which manages the Nobel Prizes, on Tuesday cancelled its traditional December banquet because of the coronavirus pandemic and said the award ceremonies would be held in "new forms". This is the first time since 1956 that the lavish banquet has been cancelled, according to the foundation. The event traditionally marks the end of the so-called Nobel Week, when the year's prize-winners are invited to Swedish capital Stockholm for talks and the award ceremony. "The Nobel Week will not be as it usually is due to the current pandemic. This is a very special year when everyone needs to make sacrifices and adapt to completely new circumstances," Lars Heikensten, director of the Nobel Foundation, said in a statement.

Heikensten added that the laureates and their work would be highlighted in "different ways", hinting that prize winners would receive their awards in their home countries or at embassies. Traditionally, the prize-winners join the Swedish royal family and some 1,300 guests for the banquet at Stockholm's City Hall after the

award ceremony—held on December 10, the anniversary of the death of the prizes' founder Alfred Nobel. The winners, except Peace Prize laureates who are honoured in Oslo, also usually give speeches during the dinner.

Many of the events would be held under new arrangements because of the uncertainty around large gatherings and international travel, the foundation said. The announcement of the prizes (Medicine, Physics, Chemistry, Literature, Peace and Economics) would still be held scheduled between 5 and 12 October, the Foundation said. The Nobel Banquet was last cancelled in 1956 to avoid inviting the Soviet ambassador because of the repression of the Hungarian Revolution, Rebecka Oxelstrom, Head of Press at Nobel Foundation, told AFP. "An unofficial dinner was nevertheless organised, without the ambassador, in another room," she said. The banquet was also cancelled during the two world wars and in 1907 and 1924.—AFP



This file photo shows guests waiting for the desserts during royal banquet to honour the laureates of the Nobel Prize 2019 following the Award ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden. — AFP



## STRUGGLING CIRQUE DU SOLEIL RETURNS TO MEXICO

Using face masks, sanitizing gel and social distancing, Cirque du Soleil artists in Mexico practise before a performance—a rare sign of hope for the famous Canadian circus company. The circus shut down 44 shows across the world due to the COVID-19 outbreak, furloughing 95 percent of its workforce and filing for bankruptcy protection. But—after three months off stage due to the coronavirus lockdown—performers in the "Joya" show returned earlier this month to the theater in Riviera Maya on Mexico's northeastern Yucatan Peninsula. Contortionists, jugglers and skaters rehearsed for what will be their fifth show since the end of lockdown. Attendance is limited to 30 percent capacity, or just 200 of the 650 seats.

"We're delighted to be back on stage during this pandemic, to be here with the audience," said Jamie Sullivan, the show's director of operations. "Joya" was inaugurated in 2014, in partnership with a Mexican hotel chain. It was only the

second of Cirque du Soleil show to reopen following the global lockdown—the first was "The Land of Fantasy" in Hangzhou, China. The Montreal-based company last week accepted a purchase offer from its creditors, which will serve as the basis for its auction in August. "Joya" involves 30 artists and

280 technicians in a theatre that was especially built for the show, inspired by the migration of the monarch butterfly. It is the first Cirque du Soleil show resident in Latin America.

During the lockdown, which lasted from the end of March until June, almost all of Joya's artists, who come from 15 different countries, remained in Mexico, said Sullivan. The Quintana Roo state, where Riviera Maya is located, is still subject to Mexico's maximum virus alert. The country has been hard hit by the virus, with almost 350,000 cases and more than 39,000 deaths.—AFP



Members of Cirque du Soleil train while preparing to resume presentations, in the Riviera Maya in Cancun, state of Quintana Roo, Mexico.—AFP photos



## Lifestyle | Features

## TikTok gave rural Indian women fame, fun and more

When India banned TikTok, it closed a window to the wider world for legions of women outside the big cities that provided fun, fame and even fortune. The government outlawed the video-sharing platform, and 58 other Chinese apps, this month citing data security fears. TikTok is also reportedly under greater scrutiny elsewhere including in the United States and Australia. Married soon after she completed college, 27-year-old stay-at-home mother Mamta Verma lives in a small town in Madhya Pradesh state. One day, her daughter got her to install TikTok on her phone to watch the dizzying array of zany videos uploaded from across what used to be the app's biggest international market.

Instagram and YouTube are for "the big people", Verma told AFP by phone, but TikTok she liked. She started to record and upload videos of her own. "I started with five likes on my first video. That was a big boost for me," Verma said. Soon, she had more than a million followers and was earning about 4,000 rupees (\$50) per video with her slick robot dance routines shot inside her small, simple home. "It's not a lot but my earnings from TikTok helped in running the house and also in managing finances for the new house. You know even 10 rupees is a huge amount for us," she said.

## Breaking a glass ceiling

But it wasn't just the money. "Before TikTok, I didn't have the confidence to



In this file photo Indian mobile users browse through the Chinese owned video-sharing 'Tik Tok' app on smartphones in Amritsar.



Legions of women outside India's big cities found fun, and some found fame, on Chinese app TikTok.



The logo of the social media video sharing app TikTok is displayed on a tablet screen in Paris. — AFP photos

talk to people. I would just do my work, and as a stay-at-home wife I never made eye contact with people or even spoke much," Verma said. Speaking a vast number of languages and dialects, around 70 percent of India's 1.3 billion people live in rural areas, a world away from big cities such as Mumbai and New Delhi. Amitabh Kumar from Social Media Matters, a group encouraging "social media for social change", said that for many people in this huge hinterland, TikTok was a "glass ceiling breaker". "Instead of Bollywood and rich people, finally there was a chance for common people to create something in 15 seconds which makes you laugh or cry or think or engage," he told AFP.

