



3 Aviation authority launches new app to assist travelers



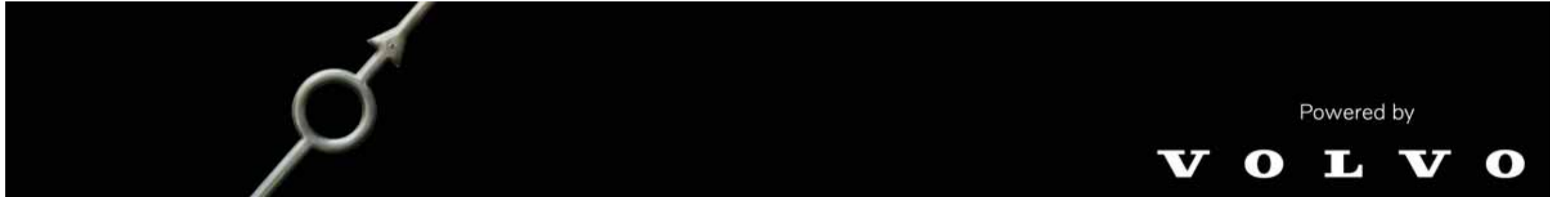
5 N Korea reports first infection as global virus cases top 16m



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Draft law on expat quotas exempts domestic helpers

1,000 iqamas of expats stranded abroad canceled daily

Farwaniya lockdown lifted



KUWAIT: Workers remove barbed wire as authorities ended a lockdown imposed in Farwaniya at 5 am yesterday. Farwaniya was the last area to be effectively isolated in Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 4)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A draft law proposing specific percentages for expat communities in the country, which has been cleared by the legal and legislative committee, exempts domestic helpers, Gulf nationals and workers on government contracts among others, the panel report said.

The draft law, which aims to rebalance the population in the country, was submitted by five lawmakers and stipulates that Indians must not exceed 15 percent of the population of Kuwaitis; Sri Lankans, Filipinos and Egyptians must not exceed 10 percent each; Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Nepalis and Vietnamese should not exceed five percent each and other communities cannot go beyond three percent each.

The legal committee report said the bill does not breach the constitution or other laws and is a good tool to balance the population. But the committee referred it to the concerned panel - the human resources development committee - to study its contents and if it can be implemented along with a number of other draft laws on the same issue.

Around 750,000 domestic helpers, tens of thousands of Gulf nationals and tens of thousands of workers on government contracts, in addition to diplomats and relatives of Kuwaitis, are exempt from the law and are not included in the percentages.

One of the clauses of the bill stipulates a ban on the recruitment of any nationality if its numbers exceed the specified percentage, and the ban will continue as long as the numbers are larger than allowed. The law also bans the transfer of domestic residences to work permits, and the same applies to visit visas, which cannot be transferred into work or dependent visas. Residencies of workers who were

brought for government contracts cannot be renewed, according to the bill.

The legal committee also recommended that a mechanism for implementation must be established, and that reaching the specified targets must be gradual. The committee report says that surplus expats will not be deported from the country after the law becomes effective. Rather, recruitment from abroad will be halted until the number of each community meets the targets. The bill stipulates a jail term of up to 10 years and a fine not exceeding KD 100,000 for any public employee who approves the recruitment of a foreigner whose community exceeds the specified number.

Meanwhile, well-informed sources told Al-Rai daily that around 1,000 residency visas of expats are canceled daily due to their presence outside Kuwait and after their employers or sponsors had not renewed them despite the fact that the ministry has allowed online renewal since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

The sources added that many companies and employers had renewed the iqamas of employees stranded outside Kuwait due to the airport closure, while others, including sponsors of family dependent visas, failed to do so and are thus responsible for losing the residency visas. "The interior ministry has nothing to do with it," the sources stressed.

The sources asserted that expats whose residency visas expire while abroad will not be able to return to Kuwait without getting new entry visas. "This is different from the case of expats who have been abroad for over six months and still hold valid residency visas, as the absence grace period has been extended till the end of the year," the sources confirmed.

KISR: COVID can spread via air; vaccines secured

KUWAIT: The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) can be transmitted via air, according to Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR). The leading Kuwaiti scientific institute said in a statement that its researchers proved that the virus could spread via the air. The results were reached in a scientific project carried out by a team of KISR researchers headed by Dr Ali Al-Humoud. It was based on a field study and analyses of samples taken from Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital.

Studies have shown that the virus can transmit via air under certain conditions. The statement quoted Dr Humoud as saying that these results would help in understanding virus movement and drafting preventive recommendations against the pandemic. The samples were collected in coordination with Harvard University using state-of-art technology.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah told local daily Al-Jarida that an agreement had been made with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) to provide Kuwait with 1.6 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine once it is produced, adding that this amount will be enough for 800,000 people, as each person receives two shots.

"This is a very good amount as a first shipment and will be enough for 20 percent of Kuwait's population," Sheikh Basel said, noting that once the second shipment is imported from manufacturing companies, Kuwait will cover 50 percent of its needs of the vaccine. He added that manufacturing and research centers working on producing the vaccine had been contacted to supply it once produced and that the health ministry's legal affairs department is currently working on the details of the agreement with GAVI.

Sheikh Basel said 145 companies, including 137 that have not published any related scientific research papers, are competing to produce the vaccine. He said MoH had only contacted companies engaged in scientific research and made an agreement with four or five of them to supply the vaccine. — Agencies

Seattle protestors clash with police over federal agents

SEATTLE: US police used flashbang grenades, pepper spray and tear gas as protestors marched in cities across the country amid a wave of public anger over Donald Trump's planned "surge" of federal agents into major metropolises. The demonstrations against racism and police brutality - sparked by the death in Minneapolis of unarmed African-American George Floyd - come as the US president faces an increasingly tough battle for re-election, and is campaigning heavily on a platform of "law and order".

Protestors marched in Austin, Texas, as well as Louisville in Kentucky, New York, Omaha, California's Oakland and Los Angeles, and Richmond in Virginia - where riot police fired chemical agents at a Black Lives Matter march, according to US media. In Seattle the sounds of repeated small detonations rang out in some streets, and smoke rose from an area where demonstrators had set fire to trailers by a construction site for a youth detention facility, an AFP reporter observed.

Continued on Page 2



SEATTLE: A demonstrator kneels in front of police during protests on Saturday. — AFP

Passion for purple revives ancient dye

TUNIS: A Tunisian man has pieced together bits of a local secret linked to ancient emperors: How to make a prized purple dye using the guts of a sea snail. "At the beginning, I didn't know where to start," said Mohamed Ghassen Noura, who heads a consulting firm. "I would crush the whole shell and try to understand how this small marine animal released such a precious color."

Now, after years of trial and error - and after getting used to the foul stench - he uses a hammer and small stone mortar to carefully break open the spiny murex shells. What happens next is part of a secret guarded so closely that it disappeared hundreds of years ago. A symbol of power and prestige, the celebrated purple color was traditionally used for royal and imperial robes.

Production of the dye was among the main sources of wealth for the ancient Phoenicians, and then for the Carthaginian and Roman empires, said Ali Drine, who heads the research division of Tunisia's National Heritage Institute. The industry was "under the control of the emperors because it brought a lot of mon-



TUNIS: Tunisian craftsman Mohamed Ghassen Noura tests a purple dye he extracted from murex shells at his workshop in the capital on July 11, 2020. — AFP

ey to the imperial coffers", he said.