Its different tools were simple to use for those who don't speak or read

English or Hindi, and the app worked well on low-speed internet. "Twitter cracked the short-form storytelling in text—with 140 and then 280 (characters). I think TikTok did it with 15 seconds," he added. And it reminded the urban elite of India's vast diversity and chasmic differences in wealth. "What we, people sitting in Delhi, probably judged and made fun of was high-class entertainment for a lot of people who never got a chance to express themselves," he said. "Here was for the first time a space that rural India was enjoying."

## 'Not a big person'

Another minor star was Rupali Manoj Bhandole, 29, a housewife and mother who left school at 14 living in a small

town in Maharashtra state that gets piped water for an hour a day and endures frequent power cuts. She would upload videos of herself poking fun at her weak economic status—and soon amassed 300,000 followers. "A person who works with a Marathi TV show called me a star... I can't tell you happy I felt," she told AFP. "I only studied until Class 9. I'm not a big person." Bhandole said she wept when TikTok was banned.

## Conservative family

Archana Arvind Dhormise hopes the benefits she derived from the platform will last. The 35-year-old from Pimpalgaon in Maharashtra seldom left home for fear of censure from her conservative family and neighbours. But then the home beautician became the

"Rani Mukherji of TikTok"—a reference to a famous Bollywood actress—dancing and miming to famous songs, and gaining 75,000 fans. She won a local competition for one of her TikTok videos. Now she has landed a part in a short film.

"I had never in my life gone up on stage and spoken or even initiated a conversation without having a million thoughts in my head," Dhormise told AFP. "But being on TikTok and seeing all the love I was getting gave me the confidence to keep that going, and also be confident in the real world."—AFP



This photo shows the YouTube SarahCooper Comedy channel on a computer screen and a sketch of US author and comedian Sarah Cooper on a mobile phone.—AFP

## How to Sarah Cooper: The US comedian lip-synching Trump into a punchline

She is quickly becoming the internet's favourite Donald Trump impersonator but Sarah Cooper does it without saying a word—preferring to let the president she calls her "head writer" do the talking for her. The former Google employee has shot to fame during the coronavirus pandemic with her trademark lip-synching of some of the US leader's greatest hits. Each of the Jamaican-born comedian's homemade sketches riffs on a recent Trump soliloquy that has gained notoriety for being unintentionally amusing or perplexing.

She parodies these unwieldy rhetorical symphonies in clips with titles that reflect Trump's topic of choice, such as "How to Obamagate" and "How to strong death totals." As the United States negotiates a fraught civil rights reckoning, an election between two aging white men and a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, the videos have gone the right kind of "viral." And they have thrust the 40-something into the spotlight as one of the country's most relevant and indispensable comics. Cooper says the clips appeal in part because they demonstrate that Trump's more eccentric utterances are only seen as part of normal discourse because it is the president speaking.

Exhibit Number One, for Cooper: the White House coronavirus task force briefings, which resumed Tuesday after being halted amid stinging criticism over Trump's exaggerated claims on the public health response and his promotion of bogus treatments. "Being a black woman, I could never get away with talking like that in a meeting, let alone as president of the United States," she told Vanity Fair.

## 'How to medical'

Cooper shot to fame on TikTok and Twitter, where her upstart impersonations garnered millions of likes just as the nation's top comics retreated homeward to film their shows from basements and living rooms, putting her production values on par with theirs. In "How to cognitive" Cooper lip-synchs the president in a recent Fox News interview professing to have "aced" an unspecified cognitive test, baiting Democratic rival Joe Biden whom, Trump alleges, "couldn't pass one." With smug self-satisfaction, Cooper holds up proof of the completed assessment: the page of a colouring book which looks like it has been scrawled over by an ungainly toddler. However it was a 49-second clip of Trump's now-infamous suggestion that

injecting disinfectant could help fight the coronavirus that cemented Cooper's status. That video instantly made her the high priestess of what has come to be known as front-facing camera comedy, a new-ish genre of lo-fi sketches using the front-facing camera of a cell phone.

The clip, "How to medical," features Trump speaking during an April task force press briefing in which he also pondered whether bringing "light inside the body" might help combat the disease. Cooper delivers the monologue with wild, darting eyes and the kind of power-posturing body language that simultaneously betrays an easy confidence and yet the sort of pompous swagger born of deep, unacknowledged insecurity. "I'm envious of his abilities to sort of BS his way through life," Cooper told MSNBC Tuesday, adding that when imitating Trump "I feel like I'm getting just a little bit of that confidence that I wish more women had and I wish I had." The topics aren't new terrain for Cooper, who had already written two books—"100 Tricks to Appear Smart in Meetings" and "How to be Successful Without Hurting Men's Feelings."

## 'Close my eyes'

The videos have earned Cooper more than 1.9 million Twitter followers — a veritable who's who of Hollywood types, politicians and influencers, from former president Barack Obama to comedians Steve Martin and Ellen DeGeneres, as well as "Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda. Mark Hamill, Luke Skywalker in the "Star Wars" movies, recently confessed on Twitter that "I close my eyes when the real #POTUS is on TV speaking & just picture @sarahcpr. It's really helped control my gag-reflex." Jerry Seinfeld has retweeted Cooper, as has actor and refugee rights activist Ben Stiller, who called her recent "How to immigration policy" clip his "favourite of all the ones that I really like that are also my favourite."

And with November's presidential election still more than 100 days away, there's not likely to be a shortage of useable sound bites. "I'll keep on doing them as long as my head writer gives me material," Cooper told The Los Angeles Times. Until now, Trump impersonations have been famously dominated by actor Alec Baldwin, who portrays the president on "Saturday Night Live." — AFP

## Kanye West's erratic behaviour puts spotlight on bipolar disorder

US rapper and apparent presidential candidate Kanye West has opened up in the past about his struggles with bipolar disorder. But his recent erratic behaviour has again called into question his health and treatment. He launched his election campaign Sunday with a rambling speech that saw him rant incoherently, reveal he had wanted to abort his daughter, and break down in tears. Other celebrities who have spoken publicly about their diagnoses include actor Stephen Fry and the late fashion designer Alexander McQueen. What is the mental illness and why is it often associated with creative people?

## Highs and lows

Bipolar disorder, formerly known as "manic depression," is characterized by extreme mood swings. On the one hand, patients experience very high periods known as "mania" when they feel energized, elated and can make reckless decisions. They sometimes also experience delusions. "They can almost have no inhibitions at all, which means they can spend their life savings in a day," said Andrew Nierenberg, a psychiatry professor at Harvard. "They can do something that's really bad judgment that they wouldn't ordinarily do, either sexually, or in relationships, or work."

The other "pole" of the illness is depression: ultra-low episodes that can include inability to feel pleasure and suicidal thoughts. In fact the suicide rate among bipolar disorder patients is 10-30 times higher than that of the general population. The illness affects up to three percent of the population, which makes it more common than schizophrenia but rarer than depression.

And there can be much variation among patients, said Timothy Sullivan, the chair of psychiatry at Staten Island University Hospital. Some are more depressive and rarely manic, while others are the other way around. As a result, diagnoses are typically delayed for years. If a patient has so far only experienced depression, they may be misdiagnosed. West first revealed his diagnosis on his 2018 album "Ye," where he called it his "superpower." Last year, he revealed it caused him paranoid delusions and described being handcuffed during treatment.

## Risk factors

Bipolar disorder is known to be "one of the more heritable mental illnesses" said Katherine Burdick, a psychologist at Harvard and the Brigham and Women's Hospital. If one of your parents had the

disorder, your risk is somewhere between 10 to 20 percent. Scientists are looking for the genes responsible, and trying to understand how these might affect the parts of the brain that deal with emotion. Another line of research suggests that bipolar disorder could be linked to a flaw in how cells regulate energy, said Nierenberg.

There may also be environmental factors. For many, but not all patients, "there's a higher rate of childhood trauma, childhood abuse and neglect," said Burdick. Substance abuse is also a risk factor, and women sometimes develop it later in life compared to men.

## COVID a trigger?

The bedrock for treatment is mood stabilizing drugs. Lithium, which has been used since the 1940s, is still considered by many clinicians as the "gold standard" despite side effects. Anti-inflammatory drugs that reduce an abnormal immune response are being investigated as a treatment, but research is preliminary. Experts have also started to understand the role that the disruption of "social rhythms" play in bipolar disorder, which has shifted more attention toward therapy. For instance, the death of a pet can trigger a depression-mania cycle, but when scientists studied such events closely, they realized patients were not driven by grief alone.

"Not only did the person suffer psychologically from that loss, but they used to take the dog out for walks, they got exercise, and it also got them up early in the day so that they had social interactions," said Sullivan. People with bipolar disorder are sensitive to such disruptions, which means events like the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns can cause particular harm. "I have actually had one patient who I haven't seen in more than 10 years, who I don't currently treat, who called me up out of the blue and she's clearly manic," said Sullivan. Support groups like the Depression Bipolar Support Alliance are credited with raising awareness and destigmatizing the illness.

There is thought to be an over-representation of artists, writers and musicians among people with bipolar disorder, a subject explored in the book "Touched with Fire." Figures from history who may have had the illness include Vincent Van Gogh. "Creative people are distinguished by particularly unique ways of thinking that involve intense emotional experiences" explained Sullivan.—AFP



US actress Amber Heard leaves after giving evidence at the libel trial by her former husband US actor Johnny Depp against News Group Newspapers (NGN), at the High Court in London, on Tuesday.



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

## Amber Heard denies affairs with Elon Musk, James Franco

Amber Heard on Tuesday denied having an affair with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, as she gave evidence in ex-husband Johnny Depp's high-profile London libel action. Depp, 57, had accused the 34-year-old actress of having liaisons with the Tesla and SpaceX founder and the Hollywood actor James Franco during their stormy two-year marriage. But giving evidence she rejected the claims, in particular dismissing suggestions Musk visited her regularly at night from March 2015, not long after the couple wed. "I wasn't even in communication with Elon until 2016," she told London's High Court on her second day on the witness stand.

Depp, star of "The Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise, is suing British tabloid The Sun and the author of a 2018 article that claimed he was a "wife-beater". He maintains it severely damaged his reputation. Depp's lawyer, Eleanor Laws, read out a 2016 text message sent by Musk offering Heard protection against Depp after an alleged fight between the couple. "The offer would stand, even if you never wanted to see me again... anyway, sorry for being an idiot," he wrote. "The radio silence hurts a lot. It only matters because I really like you." The text was sent the day after Heard claims the actor hit her in the face with a mobile phone during an argument, and while she was considering obtaining a restraining order.