In Aug 2007 on a Tunisian beach, Noura found a shell releasing a purplish red color, reminding him of something he'd learnt in history class at school. He bought more shells from local fishermen and set out experimenting in an old outside kitchen at his father's house that he still uses as a workshop. "Experts in dyeing, archaeology and history, as well as

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Indian firms struggle to lure workers back

MUMBAI: Spurning free air tickets, accommodation and higher pay, millions of migrant workers who fled India's cities when coronavirus hit are too scared to return, with grim implications for the already crumbling economy. Migrant laborers form the backbone of Asia's third-biggest economy toiling in every sector from making consumer goods and stitching garments to driving cabs.

But when India went into lockdown in late March, vast numbers lost their jobs, prompting a huge heart-rending exodus back to their home villages, sometimes on foot, their children in their arms. Some died on the way. Mumbai's swanky high-rises, for example, were built and largely staffed by people from poorer states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha, who worked as security guards, cooks and cleaners.

But as the city became a virus hotspot, around 80 percent of construction workers left the financial hub after work came to a standstill, according to the Maharashtra Chamber of Housing Industry.

Continued on Page 2

Local

Deputy Amir receives senior state officials at Seif Palace

Egypt, Maldives Presidents inquire about Amir's health



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. His Highness the Deputy Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, as well as Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Deputy Amir received on Saturday a phone call from Egyptian President AbdelFattah Al-Sisi, inquiring about the health of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness expressed his appreciation for the gesture, wishing the president good health. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also received a cable from the Maldives President Ibrahim



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh.

Mohamed Solih, who inquired about the health of His Highness the Amir, and wishing him long-lasting health and wellbeing. In response, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to President Solih for his gracious sentiments and sincere wishes. He also wished President Solih life-long good health and wellbeing. — KUNA

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 63,773 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of yesterday, in addition to 433 deaths. With the exception of 123 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, 54,373 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 8,967 people receiving treatment.

Curfew

Kuwait is set to move to the third phase of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life on June 28, 2020. The curfew will be from 9:00 pm to 3:00 am, government and private offices will be able to operate with up to 50 percent capacity, mosques will host Friday prayers with strict social distancing and health precautions observed, taxis will be allowed to resume operations but they are allowed to carry only one passenger, while resorts, hotels and furnished apartment businesses will be allowed to reopen.

Kuwait moved to the second phase on 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.

The first phase began on May 31, and during which a daily curfew was imposed from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later reduced to start on 7:00 pm and end at 5:00 am starting from June 21, 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. 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, the curfew would end, government and private sector would return to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

The first phase included 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, in Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on July 9, 2020, and in Farwaniya on July 26, 2020.

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. The ministry is still expected to release regulations regarding the start of the 2020/2021 school year at foreign private schools. 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.

Hotlines

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

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

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

Medicine delivery

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

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852

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

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

Mental health assistance

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

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

Seattle protestors clash with police...

Continued from Page 1

Protesters slashed car tires and smashed trailer windows. Police in riot gear faced off against the protestors, some holding umbrellas against falling pellets of pepper spray. Late Saturday, Seattle Police said 45 people were arrested in connection with the demonstrations, which they designated a riot, according to the force's official Twitter account.

Police Chief Carmen Best implored people to "come in peace to the city", and castigated the demonstrations. "The rioters had no regard for the community's safety, for officers' safety or for the businesses and property that they destroyed," local media reported her as saying.

The latest spasm of violence came after police and federal agents fired tear gas and forcefully dispersed protestors further south in Portland early Saturday, also in anger over Trump's heavily-criticized surge of security forces. The city, the biggest in the state of Oregon, has seen nightly protests against racism and police brutality for nearly two months, initially sparked by Floyd's death.

Portland is also a stage for the highly controversial crackdown by federal agents ordered by Trump - one that is not supported by local officials, and which many say smacks of authoritarianism. Friday's demonstration was mainly peaceful, with crowds playing music and dancing, blowing soap bubbles and setting off fireworks. But it ended - like many before it - in a showdown between protestors and police, which escalated in a haze of tear gas and flashbang devices.

Portland police confirmed a man was stabbed, with the suspect "held down by protestors" before he was detained by officers and charged with assault, according to a statement. The victim was transported to hospital with a serious injury. Earlier, protestors who spoke to AFP complained of the federal agents in the city and voiced their support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

"I don't like what's happening down here, what Trump is doing," Mike Shikany, a 55-year-old aerospace engineer, said, adding he did not "want to get anywhere near the little green men", meaning the federal troops. Portland retiree Jean Mullen, 74, said that without pressure nothing would change. "It's time to become the country we always brag about being. And we can't brag anymore, about anything. We aren't first in anything and it's a terrible, terrible thing to see at the end of my life," she said. — AFP

Indian firms struggle to lure...

Continued from Page 1

Four months on, with lockdown measures eased, some workers have trickled back but more than 10,000 building sites are lying virtually abandoned due to severe labor shortages across the city.

"We are trying our best to bring back migrant

workers, even going to the extent of giving them air tickets, COVID-19 health insurance ... (and) weekly checkups by doctors," real estate developer Rajesh Prajapati said. "But it has not reaped any positive signs yet," he told AFP.

Property giant Hiranandani Group which - unusually - continued to pay its workers during lockdown, has had more success, but has still only managed to convince around 30 percent of its 4,500 workers to stay on site. "We looked after them, took care of their food, safety and sanitization and even had mobile cèches for kids," the group's billionaire co-founder Niranjan Hiranandani told AFP. — AFP

Passion for purple revives...

Continued from Page 1

chemistry, helped and encouraged me, but nobody knew the technique," Nourira said.

No historical documents clearly detail the production methods for the purple pigment, Drine said. "Maybe because the artisans did not want to divulge the secrets of their knowhow, or they were afraid to because the production of purple was directly associated with the emperors, who tolerated no rivalry," he said. The only clues for unearthing the techniques lie in archaeological sites and

artifacts in the Mediterranean, particularly in Tyre in southern Lebanon, and Meninx, on the coast of Tunisia's Djerba island. Phoenicians from Tyre set down the foundations of what would become the Carthaginian empire on the Tunisian coasts. Also known as Tyrian purple, the pigment is still highly valued today and is produced by just a handful of people around the world. They include a German painter and a Japanese enthusiast, each with their own secret techniques. Among the buyers are collectors, artists and researchers.

The dye can cost \$2,800 per gram from some European traders, and prices can reach up to \$4,000, Nourira said. He said he had produced a total of several dozen grams of the pure purple dye, which he sells internationally for more modest prices. Nourira said that when he sought help from other dye-makers, one told him bluntly, "it's not a cooking recipe to be passed around." — AFP

Local

Kuwait aviation authority launches app to assist travelers

Departing passengers must install 'Kuwait Mosafer' app as of Aug 1

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Saturday launched a new application to serve all passengers to and from Kuwait, coinciding with the airport commercial flights resumption starting next month. The application includes guidelines approved by the DGCA, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Interior. The new app, called 'Kuwait Mosafer,' makes Kuwait a leader among the region's airports in applying this technology on one platform, DGCA said. It also aims to help passengers meet travel requirements and facilitate new procedures to keep pace with COVID-19, reduce waiting periods and avoid congestion at the airport. The application was developed to achieve three main goals: protecting health of passengers, airport employees, as well as raising awareness of the new safety procedures. All passengers should register with the application available in English and Arabic at www.kuwait-mosafer.com and enter the required data on the flight details that will allow them to book appointments for the PCR test when needed.