Heard claimed on Monday that Depp threatened to kill her on a number of occasions, and subjected her to verbal and physical violence while under the influence of drink and drugs. On Tuesday, Heard acknowledged hitting Depp during a particularly nasty argument in March 2015 whose details have been in dispute throughout the trial. "I did strike Johnny that day in defence of my sister," she said, expressing fear that Depp was about to push her sister Whitney down the stairs.—AFP



In this file photo Kanye West meets with US President Donald Trump in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC.—AFP



## Sports

Photo of the day



Rubi Habash poses for a portrait in Ancient Jerash, Amman. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Pakistan to pick only an 'up to the mark' Amir

**LONDON:** No player is indispensable and Pakistan will pick Mohammad Amir against England only if the bowler is "up to the mark", bowling coach Waqar Younis has said. Amir had initially pulled out of the tour but is set to join the Pakistan squad in England following the birth of his second daughter last week.

Waqar suggested Amir, whose test retirement last year irked the team management, could not take his place for granted in England where Pakistan are scheduled to play three tests and as many Twenty20 Internationals from Aug. 5.

"The doors are never shut for anyone even if they have played for Pakistan or (are) yet to play," Waqar told in an online interaction with reporters on Tuesday. "He is a seasoned bowler and at times it did hurt when he left test cricket at a crucial time and we all expressed our displeasure on it.

"But we have moved on and we have to see where he stands. If he's up to the mark, then we will pick him and play him. But nobody is indispensable. I never thought we couldn't function without one cricketer."

Jolted by the crafty left-arm quick's shock test retirement, former captain Waqar oversaw the creation of a bigger pace pool, which includes pace mainstay Shaheen Afridi and the exciting teenager Naseem Shah.

Waqar said the youngsters could learn from Amir's experience. "In a way it's actually good that he came and young players can actually learn from him," said Waqar, himself a formidable swing bowler of his era. "But we will prioritise those who are doing well, and they are definitely going to get a go. With 29 players here, there's a good healthy competition and that's a great luxury." —Reuters

## Sole in one! thousands of players kicking balls on 'footgolf' courses

Footgolf, a novel fusion of two of the world's most popular sports

**SHAH ALAM:** Her eyes fixed on the flag in the distance, Jamiatul Akmal Abdul Jabar takes a run-up past her cheering friends and kicks a football down a golf course in Malaysia.

This is "footgolf", a novel fusion of two of the world's most popular sports that is growing fast and attracting people to the fairways. It follows the rules of golf, but players leave their clubs at home and instead tee off with their feet try to complete each hole in as few kicks as possible.

Jamiatul was having a go at the sport with her friends on a converted course with 21-inch (53-centimetre) holes outside the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. The 38-year-old said she had considered golf "such a boring game" but was rather taken by footgolf.

"You feel that this is something new, something to experience," Jamiatul, an avid futsal player, told AFP. "I'm planning to book another (session)." Thousands of players are now kicking balls on footgolf courses in about 36 countries, and the sport has been governed by an international federation since 2012. Several World Cups have been staged, although the 2020 edition originally due to take place in Japan has been postponed to next year due to the coronavirus.

The sport's origins aren't clear, but one of the earliest recorded tournaments was in the Netherlands in 2008. In Malaysia, people started playing footgolf in 2018 at the Bukit Jelutong course outside the capital Kuala Lumpur, which had been abandoned but was given a makeover by Footgolf Malaysia.

Jeffrey Cottam, who co-founded the organisation, said initial attempts to start the sport were resisted by course owners who balked at the idea of letting footballers onto their greens.

But he finally managed to set up at Bukit Jelutong, and the company now manages two footgolf courses in Malaysia — the second is in the



SHAH ALAM: This picture taken on June 21, 2020 shows Jamiatul Akmal Abdul Jabar, 38, kicking the ball on a footgolf course in Shah Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Footgolf, a novel fusion of two of the world's most popular sports, is growing fast and attracting young people back on to the fairways. —AFP

southern state of Johor — with a third on the way.

More than 2,000 people play each month in Malaysia, Cottam said. "Footgolf, like golf, isn't about strength and how young you are," he told AFP. "It's more technical... It's not about beating people. It's about beating the course."

He also hoped the growing popularity of the sport could give some help to ailing courses. Golf has fallen out of favour in many countries, with young people largely uninterested and few having the time to spend a whole day playing the

sport, leading to many courses closing.

But footgolf is giving them some much-needed revenue — in the US, for instance, the sport is now played on more than 500 courses, according to the American Footgolf Federation.

Danny Chia, a Malaysian professional golfer who plays on the Asian Tour, also said footgolf might help courses. "There are still a lot of golf courses out there that are not doing very well," he told AFP. "This could be a new avenue for them." —AFP



SHAH ALAM: This picture taken on June 21, 2020 shows Jamiatul Akmal Abdul Jabar, 38, watching as her "foot putt" goes into the hole on a footgolf course in Shah Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

## Virus vaccine key for Olympics go-ahead in 2021

**TOKYO:** The development of a coronavirus vaccine or treatment will be key to allowing the postponed Tokyo 2020 games to open in a year's time, organising committee president Yoshiro Mori said yesterday.

Asked what factors will be crucial for the rescheduled Games to go ahead, Mori said "it would be whether the coronavirus woe is settling down." "Specifically, the first point will be that a vaccine or drug has been developed," he said in an interview with national broadcaster NHK, published yesterday.

Asked whether Tokyo could hold the Games if the virus situation remained unchanged, Mori said: "If things continue as they are now, we couldn't." But he said that scenario was hypothetical. "I can't imagine a situation like this will continue for another year," he said.

Tokyo 2020 should have been opening on Friday, but the Games were postponed in March as the coronavirus spread across the globe, marking the worst disruption to an Olympics since two editions

were cancelled during World War II.

The Games are now set to open on July 23, 2021, but recent polls have shown less public enthusiasm for hosting the event, as virus cases show a resurgence in Japan. Just one in four people in Japan want to see the delayed Tokyo Games held next year, with most backing either further delay or a cancellation, according to a survey published by Kyodo News this week.

Most of those backing a delay or cancellation said they simply didn't believe the pandemic could be contained in time for the Games. Among the options that have been floated for a Games held during a pandemic is the possibility of limited spectators, or holding the event behind closed doors.

But Mori said reducing the number of spectators would be tough. And he said holding the event without any fans was not an option for now. "If it's the only way to do it, then it's something we'd have to consider. If that happens, there might be talk of cancellation," he was quoted as saying, without elaborating.

With just over a year to go until the rescheduled Games, there are persistent doubts about whether the delay will be sufficient for the pandemic to be brought under control. Japan has so far reported 26,300 COVID-19 cases with 989 deaths, but Tokyo has seen an increase in cases recently and the country's borders remain almost completely sealed to overseas visitors. —AFP

## 'Long way to go' with Olympics on hold

**SYDNEY:** Australia's elite swimmers should now be in peak condition and eyeing Olympic medals but instead, like their rivals from other countries, they're treading water — and wondering whether they'll get to compete in Tokyo at all.

The decision to postpone the 2020 Games for a year because of the coronavirus was "devastating", team bosses said, with preparations thrown into disarray and mental as well as physical fitness needing careful management.

With the pandemic showing no signs of abating, Japanese and International Olympic Committee officials have spoken openly about cancelling the Games altogether. Adding to the turmoil for Australian swimmers, long-time coach Jacco Verhaeren quit last month to return to his native Netherlands.

Verhaeren took control in 2013 after Australia's poor results at the London Olympics a year earlier, a campaign marred by ill-discipline, drug use and drunkenness. He steadied the ship and helped restore Australia as a swimming superpower, with the squad finishing second only to arch-rivals the United States at the 2015 and 2019 world titles.

Swimming Australia has turned to Rohan Taylor, who was state coach for Victoria and Tasmania and has been around the national team for years, as his replacement. He inherits a squad boasting a slew of world champions including Mack Horton and Ariarne Titmus, along with experienced sisters Cate and Bronte Campbell.

Taylor told AFP in an interview that his immediate focus was to get them through the anguish of the Games being

postponed, and deal with the uncertainty of whether they will go ahead. "Any athlete who is highly competitive across any sport is motivated daily, and what gets them up and moving is that carrot at the end of the stick. And when that was taken away it was quite devastating for them," Taylor said.

"And then of course it is back on, but we still can't really get our hands around it. "So I think there is a bit of treading water, doing what they can do, keeping themselves under good control and recognising there's still a long way to go."

## 'HALFWAY HOUSE'

Australian swimming legend Grant Hackett, who has dealt with his own mental demons including a breakdown in 2017, said being an Olympic athlete right now would be "hugely challenging". "People put their whole life on hold for the Olympics. You stop studying, you stop doing other things, you stop being a well-rounded person," he told the Sydney Morning Herald.

Hackett added: "The worst thing as an athlete right now is to be in that halfway house. You have to train for it like it's on, believe it's on and commit to that degree; commit like it's happening and if it doesn't happen, so be it."

After about six weeks of being banned from pools due to government coronavirus regulations, most of Australia's top swimmers are now allowed back in the water.

But given continuing travel restrictions, any competition leading into Tokyo is likely to be on home soil. The 2021 world championships have been moved to May 2022 to accommodate the Olympics, and the short course titles rescheduled to December 2021. Australia is set to hold its national championships in April, with finals in the morning and heats in the evening to mirror what will happen in Japan, ahead of Olympic trials in June. —AFP



## Sports

# Ronaldo targets more records as Juventus close in on title

## ‘They’re set to win their ninth Scudetto in a row’

**MILAN:** Cristiano Ronaldo is eyeing more records as Juventus head for Udinese today with a ninth consecutive Serie A title within their grasp. Ronaldo scored a double on Monday against Lazio to bring his tally to 51 Serie A goals since arriving in Turin in July 2018.

The 35-year-old not only became the first player to achieve a half century of goals in Italy, Spain and England, but was also the fastest, doing so in 61 league games. Last year the five-time Ballon d’Or winner scored 21 goals in his first season in Italy, but thanks to his brace against Lazio he brought his tally to 30 this term, with four games remaining.



We’re almost there guys!

Another goal would see him match former Italy World Cup winner Felice Borel, who was the last player to score 31 goals for Juventus in the 1933-34 season. For Ronaldo the title of top scorer — ‘Capocannoniere’ — is up for grabs, as he is currently level on 30 with Lazio’s Ciro Immobile.

And he could even overtake Bayern Munich’s Robert Lewandowski, the top scorer in Europe with 34 goals in the Bundesliga this season. There is also the record of Argentine teammate Gonzalo Higuain, who was Serie A top scorer under Sarri at Napoli in the

2015-16 season with 36 goals.

“Cristiano is unpredictable,” said Sarri. “If he puts his mind to something, he’s very determined. “Not only physically, but, above all, mentally: he is a champion with his feet, but also with his head.”

‘GIVE YOUR ALL’

“Very important victory! We’re almost there guys! Let’s go,” Ronaldo wrote on Instagram after the Lazio game. Juventus can seal the title with a win over 16th-placed Udinese, but it depends on Inter Milan, who are eight points behind the champions, losing to Fiorentina at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Otherwise they could win their 36th Scudetto on Sunday, at home against Sampdoria, giving Sarri, 61, his first league title. It would allow them to start preparing for the Champions League, and overturning a 1-0 first-leg deficit against French club Lyon in the last 16 next month.