The DGCA had announced a number of health restrictions for passengers traveling through Kuwait International Airport as commercial flights are set to resume on August 1, 2020. The regulations are as follows:

Departing Passengers:

- Must register in the 'Kuwait-Mosafer' app and submit the relevant barcode throughout the phases of travel.
- Must obtain a health certificate issued by laboratories approved by the Ministry of Health, confirming negative infection with the COVID-19 disease, if required, depending on the requirements of each country, together with adhering to the required period of its validity.
- Citizens must obtain health insurance for the period of travel, covering

Health Restrictions for Passengers From & To Kuwait International Airport

Departing Passengers

- Must register in the application (Kuwait – Mosafer) and submit the relevant barcode throughout the phases of travel.
- Must obtain health certificate issued by laboratories approved by the Ministry of Health, confirming negative infection with COVID-19 disease, if required, depending on the requirements of each country, together with adhering to the required period of its validity.
- Citizens must obtain health insurance for the period of travel, covering treatment of infection with COVID-19 virus.
- Must abide by the health requirements respective to wearing masks and gloves, using the sanitizers and adhering to physical-distancing.

Arriving Passengers

- Must register in the application (Shlonik) prior to boarding the aircraft.
- Must obtain approved health certificate (PCR), proving negative infection with COVID-19 disease, with 96-hours validity from the testing date.
- All arriving passengers will be subjected to home-quarantine for 14 days.
- Body temperature of all passengers will be checked prior to boarding the aircraft and upon arrival.
- A random (PCR) test will be conducted on 10% of the passengers of each flight upon arrival.
- Must abide by the health requirements respective to wearing masks and gloves, using the sanitizers and adhering to physical-distancing.

treatment of infection with the COVID-19 virus.

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DGCA sets passenger guidelines

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Travelling Soon?
Make sure you register with the DGCA's

Kuwait Mosafer App
kuwaitmosafer.com

Your official gateway to all Kuwait International Airport's passenger services.

At Home Services

- PCR test appointment
- Health check procedures
- Airport check-in appointments
- Get your digital boarding pass
- Purchase protective gear
- Book premium airport services

At Airport Services

- Priority services
- Proceed immediately to check-in counter
- Receive boarding notifications
- Baggage notifications & booking delivery service
- Get assistance or report issues

Anyone travelling in and out of Kuwait must register on this app. You are responsible for checking the Covid-19 testing and quarantine requirements for your destination country.

Some shipments cannot be delivered

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Some products ordered from abroad cannot be delivered to your doorstep. If you order banned items, food supplements, some skincare products, medicines, precious stones or jewelry, or other products that need approval of the health

ministry, the shipping company is unable to deliver the shipment to the client's address, who will be obliged to personally go to the customs department at the airport.

The health ministry, Public Authority for Industry and other public institutions have offices at the airport customs department. "For regular products that need special approval, the shipping company clerk can complete the procedures at the customs through the offices of these authorities and the client will receive the shipment. But some shipments include prohibited materials or unfamiliar items, and in this case the shipment gets held at

the customs," a customs inspector named Meshaal told Kuwait Times.

"The shipment will be held at the customs department for 40 days waiting for its owner to come and pick it. If they don't come, the package will be transferred to the customs warehouse to be either sold through auction or destroyed. The revenue from the sold items will cover the daily fees charged by the customs department for holding the shipment," he explained.

The auction is mostly held for larger items. "Usually, small personal parcels are damaged and not worth selling in an auction. The auction is held

on Wednesdays, and it's usually for large shipments, especially commercial ones that weigh 50 or 60 tons," Meshaal said.

About 90 percent of consumer products are damaged. "Mostly these items get spoiled or expire, such as food, skincare, etc. Also, if the goods are banned, such as counterfeits, they will most likely be destroyed. In some cases, they may be sent back to the country of origin - this is usually for Turkish products. If a small personal shipment includes fake branded items, it may be released," he added. Customs fees for personal shipments worth below KD 100 were recently waived.

News in brief

Kuwait reports 766 recoveries

KUWAIT: Some 766 people recovered from the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 54,373, Kuwaiti Ministry of Health said yesterday. The ministry added in a press statement that the new number was based on clinical tests, which proved that the patients were now virus-free.

Fourteen flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that 14 flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 2,440 passengers. They included eight flights to Egypt, three flights to the UAE, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Lebanon, and one flight to Bangladesh.

Curfew breakers

KUWAIT: Police arrested 14 people on Saturday for breaking the curfew, including 11 Kuwaitis, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. Seven of the arrests were made in the Capital Governorate, while five were made in Ahmadi and two in Hawally, the ministry explained.

E-learning portal

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training launched its portal for e-learning and technical support, as part of its efforts to adopt remote education. Director of the Information Technology Center Ali Hussein said that the portal includes several platforms that can be used by teaching and training staff members, as well as students of applied colleges and training institutes.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Farwaniya residents thankful after two months of isolation

Expats return to work after months of no pay



KUWAIT: Security barriers in Farwaniya were removed Saturday night as the area's isolation was lifted as of 5:00 am yesterday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Farwaniya, the last area under isolation, reopened yesterday after 57 days of lockdown. Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh had earlier endured nearly 100 days of lockdown after being identified by the ministry of health as having too many cases of COVID-19. Two more areas - Khaitan and Hawally - were only briefly isolated for around 20 days. The lockdowns were implemented by the Cabinet as part of measures to try to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The lifting of the lockdown was a relief, especially for businesses and expats who wanted to return to work after months of no work and no pay. "This is a beautiful gift to us, as we all want to start working again after four months without salaries. We want to work and return to normal life. This is not about me, but about my family's survival. We've had enough after months of sacrifices. Thank God I still have a job after more than four months of sitting idle at home," said Mark Ese, a Farwaniya resident. He works as a stor-

age supervisor in Shuwaikh Industrial Area - a 10-minute drive from Farwaniya.

Some people are thankful for the prolonged lockdown. "I am thankful for the lockdown - because of it, I was able to look for another source of income by buying and selling online and diversifying my portfolio through trading stocks. I also had some time to read and enhance my understanding, especially about vlogging, which is now the new trend which can help us survive," said Alex Salera, an engineer.

Ceejay Torres, a barista at a popular coffee chain in Kuwait, enjoyed the long break, although he was depressed after hearing the stories of many people in his neighborhood who were abandoned by their companies. "I am sad for them because they needed to rely on charity organizations for food. I am thankful to our company that didn't neglect us - they sent us food packs, besides paying our salary, though not full. But it helped a lot and their generosity amidst the pandemic is really worth mentioning," Torres said.

Mustafa, a Palestinian who lives with his family in



Farwaniya, was also thankful that everything is back to normal now. "I have lived most of my life in Kuwait and it was the first time I experienced the isolation of an area. I hope that it will not happen again. I am especially sad for small children who were unable to leave their homes for many months. I realized how precious freedom is," he said.

Kuwait Ports' chief elected as CEO of AASTMT

CAIRO: The Director General of Kuwait Ports Association (KPA) and President of the Arab Sea Ports Federation Sheikh Yousef Abdullah Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah won the CEO role of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT) on Saturday, in the elections held by the academy. AASTMT said in a press statement that this came at its general assembly meeting via video conferencing, with the participation of the Assistant Secretary General of the League of Arab States for Economic Affairs Ambassador Kamal Hassan Ali, and AASTMT's President Dr Ismail Abdel Ghaffar.

Sheikh Yousef Al-Sabah said, regarding his victory in the position, that they seek to push for maritime transport to the refineries of the world, promoting it to be the first in the developed countries. He dedicated this win to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Then he thanked AASTMT's representatives, appreciating all the participating countries that supported and voted for Kuwait in the elections.

The new executive council includes nine countries: Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Palestine, Mauritania, Libya and Sudan. AASTMT is an educational organization specialized in science, technology and maritime transport, affiliated with the League of Arab States that aims to teach research training and work, with multiple branches worldwide. —KUNA

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KUWAIT: An accident was reported between two half lorries at the Airport Road Saturday afternoon. One of the vehicles was heavily damaged by the accident, but no injuries to the drivers were reported. —Photo by Islam Al-Sharaa



KUWAIT: A medical team recently tested employees at the Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company's head office building through nasal-pharyngeal swabs, as part of the Ministry of Health's efforts to limit the spread of the COVID-19 disease.



40 years ago, Shah of Iran died in exile

'A concentration of death': Virus ravages South Africa care home

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PYONGYANG: Korean war veteran delegates of the Korean People's Army (KPA) attend the 6th National Conference of War Veterans on the occasion of 67th anniversary of what North Korea refers to as the 'people's victory in the great Fatherland Liberation War', at a hotel in Pyongyang. —AFP

Global coronavirus cases top 16 million

North Korea reports first suspected infection

SEOUL: North Korea declared its first suspected coronavirus case yesterday, becoming one of the last countries to do so as the number of people infected worldwide passed 16 million. The isolated, impoverished state had until now insisted it had not detected a single COVID-19 case—even as the pandemic swept the planet, overwhelming health systems and trashing the global economy. At least 645,000 people around the world have succumbed to the respiratory disease, with North Korean arch-rival the United States the worst-hit country by far. "The vicious virus could be said to have entered the country," leader Kim Jong Un said, according to the official KCNA news agency.

Authorities locked down the city of Kaesong, near the frontier with South Korea, as state media said a defector who left for the South three years ago had returned and was suspected to be infected with the coronavirus. But experts believe the contagion is likely to have already entered North Korea from neighboring China, where the new disease emerged late last year. The pandemic's spread is still accelerating, with more than five million cases declared since July—a third of the total number of cases since the catastrophe began.

Even in recent days there has been an alarming uptick in infections, including in

places that had appeared to have controlled their outbreaks. One of those was Australia, which yesterday suffered its deadliest day since the pandemic began, with 10 fatalities and a rise in new infections despite an intense lockdown effort. "These things change rapidly, but we have to say these numbers are far too high," said Daniel Andrews, premier of Victoria state, where the latest outbreak is centered.



COVID-19 leaves at least 645,000 dead

No fireworks

Around a quarter of the world's 16 million confirmed COVID-19 cases are in the United States, which recorded more than 68,000 new infections in the past 24 hours. After a drop in transmission rates in late spring, the country has seen a virus surge—particularly in California, Florida and Texas, which is also bracing for the first Atlantic hurricane of the year. Daily US fatalities have exceeded

1,000 for the past four days, rapidly increasing the country's death toll to more than 146,000.

"I'm still concerned that America doesn't take it as seriously as the rest of the world," said British golf star Lee Westwood, voicing his hesitation to travel there despite a new quarantine exemption for professional golfers. In Latin America and the Caribbean, which also count for a quarter of total cases, governments are not planning a return to normality any time soon. New Year's Eve celebrations on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro have been cancelled as Brazil grapples with a spiraling virus crisis. "There is no great reason to celebrate, with more than 80,000 deaths" from coronavirus in Brazil, an official told AFP.

Holiday woes

Meanwhile Europe has reported around three million infections—despite being largely open for summer holidays within the continent. However in a snap decision, Britain's government said passengers arriving from Spain will have to self-isolate for two weeks, after a surge in cases in the Mediterranean country, with health officials pointing to nightlife as a possible culprit.

The move, has reportedly caught out its Transport Minister Grant Shapps who is holidaying there. "Various gov-



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

ernment ministers would have known in advance there was a possibility of imposing a quarantine on holidaymakers returning from Spain," tweeted opposition MP Diane Abbot. "But apparently no-one bothered to tell @grantshapps," she joked. It marked another hit to Spain's tourism industry, which is desperately seeking a rebound after lockdowns and border closures pushed around 13 percent of bars, hotels and restaurants to permanently close.

It mirrors the fiscal pain wrought around the world by the pandemic, particularly in precarious economies

where livelihoods are fast crumbling. In India, for instance, millions of migrant workers who fled cities when COVID-19 hit say they are too scared to return. Asia's third largest economy has reported more than 1.3 million virus cases and is the third worst hit country behind the US and Brazil. "We are trying our best to bring back migrant workers, even going to the extent of giving them air tickets, COVID-19 health insurance ... (and) weekly check-ups by doctors," real estate developer Rajesh Prajapati said. "But it has not reaped any positive signs yet." — AFP

America divided two months after death of Floyd

WASHINGTON: One after another, statues recalling slavery in America keep coming down, and night after night demonstrators taunt police in a groundswell of anger over brutality against people of color. Two months after African American George Floyd died when a white policeman knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes, triggering a nationwide and global outcry for justice, the United States is being shaken by an anti-racism surge that, more and more, is dividing its political class.

The days of huge, boisterous nightly marches in cities from New York to Los Angeles may be over but things are still happening. Overnight Thursday, two statues of Christopher Columbus—for many a symbol of colonization and cruelty to native people—were taken down in Chicago. And that same night protesters in Portland, Oregon again clashed with police in a wave of unrest that is now nearly two months old.

With the presidential election 100 days away, this unsettled atmosphere is seen in diametrically opposed ways by the people on either side of it. For Democrats, taking down Confederate-era statues is a way to acknowledge a racist past and stop glorifying white men who played a part in the oppression of African and Native Americans. President Donald Trump, appealing to his white, working class base

as he seeks re-election with a strong law and order message, calls this practice an act of vandalism and an insult to the heritage of the American South.

As for the protests in Portland, Republicans welcome the administration's sending in federal agents to restore order disrupted by people they label as anarchists. Critics say these agents in military fatigues use excessive force and are just making the demonstrators more angry and violent. The death of Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 was condemned by politicians of all stripes. And as protesters filled the streets every night for weeks, both conservatives and liberals presented ideas for police reform.