“Juventus are still the best side in the league,” said Inter boss Antonio Conte, who coached the Turin side to the first three titles in their current run of league triumphs.

“They’re set to win their ninth Scudetto in a row. We can learn from them. “We’ve got to keep trying to improve, to be more involved in the title race, so we can eventually get our hands on the Scudetto.”

Inter Milan, who have not won the title since their historic treble in 2010 under Jose Mourinho, are however assured of a Champions League place next season. “It’s great that we’ve achieved this goal,” continued Conte, “it was one of the club’s main requests, to improve our results compared to previous seasons and to steady the ship so that things aren’t so hectic at the end of the season.”

Against Franck Ribery’s Fiorentina they were held



**TURIN:** Juventus’ Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (R) is congratulated by Juventus’ Italian coach Maurizio Sarri after scoring during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Lazio. — AFP

1-1 earlier this season, with the 12th-placed Tuscany side coming off back-to-back wins. “They’ve got a good squad of players, they’re a good team and Giuseppe Iachini is doing a great job as coach,” added Conte.

“They’ll be unfazed by us, but when you’re up

against Inter you always have the motivation to give your all.” Lazio, in fourth, play at Cagliari after their league hopes were dashed at Juventus on Monday. They too are also poised to return to the Champions League after 13 years, as they are 11 points clear of fifth-placed Roma. — AFP



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain’s French forward Kylian Mbappe (L) speaks with Paris Saint-Germain’s French defender Presnel Kimpembe during warm up ahead of the friendly football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Glasgow Celtic FC at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris. — AFP

## Mbappe to stay at PSG next season

**PARIS:** Kylian Mbappe said on Tuesday he would remain with French champions Paris Saint-Germain next season “whatever happens” despite constant speculation over his future.

“I’m here. I’m part of the project for a fourth year,” Mbappe, 21, told BeIn Sport during half-time of PSG’s 4-0 win over Celtic in a friendly played in front of around 5,000 fans at the Parc des Princes.

“The club’s 50-year anniversary is an important one in the eyes of the club, the supporters, of everyone, so I will be here whatever happens.”

“I’m going to try and bring back trophies with the team and give the best of myself,” added Mbappe, who arrived at PSG from Monaco in 2017 in a deal worth 180 million euros (\$208 million).

Real Madrid have regularly been linked with a move for Mbappe, but club president Florentino Perez said last week the Spanish champions would not make any big signings this summer.

“Kylian has a contract with us, we’re not ready to sell him. He is super important, he’s a key player, our player. It’s a gift to work with him,” said PSG coach

Thomas Tuchel. “It’s super. There’s a really nice connection between him and Neymar. It makes it fun for everyone. It’s a real strength for PSG. It’s great like that.”

Mbappe opened the scoring for PSG against the Scottish champions in the first minute after he was played in behind the Celtic defence by Neymar.

The Brazil star added a second with a deflected effort on 25 minutes in PSG’s final tune-up ahead of the French Cup final against Saint-Etienne on Friday.

Ander Herrera made it 3-0 shortly after half-time and Pablo Sarabia grabbed a fourth with a sweetly-struck volley from Marco Verratti’s lofted pass.

PSG will make their return to competitive action at the Stade de France later this week as they bid for a record-extending 13th French Cup title.

Tuchel’s side qualified for the quarter-finals of the Champions League on March 11 before French football ground to a halt because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Ligue 1 season was declared over in April with PSG confirmed as champions for the seventh time in eight seasons.

They will also face Lyon in the French League Cup final on July 31 before resuming their Champions League campaign in Lisbon, where they take on Atalanta for a spot in the last four. — AFP

league resumed after the coronavirus lockdown before drawing 2-2 with Juventus, and were held 1-1 at Verona last time out.

The Bergamo side have 74 points this season with three games to play, overtaking their previous best haul of 72 during the 2016-17 season.

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini was banished from the sidelines after a spat with counterpart Sinisa Mihajlovic before the break, with the Bologna boss receiving a yellow card.

It was the second red card in recent weeks for Gasperini who has been showing signs of frayed nerves before his side meet Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last night next month.

“I didn’t deserve to be expelled,” fumed Gasperini afterwards. “But let’s talk about the match.

“We’re looking for consistency on the pitch, then we’ll have 12 days later to choose what kind of work to

## Liverpool prepare to lift Premier League trophy

**LONDON:** Jurgen Klopp said he felt like it was Christmas Eve on Tuesday as Liverpool count down the hours until they lift the Premier League trophy after a 30-year wait. The Reds will lift the trophy on the Kop stand at Anfield after Wednesday’s clash against Chelsea.

“It’s like Christmas,” said the German manager. “If you know beforehand you have a certain present, there is still excitement. We are very excited about that. I never touched a Premier League trophy ever before, that will be special.”

The celebrations will take place without fans in the stadium due to the coronavirus pandemic and Klopp again urged supporters to stay at home after crowds gathered around Anfield and in Liverpool city centre following their title win last month.

Klopp is relieved his players will get the chance to celebrate inside the stadium because they did not seal the title on the pitch — Manchester City’s defeat at Chelsea ended the race. “Everybody in the club worked so hard for it, so it should be in the stadium,” he said.

“From a professional basis (it will be) 100 percent one of the great days in my life to get our hands on this trophy that everyone was waiting so long for and two or three years ago nobody thought it would be possible for us.