But Trump quickly changed the debate to focus on violence committed on the sidelines of the largely peaceful marches. As calls mounted for defunding the police—redirecting resources away from them to people trained to deal with problems like substance abuse and domestic violence—Trump hammered away at Democrats and even his moderate election rival Joe Biden as symbols of a "radical left" bent on simply dismantling police departments altogether.

600 dead

Trump felt justified in toughening his rhetoric thanks to a rise in gun violence starting in early July in several large cities run by Democrats, and to send in federal agents to Portland and Chicago, even though local elected officials do not want those agents. His supporters mixed the two problems together—the wave of protests and the rise in gun violence.

"We had that terrible event in Minneapolis, but then we had this extreme

reaction that has demonized police and calls for the defunding of police departments," Attorney General Bill Barr said this week. "And what we have seen is a significant increase in violent crime in many cities. And this, this rise, is a direct result of the attack on the police forces and the weakening of police forces," he said. In "50 Days of Democrat Silence on Dangerous 'Defund the Police' Movement," there have been 600 killings in six cities run by Democrats, an association of Republican state attorneys general said Friday.

Thomas Abt, a specialist in urban violence at the Council on Criminal Justice, said the rise in homicides is in fact linked to the coronavirus pandemic because it "has placed the individuals who are the highest risk of violence under great pressure, because the coronavirus is disproportionately affecting the people who are disproportionately affected by violence." And while there is a tie between the rising gun violence and the unrest over police racism, it is "not for the reason that Trump says," Abt told the progressive news website Mother Jones.

Abt said the death of Floyd triggered a rise in black people's defiance of the police, although in cases of urban violence witnesses and victims of it were less likely to turn to law enforcement. "In addition, in certain cities we are seeing sudden and arbitrary pullbacks in policing activity," said Abt. In Atlanta, for instance, many officers called in sick for at least three days after two officers were charged including one who shot a fleeing black suspect in the back, killing him. This was called "blue flu" for the color of the police uniform. — AFP

Dark history of slavery traced through DNA

WASHINGTON: A new DNA study published Thursday sheds fresh light on the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, from the legacy of rape that can be seen in today's genetics to how disease likely decimated some groups forced to work in deadly conditions. For example, DNA from one African region may be under-represented in the US because so many slaves from there died of malaria on American plantations.

The grim results from a paper, which appeared in the American Journal of Human Genetics, compiled genetic data from 50,000 consenting research participants from both sides of the Atlantic. It cross-referenced these with detailed records from slave ships that transported 12.5 million men, women and children between 1515 and 1865. Some two million died on the journey. "We wanted to compare our genetic results to those actual shipping manifest to see how they agreed and how they disagreed," Steven Micheletti, a population geneticist at 23andMe, which recruited most of the participants, told AFP. "And in some cases, we see that they disagree, quite strikingly," he added.

The researchers found that while the genetic contributions from major African populations largely correspond

to what they expected based on historic records, there are major exceptions. For instance, most Americans of African descent have roots in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in line with the major slave route. But Nigerian ancestry was over-represented in African Americans in the US, probably because of the intra-continental slave trade which brought them from the Caribbean.

By contrast, there were fewer genetic connections between African Americans and the Senegambia region than would be expected given the number who disembarked on slave ships in North America. The probable reasons are grim. "Because Senegambians were commonly rice cultivators in Africa, they were often transported to rice plantations in the US," said Micheletti. "These plantations were often rampant with malaria and had high mortality rates, which may have led to the reduced genetic representation of Senegambia in African Americans today."

Government and slave-owner practices had an enormous impact on African genetics too. Despite the fact that more than 60 percent of enslaved people brought to the Americas were men, comparisons of genetics reveal a strong bias toward African female contributions in the modern gene pool of African heritage people across the region. Much of this can be attributed to the rape of enslaved African women by white men, and other forms of sexual exploitation, like the promise of freedom if they birthed enough children. — AFP

International

Why COVID-19 is killing diabetes patients at alarming rates in US

40% of people who died with COVID-19 had diabetes

NEW YORK: Devon Brumfield could hear her father gasping for breath on the phone. Darrell Cager Sr., 64, had diabetes. So his youngest daughter urged him to seek care. The next day, he collapsed and died in his New Orleans home. The daughter soon learned the cause: Acute respiratory distress from COVID-19. His death certificate noted diabetes as an underlying condition. Brumfield, who lives in Texas and also has type 2 diabetes, is "terrified" she could be next. "I'm thinking, Lord, this could happen to me," she said of her father's death in late March.

She has good reason to fear. As US outbreaks surge, a new government study shows that nearly 40% of people who have died with COVID-19 had diabetes. Among deaths of those under 65, half had the chronic condition. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analyzed more than 10,000 deaths in 15 states and New York City from February to May. Jonathan Wortham, a CDC epidemiologist who led the study, called the findings "extremely striking," with serious implications for those with diabetes and their loved ones.

A separate Reuters survey of states found a similarly high rate of diabetes among people dying from COVID-19 in 12 states and the District of Columbia. Ten states, including California, Arizona and Michigan, said they weren't yet reporting diabetes and other underlying conditions, and the rest did not respond - rendering an incomplete picture for policymakers and clinicians struggling to protect those most at-risk.

America's mortality rates from diabetes have been climbing since 2009 and exceed most other industrialized nations. Blacks and Latinos suffer from diabetes at higher rates than whites and have

disproportionately suffered from COVID-19. "Diabetes was already a slow-moving pandemic. Now COVID-19 has crashed through like a fast-moving wave," said Elbert Huang, a professor of medicine and director of the University of Chicago's



Blacks and Latinos suffer from diabetes at higher rates

Center for Chronic Disease Research and Policy.

Keeping diabetes under control - among the best defenses against COVID-19 - has become difficult as the pandemic disrupts medical care, exercise and healthy eating routines. The high price of insulin has also forced some people to keep working - risking virus exposure - to afford the essential medicine. And as the country grapples with an economic crisis, millions of Americans have lost their jobs and their employer-sponsored health insurance.

Much of this could have been anticipated and addressed with a more comprehensive, national response, said A. Enrique Caballero, a Harvard Medical School endocrinologist and diabetes researcher. Top health officials should have done more to emphasize the threat to people with diabetes and assuage their fears of hospital visits, he said, while also focusing more on helping patients

manage their condition at home. Policymakers had ample warning that COVID-19 posed a high risk for diabetes patients. In 2003, during the coronavirus outbreak known as SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, more than 20% of people who died had diabetes. In 2009, during the H1N1 flu pandemic, patients with diabetes faced triple the risk of hospitalization. Most recently in 2012, when the coronavirus Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS, emerged, one study found 60% of patients who entered intensive care or died had diabetes.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has unearthed previously unknown complications because it has lasted longer and infected many more people than earlier coronavirus epidemics, said Charles S. Dela Cruz, a Yale University physician-scientist and Director of the Center of Pulmonary Infection Research and Treatment.

Doctors warn that the coronavirus pandemic may indirectly lead to a spike in diabetes-related complications - more emergency-room visits, amputations, vision loss, kidney disease and dialysis. "My fear is we will see a tsunami of problems once this is over," said Andrew Boulton, president of the International Diabetes Federation and a medical professor at the University of Manchester in England.

'One big puzzle'

Researchers have scrambled for months to unravel the connections between diabetes and the coronavirus, uncovering an array of vulnerabilities. The virus targets the heart, lung and kidneys, organs already weakened in many diabetes patients. COVID-19 also kills more people who are elderly, obese or have high blood pressure, many of whom

also have diabetes, studies show. On the microscopic level, high glucose and lipid counts in diabetes patients can trigger a "cytokine storm," when the immune system overreacts, attacking the body. Damaged endothelial cells, which provide a protective lining in blood vessels, can lead to inflammation as white blood cells rush to attack the virus and may cause lethal clots to form, emerging research suggests. "It's all one big puzzle," said Yale's Dela Cruz. "It's all interrelated."

Many of their vulnerabilities can be traced to high blood sugar, which can weaken the immune system or damage vital organs. COVID-19 appears not only to thrive in a high-sugar environment but to exacerbate it. Recent evidence suggests the virus may trigger new cases of diabetes. David Thrasher, a pulmonologist in Montgomery, Alabama, said up to half of COVID-19 patients in his local hospital ICU have diabetes. "They are often my most challenging patients," he said, and the immune system response may be a big reason why. The pandemic has ripped through several southern states with some of the nation's highest diabetes rates. A Reuters examination of state data found that nearly 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths were people with diabetes in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and West Virginia. Much of this area lies within what the CDC calls the "diabetes belt." Alabama has the highest percentage of adults with diabetes at 13.2 percent, or more than 550,000 people, CDC data show. Diabetes patients accounted for 38 percent of the state's COVID-related deaths through June, officials said. Karen Landers, Alabama's assistant state health officer, said she is particularly heartbroken at the deaths of diabetes patients in their 30s and 40s. — Reuters

As Trump falters, Democrats aim to flip Texas in Nov

PLANO, Texas: Texas attorney Monica Haft voted for Donald Trump in 2016 and regretted it almost immediately. Now barely 100 days before a critical US presidential election, the lifelong Republican insists she won't repeat her mistake. She expects other disillusioned conservatives to join her in helping Democrat Joe Biden flip Texas - for decades a reliably Republican bastion - come November and end what she describes as a horror-show presidency.

"We have to get him out," Haft, 51, told AFP in this conservative city north of Dallas, citing Trump's failed response to the coronavirus crisis and his general lack of fitness for office. "I can't even imagine what would happen to our country after four more years of this." Americans who supported Trump, but may not do so again, hold the 2020 election in their hands.

Haft predicted there are enough "disgusted and embarrassed" Republicans like her to help a Democratic nominee win Texas for the first time since 1976. She has "taken some heat" from relatives and been unfriended on social media, but Haft sees a clear shift away from Trump. "I have several friends and colleagues who voted for him who now regret it, or are Republicans who didn't vote in the last election and now are going to vote for Joe Biden," she said.

Republicans for decades have enjoyed a baked-in advantage in Texas, where voter registration favors the GOP. But demographic changes are shifting the ground beneath Trump's feet. Never Trumper Claire Young, a teacher from conservative Bee Cave near Austin who voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016, said she sees fellow Republicans transitioning away from the president. "Trump's COVID response has really pissed a lot of people off that used to give Trump the benefit of the doubt," said Young, 43, adding that several of her relatives who backed Trump are now committed Biden voters.

'Persuasion game'

Winning Texas, the country's most populous state after California, would be a massive coup for Biden. The former vice president leads in national polling, and is also ahead in major swing states Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Polls show the rivals are neck and neck in The Lone Star State, a hotspot with over 4,500 coronavirus deaths and where voters have soured on Trump's pandemic response.

A Quinnipiac University Poll of Texas voters released Wednesday puts Biden at 45 support with Trump at 44 percent. While Biden has yet to commit to a full-on multi-million-dollar ground game in Texas, many Democrats, like strategist Jane Hamilton of Dallas, are pushing team Biden to do so. "Everything that is happening now is a perfect storm," said Hamilton, who was Biden's statewide director during the primaries. "If Texas goes blue, then frankly there's no path" for Trump's re-election, she added.

Experts see the state as a true battleground in 2020. "The numbers don't look good for Trump" on his pandemic response, said University of Houston political science professor Brandon Rottinghaus. He pointed to the state's sprawling suburbs, where Latino and women voters hold increasing sway. — AFP

Brazil COVID crisis big, complicated as country itself

BRASILIA: Brazil is being battered by the coronavirus crisis, but the damage is uneven across the sprawling South American country, where experts say chaotic policy-making has only made a complicated situation worse. Like the United States - the only country that has recorded more infections and deaths in the pandemic - Brazil is a continent-sized giant with myriad regions and sub-regions, held together by a federal system that can breed a confusing cacophony of national, state and local policies even at the best of times.

The national statistics on the new coronavirus - more than 2.3 million infections and 85,000 deaths - mask a varied panorama across the country of 212 million people. "It's very heterogeneous," said Marcelo Gomes, of leading public health research institute Fiocruz. Brazil's 27 states are all facing different epidemics. Even within states, "things can change a lot from one region to the next", he told AFP.

Nationwide, the curve of daily COVID-19 deaths

40 years ago, Shah of Iran died in exile

PARIS: On July 27, 1980, the former Shah of Iran died of cancer while in exile in Cairo, 17 months after being driven out by his country's Islamic Revolution. Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, his last remaining ally, laid on a state funeral for the former monarch. Here is an account, based on AFP reports.

Dumped by Iranians, America

The once-venerated Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had fled Iran in Jan 1979 in the face of an uprising on the streets, after a reign of 37 years in which he dreamt of making his country the fifth world power by 2000. His exile opened the way for the triumphant return from France on February 1, 1979, of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the establishment of an Islamic republic. At first courted then dumped by the Americans, he drifted between Morocco, the Bahamas, Mexico, the United States and Panama, before being given asylum on March 24, 1980, by his only real ally, Egyptian president Sadat.

Gravely ill on arrival, he was rushed by helicopter to a military hospital, where he had his spleen removed. He then had a long convalescence at Cairo's Kubbeh Palace, surrounded by his wife, Farah Diba, and four children. But his health deteriorated. Hours after the Shah's death, Sadat announced "with great sadness" in an address to the nation the loss "of a friend and a brother".

"Let's leave to history the task of judging Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as a leader, but we, in Muslim Egypt, show recognition and respect for him as a man and as a Muslim," he said. AFP reported: "Right up to the last moment, lying in the face of criticism, in the Muslim world and in his own country alike, the Egyptian head of state remained loyal to the one he continued to call 'the Shah'." The two men's staunch friendship dated back to the early 1970s. The Shah stood by Egypt during the Israeli-Arab war of 1973, sending medical aid and doctors, but especially by allowing Soviet planes to fly over Iran to supply Cairo with weapons and military equipment.



BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro waves as he takes a ride and has his motorcycle's engine overhaul after he announced he tested negative for COVID-19 more than two weeks after being diagnosed. — AFP

in Brazil has been in a long plateau since June, albeit in a very high range. At the state level, things are murkier. On average over the past seven days, four states posted declining daily death tolls, including once-devastated Amazonas in the north and Ceara in the northeast. Ten had rising numbers, including in the south and west-central regions, which had been less affected until recently. And 13 were basi-



CAIRO: A file photo shows Farah Diba (left), widow of the late Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and Jihan Sadat, widow of Egypt's former president Anwar Sadat, attending a memorial service marking the 29th anniversary of the Shah's death in Cairo's historic Al-Rifai Mosque. — AFP

Hostage crisis

In Tehran, the former monarch's death was announced in a laconic statement on national radio. But the Iranian headlines left no doubt the next day. "The vampire of the century is dead," said the Tehran Times. "The pharaoh is dead," Pars agency wrote. Jomhuri-e Eslami, the newspaper of the Islamic Republican Party, accused the United States of having killed the exiled monarch. Official reaction was limited to parliamentary speaker Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, who described the death as "a small problem, without importance".

Radical students who had seized 52 hostages at the US embassy in Tehran some nine months earlier, demanding the Shah's extradition, said they were not interested in getting his body back. They said the hostages, who went on to be held for 444 days, would only be released once the Shah's assets were returned.

The state funeral in Egypt took place on July 29. The anthem of imperial Iran was performed, and Sadat then led a funeral cortege transporting the coffin, draped with the Iranian flag and driven on a gun carriage drawn by six horses, from the presidential palace to the Al-Rifai mosque. Behind him followed members of the former imperial family, representatives of other deposed royal families, including Greece's King Constantine, and thousands of Egyptian soldiers. — AFP

cally stable, including Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the two hardest hit states. In some states, including Ceara and Rio de Janeiro, there is talk of a "second wave, even though the first wave never really tapered off," said Gomes.

Strategic mess

President Jair Bolsonaro has downplayed the pandemic, comparing the virus to a "little flu" and the reaction to it "hysteria". The far-right leader, who regularly defies social distancing guidelines, tested positive for the virus himself on July 7 after developing a fever and fatigue. On Saturday, after spending nearly three weeks in self-isolation at the presidential palace, he said he had tested negative for the virus - crediting his controversial use of the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine, whose efficacy against COVID-19 has not been proven.

Amid Bolsonaro's attacks on stay-at-home measures to contain the virus, the Supreme Court gave state and local authorities the final say in the matter. But states and municipalities have imposed an inelegant hodge-podge of quarantine measures, with little in the way of enforcement and a widespread lack of adherence. That has been followed, in some cases, by poorly designed policies to reopen the economy, which many experts have deemed premature. Brazilians are also split by huge socioeconomic and regional divides. — AFP

'A concentration of death': Virus ravages S Africa care home

JOHANNESBURG: "The sickness is around. We don't know when we're going to get it," says 79-year-old Giuseppe Tassi. "I knew a couple of people who went to hospital and never came back." Tassi is sitting in the lounge at the Casa Serena retirement home in the Johannesburg's district of Germiston. The empty chairs tell their own tale of death and absence. At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the facility - whose name means "serene home" in Italian - had 64 residents.

Nearly a quarter of them have since died. "We lost 14, some of whom have died of COVID, and others have died with COVID," said Mario Serra, the manager of the home, which caters to the Italian-South African community. Casa Serena is just one of 17 care facilities in Gauteng, South Africa's most populous province, that have been ravaged by COVID-19. Across the nation, more than 400,000 cases have been recorded, the highest in Africa, with at least 6,000 deaths.

Serra, who lives at the centre, also contracted coronavirus but recovered. He spoke bitterly about the unequal fight to save lives. As early as March, he imposed a rigid quarantine and other measures - but his defenses were breached by a stealthy and relentless foe. "We were expecting people to die, as every year during winter times, but this is a concentration of death," Serra said. "It is like walking in the sun and all of a sudden a big paw with tremendous nails scratches you from behind. You see the blood and you don't know what it was."

Most of the dedicated staff members have not left the facility since nationwide coronavirus lockdown started on March 27. But there is little they can do for residents stricken by fear, solitude and a sense of powerlessness. They ask, "Am I going to die?", "am I positive?", "am I negative?" - and you've got to answer," said Serra. The home, managed by an Italian community, includes the children of Italian World War II prisoners and migrants who came to South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s to seek their fortune. Italian culture echoes through the home, in the language and food and devotion to family. But visitors are only allowed under exceptional circumstances as the quarantine is still in force. — AFP

International

'Londongrad': Russia influence under the spotlight in Britain

UK hosting billions of pounds of suspicious wealth from Russia

LONDON: A long-awaited parliamentary report this week failed to confirm suspicions about Russian interference in British politics, including in the divisive 2016 Brexit referendum. But it laid out the extent to which wealthy Russians - some with close ties to President Vladimir Putin - have become an integral part of the highest ranks of British society. Anti-corruption campaigners have long alleged that Britain and its financial institutions were being used to launder dirty cash from around the world.

"The United Kingdom is hosting billions of pounds of suspicious wealth from Russia," said Ben Cowdock, an investigator at Transparency International UK. He told AFP £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) of suspicious Russian funds have been pumped into luxury property in London, leading it to be nicknamed "Londongrad". Pete Duncan, a Russia specialist at University College London, estimated that "hundreds of billions of pounds" have been reinvested from Moscow since the 1990s.

Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) said the current and previous governments had "actively avoided" digging deeper into the source of the money. It also hit out at huge donations to political parties, particularly Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives, and the use of PR and law firms to secure top-level access. "Russian influence in the UK is the 'new normal'," the ISC said in its report, published on Tuesday. "There are a lot of Russians with very close links to Putin who are well integrated into the UK business and social scene, and accepted because of their wealth."

The ISC named no names and came to no firm conclusions about alleged Russian interference in the Brexit vote or the Scottish independence refer-

endum two years earlier. But Cowdock said wealthy Russians were regular guests at political party fundraisers.

'Wilful amnesia'

London's role in suspicious trading of Russian cash gained public attention in a £10 billion scandal involving Deutsche Bank between 2011 and 2015. Cowdock noted Britain promised to crack down on



Russian influence in the UK is the 'new normal'

laundering in 2016, notably setting up a register of the real owners of luxury homes, which are often bought by shell companies. "That's something that could be brought in very quickly," he said.

Duncan called for British law enforcement organizations like the National Crime Agency, which investigates serious and organized crime, to get more resources to tackle oligarchs. Last year, Chris Bryant told the Guardian newspaper the Russian embassy wanted him removed as head of parliament's Russia group in 2009 because he was not pro-Kremlin enough. The Labour party MP accused the Tories of being reliant on Russian mon-



LONDON: In this file photo taken on Nov 8, 2018, a Brexit-themed billboard depicting Britain's former foreign secretary Boris Johnson waving Russian national flags reading "Thank you Boris" is seen in east London. — AFP

ey and of having "wilful amnesia" as they sought to reset relations with Russia. Former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele, who wrote a dossier on US President Donald Trump's alleged links to Russia, said the Kremlin had "a particular

interest in and seeming obsession with the UK". "The Russian elite has succeeded in establishing a powerful interest group/lobby in Britain through lavish expenditure and investment," he said in evidence to the ISC. — AFP

News in brief

Deadliest day in Australia

MELBOURNE: Australia has suffered its deadliest day from the coronavirus since the pandemic began, with authorities reporting ten fatalities yesterday and a rise in new infections despite an intensive lockdown effort. The country's COVID-19 death toll rose to 155 and the southeastern state of Victoria reported more than 450 new infections in the last 24 hours. A clearly concerned Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said 10 people aged between their 40s and 80s had died, of which seven deaths were linked to outbreaks in aged care facilities. It is the worst loss of life from the virus in Australia since the disease first emerged, according to a tally compiled by AFP. — AFP