“It’s a milestone, it’s a very important day but not the last one for us.” Chelsea travel to Anfield in far greater need of the points as one win from their final two matches will secure Champions League football next season.

The Blues have also been the first of the Premier League’s big clubs to spend in the transfer market to try and bridge the gap to Liverpool at the top of the table. Timo Werner will join Chelsea next season despite interest from Liverpool in the German international before the outbreak of the illness, which forced Klopp to reevaluate his transfer plans.

“I’m completely happy with my squad,” Klopp said. “It’s not that we don’t want (to sign players), but we try to make right decisions. “COVID came and changed the situation again. Not to the better for any business in the world but for football as well. It’s not that we can’t improve, we just do what is possible for us and what we are able to do, that’s all.—AFP

do to prepare for the Champions League.” Bologna, in tenth, battled after their 5-1 defeat against AC Milan last time out with Musa Barrow missing a double chance against his parent side.

Muriel came off the bench after the break and picked up a cross from fellow Colombian Duvan Zapata to score his 18th goal this season and 11th off the bench.

Juventus can seal the title with a win over 16th-placed Udinese, but it depends on Inter Milan, who are eight points behind the champions, failing to beat Fiorentina at the San Siro on Wednesday.

**MILAN REWARD PIOLI**

Outside the Champions League places, Stefano Pioli’s Milan extended their unbeaten run since the return with a seventh win in nine games.

“I was already seeing the team improve before the

## Solskjaer defends ‘mentally strong’ De Gea after errors

**LONDON:** David de Gea is mentally strong enough to deal with fierce criticism following a series of costly goalkeeping blunders for Manchester United, manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said on Tuesday.

The 29-year-old Spaniard’s place as United’s number one is under severe pressure after he was at fault for two goals in United’s 3-1 FA Cup semi-final defeat against Chelsea on Sunday.

It came after other glaring errors over the past 18 months from De Gea, previously considered among the best goalkeepers in the world. Solskjaer, speaking at his pre-match press conference, was determined to keep the focus on Wednesday’s game against West Ham rather than the struggles of his goalkeeper.

“This is not going to become a David de Gea press conference,” he said. “We’re just going to stick together. We’ve got two games, so we’re just going to focus on that one.

“David’s mentally strong enough to know that his job is to perform in training the next day and then be ready for the games.”

Dean Henderson is snapping at De Gea’s heels after impressing on loan at Sheffield United while Sergio Romero, the back-up goalkeeper surprisingly omitted from the FA Cup semi-final starting line-up, is waiting in the wings.

Solskjaer has a significant decision to make about the position for their penultimate Premier League match of the season, given victory would give his fifth-placed side a huge boost in the Champions League race.

Leicester’s 3-0 loss at Tottenham on Sunday means United are not only level with the fourth-placed Foxes on 62 points but on goal difference as well, with the clubs going toe-to-toe at the King Power Stadium in fascinating season finale on Sunday.

Solskjaer was under intense pressure himself earlier in the season but a long unbeaten run either side of the coronavirus shutdown has turned their campaign around. The Norwegian said it was clear that United were on the right track.

“It is in our own hands,” he said. “I don’t want to talk about how much it (Champions League) will mean financially or to attract people. We just have to focus on the next two games and make sure we are there.”

Eric Bailly was taken to hospital after a nasty clash of heads with fellow United defender Harry Maguire on Sunday and Solskjaer said he was unlikely to feature against West Ham.

“Eric stayed down in London after for all the checks,” he said. “I didn’t see him yesterday. He’s following the protocols that’s needed so, for me, I don’t think that he’ll be ready for this game.” — AFP

lockdown, then we grew a lot,” said Pioli, who has been given a two-year contract extension with the club until June 2022.

“We’re doing good things, but it is not over yet,” added Ibrahimovic. “We are still in the running to reach our goal. Fifth place is what we want, but the qualifiers are fine too.”

Ibrahimovic nodded in Hakan Calhanoglu’s cross after 19 minutes and added a second just before the break. The 38-year-old, who helped Milan to their last Serie A title back in 2011, savoured scoring more than one goal in a Serie A game for the first time in eight years. Francesco Caputo had equalised for the hosts from the penalty spot, after a Calhanoglu handball, for his 19th goal this season. But Sassuolo played the second half a man down after Mehdi Bourabia was sent off for a foul on Ante Rebic, ending their nine-match unbeaten run.—AFP

## Atalanta back second in Serie A

**MILAN:** Luis Muriel came off the bench to score the only goal as Atalanta beat Bologna 1-0 in a fiery Serie A clash on Tuesday to move back second behind leaders Juventus.

Muriel struck just after an hour as Atalanta extended their unbeaten run to 15 games to move six points behind Juventus, and two ahead of third-placed Inter Milan. Swedish star Zlatan Ibrahimovic turned back the clock with a double as AC Milan beat 10-man 2-1 Sassuolo to move fifth ahead of Roma and Napoli and into the Europa League berths.

Atalanta had won six successive games since the



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BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa's Spanish goalkeeper Pepe Reina (R) jumps for the ball during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Arsenal at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England. — AFP

## Aston Villa out of relegation zone

### Trezeguet clinch a priceless 1-0 win against Arsenal

**BIRMINGHAM:** Dean Smith urged Aston Villa to finish the job after they climbed out of the Premier League relegation zone as Trezeguet clinched a priceless 1-0 win against Arsenal on Tuesday.

Smith's side have their survival fate in their own hands after the Egypt winger's first-half strike at Villa Park. Watford's 4-0 thrashing against Manchester City earlier on Tuesday had opened the door for Villa to escape the bottom three.

And Villa seized their chance with a first home Premier League win over Arsenal in 18 attempts dating back to 1998.

Villa are now fourth bottom and have moved ahead of third-bottom Watford on goal difference, with Smith's men on -26 compared to the Hornets' -27. They head to West Ham for their final game of the season on Sunday, while Watford visit Arsenal and second-bottom Bournemouth, three points from safety, travel to Everton.

There are a multitude of permutations that could

decide relegation, but Villa will be safe if they can better Watford's result on what is certain to be a dramatic finale. If Villa and Watford both win, goal difference or goals scored will decide who goes down.

"It is a big boost, that's for sure. We knew we had to get that win to catch Watford and now we have got the season in our own hands," Smith said.

"That's all you can ask going into the last game. It was a great performance and an even better result against a good team who just beat two of the best teams in Europe.

"We have taken the season to the last day. Watford can go and win at Arsenal so we have to make sure we win at West Ham." Having secured an FA Cup final place by beating Manchester City on Saturday, Gunners boss Mikel Arteta made six changes and Arsenal looked a shadow of the team who impressed at Wembley. "Emotionally and physically it's been a very demanding week but I saw a team who

wanted to fight until the end," Arteta insisted.

Arsenal cannot finish higher than eighth and must win the FA Cup final against Chelsea to qualify for next season's Europa League.

For all the positive signs since Arteta took charge in December, Arsenal will suffer their worst Premier League finish since 1995. "It tells you the gap doesn't lie. We have to make that smaller and smaller," Arteta said. "I know where we are in certain areas and where we need to improve. We will get that." A plane trailing a banner reading "Back Arteta Kroenke Out" was flown over Villa Park during the match, but Arteta pleaded with Arsenal fans to trust he has the support of the US-based owner.

"The Kroenkes and the board and the sporting director, I have their full backing. I have that 100 percent. The fans have to believe what I'm saying," Arteta added. Arsenal's long-standing weakness at set-pieces reared its head again as Villa snatched the lead in the 27th minute.

Tyrone Mings glanced Conor Hourihane's corner across the six-yard box and Trezeguet was left unmarked to blast a fierce strike past Arsenal keeper Emiliano Martinez.

Trezeguet has been Villa's saviour as the stakes have got higher and his vital goal followed his brace in the victory against Crystal Palace nine days earlier. Jack Grealish, strongly linked with a close-season move, was captaining Villa in what could have been his last home game with the club he supported as a boy. Asked after the match about his future, Grealish said: "I'm not too sure at the moment. I have one aim and that's to keep Villa in the Premier League. That's all I'm thinking about."

Arsenal were better in the second half but Bukayo Saka blazed over from a good position 12 yards out.

With the tension mounting, Villa rode their luck when Eddie Nketiah's glancing header hit the post and bounced back into Pepe Reina's hands. — AFP

### Watford 'crazy low' on confidence after latest City thrashing

**LONDON:** Watford goalkeeper Ben Foster admitted the Hornets' confidence is "crazy low" as they slipped into the relegation zone with one game of the Premier League season to go after being thrashed 4-0 at home by Manchester City on Tuesday.

A change of management did little good after Watford became the first Premier League team to sack three managers in a season when Nigel Pearson departed on Sunday, as City bounced back from their weekend disappointment of losing an FA Cup semi-final to Arsenal.

Raheem Sterling scored twice in the first half before Phil Foden and Aymeric Laporte rounded off a comprehensive City win as Pep Guardiola's men won a fourth straight league game for the first time this season.

The margin of defeat could send Watford down come the final day of the season on Sunday as they dropped into the bottom three on goal difference after Aston Villa beat Arsenal 1-0.

Watford travel to Arsenal at the weekend, while Villa take on West Ham, who are now realistically safe due to a much superior goal difference.

"I don't think we helped ourselves, I don't think we did enough to do anything but what the result suggested to be honest," said Foster, who helped keep the score down with a string of saves.

"The confidence is so crazy, crazy low. I don't know why it should be, but you get into a state of trying to minimise as much damage as you can and it's a dangerous way to do things."

City will end the season in second place no matter what happens on the final day when they host already relegated Norwich, but Guardiola was pleased to get a reaction from a bitterly disappointing 2-0 defeat to his old assistant Mikel Arteta's Arsenal on Saturday.

"Watford were playing for a big issue but we were much more aggressive in our senses today," Guardiola said.

"We had to avoid the game we played against Arsenal, especially the first half. Whether you win or lose you have to go in the dressing room and say, 'OK, I've done everything'. This must always be happening at the big clubs and the last game we did not do it."

City have now beaten Watford by a combined score of 18-0 in their last three meetings after an 8-0 rout earlier in the season and 6-0 in last season's FA Cup final.

Hayden Mullins took charge of the hosts on a temporary basis for the second time this season and set up to frustrate the visitors by defending deep with

little threat of ever testing City's soft spot at the heart of their defence.

However, there was little doubt over the outcome once Sterling controlled Kyle Walker's cross and fired powerfully into the top corner on 31 minutes.

Nine minutes later Sterling was taken down inside the area by Will Hughes and was given the chance to further his chances of chasing down Jamie Vardy for the golden boot as Kevin De Bruyne handed over responsibilities from the penalty spot.

Foster nearly made the Belgian regret that decision with a brilliant save from Sterling's penalty but the England international followed up to tap home his 19th Premier League goal of the season.

Foden added the third after Foster had again denied Sterling's initial effort before Laporte was left completely unmarked to head home De Bruyne's free-kick as the latter moved to within one of Thierry Henry's record of 20 Premier League assists in a season. —AFP