24 Rohingya migrants drown

KUALA LUMPUR: A Rohingya migrant is feared to be the only survivor from a boat carrying at least two dozen asylum seekers that is believed to have run into difficulty off the Malaysian coast near Thailand, a coastguard official said yesterday. Mohamad Zawawi Abdullah, coastguard chief for the northern states of Kedah and Perlis, said the 27-year-old named Nor Hossain was detained by police after he swam to shore on the resort island of Langkawi. "Based on the information from the police, the illegal Rohingya migrant had jumped off the boat that had 24 other people and that he was the only one who managed to swim to the shore safely," Zawawi said. — AFP

Vietnam bus crash kills 13

HANOI: A high school reunion trip in Vietnam took a fatal turn yesterday when a bus carrying the alumni crashed and flipped over at a bend on the highway, killing more than a dozen passengers. The nearly 40 passengers on the bus were classmates from Dong Hoi High School who were travelling to visit the area in central Quang Binh province for the 30th anniversary of their graduation. But the driver lost control on a sharp turn on the highway, said state media. At least 13 people were killed, and many more injured. Images shared on news websites showed a bus on its side in a gutter by the asphalt road, with bystanders looking on as rescuers tended to the injured. — AFP

Tunisia minister named PM

TUNIS: Tunisia's interior minister Hichem Mechichi has been appointed to form the next government, the president's office said, amid political tensions among major parties in the North African country. The 46-year-old lawyer succeeds Elyes Fakhfakh, who resigned as prime minister earlier this month - but Mechichi was not one of the names proposed by the ruling political parties to President Kais Saied. In a statement following Saturday's announcement, Mechichi said he would "work to form a government that meets the expectations of all Tunisians". — AFP

Minister's holiday ruined

LONDON: Passengers arriving from Spain will have to self-isolate for two weeks, the UK government has said, in a move that has reportedly caught out its transport minister who is holidaying in the country. Britons returning from the popular destination must self-isolate, following a surge in coronavirus cases there, a UK government spokesman said Saturday. The snap move is a blow to Britons seeking some Mediterranean sun after months of lockdown at home - including Transport Minister Grant Shapps. — AFP

Kabila prowls the political sidelines

KINSHASA: Officially, he stepped down in Jan 2019, retiring after 18 years at the helm of the biggest country in sub-Saharan Africa. But nearly 18 months on, former president Joseph Kabila remains a powerful figure, wielding influence in the murky politics of the Democratic Republic of Congo through a network of followers and a forced coalition with his successor. "Kabila, come back quickly so we can restore order," his supporters chanted on Thursday as they marched in Kinshasa, where the coalition with backers of President Felix Tshisekedi is in trouble and heads are rolling.

Prime Minister Sylvestre Ilunga has publicly denounced a decision by Tshisekedi to replace two pillars of the former Kabila regime: the army's inspector general and the president of the Constitutional Court. Kabila handed the presidency to Tshisekedi after elections in December 2018, in the first peaceful transfer of power since independence from Belgium nearly 60 years earlier. Still only 49 despite his years at the top, Kabila lives on a farm at Kingakati, 80 km from the capital, surrounded by wildlife ranging from lions to antelopes.

In a zoo open to the public, Kabila takes selfies with visitors he sometimes bumps into on Sundays. The man who once ruled the sprawling DRC during a brutal regional war now goes out with just "two or three bodyguards", according to an aide. Low-key by nature, Kabila has made no political utterances and has avoided public appearances, even when meeting with Tshisekedi to try to ease the tensions in their uneasy cohabitation.

No information was released about their last meeting at the beginning of July. But he remains the driving force in his Common Front for Congo (FCC) political group - a veritable war machine that he set up before leaving office. In the same elections that brought Tshisekedi to power, the FCC won a commanding majority in parliament, forcing Tshisekedi's supporters into the role of junior partners in what has become a deeply troubled coalition.

Kabila placed the FCC leadership in the hands of his former chief of staff, Nehemie Mwilanya, who hails as he does from the Swahili-speaking east of the country. Mwilanya acknowledges that "the chief"

Biden's hometown: A mirror of his low-key White House bid

WILMINGTON: Unmarked Secret Service cars bar access to Joe Biden's house in a plush neighborhood of Wilmington, the US East Coast city that mirrors the look of his presidential campaign: quiet and low-key. None of the impeccably trimmed yards of the neighboring homes are studied with the small political placards that many Americans proudly plant to show whom they support during election season. It is an apt and symbolic absence, with 100 days until voting in a campaign marked by the 77-year-old Biden's subtle strategy of leaving his opponent Donald Trump to do much of the talking.

Only the heavy security deployed around the home at 1209 Barley Mill Road betrays that the Democratic former vice president has been leading his campaign from his basement since the COVID-19 pandemic threw the world into disarray. Many of his brief public appearances have been close to home, and Biden has opted not to hold any rallies as a precaution against the virus that is still surging across much of the United States. Demi Kollias remembers last having seen Biden in March at her eatery Claymont Steak Shop, a local institution where he is a regular.



Joseph Kabila

receives FCC officials on his ranch. "There are courtesy visits and there are visits to seek advice," he said. "He manages his political family on a day-to-day basis," a former presidential adviser told AFP.

'Balance of power'

The former head of state has never ruled out a return to the political stage. "In life as in politics, I exclude nothing," he told the foreign press in Dec 2018, just before his retirement. Kabila left office two years after his second and last constitutional term expired. He was under pressure from foreign partners of the DR Congo, including the United States and the European Union, as well as demonstrators.

Kabila's many foes, who have faced brutal repression, feared he would seize a third mandate by force, but elections took place after three postponements. Earlier this month, three street protests were called by a spectrum of political and social forces including Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). One of their grievances was the choice of a new election chief who has been accused of rigging elections in favor of Kabila.

Thursday's heated protest was launched after Tshisekedi sacked two strongmen of the former regime. Kabila supporters see their role as containing Tshisekedi's influence in the name of "a balance of power". Some argue that nothing stops him coming back. The next elections are due in 2023. "The constitution bans three consecutive terms, but it says nothing about a possible return after a gap of five years," a former adviser said. Kabila's right-hand man Mwilanya, a lawyer, is firmer still: "The constitutional rules are clear. They impose no restrictions on him per se." — AFP



WILMINGTON, Delaware: The Joseph R. Biden Jr. Aquatic Center is seen on July 21, 2020. — AFP

On that day, like he always did, the famously avuncular politician bantered with staff and even posed for pictures as he tucked into his cheesesteak sandwich. "He is very personal, very friendly, very pleasant, very nice. He would talk to anybody," Kollias told AFP, adding the inability to plunge into campaign crowds must be frustrating for him. "It's a very crazy situation, a very difficult time really," she added. Trump went ahead with a mass rally in Oklahoma, but the June event was dogged by an uneven performance by the Republican president, weak attendance and worries it was a vector to spread the virus.

Fears for Uighur culture as scholars vanish in crackdown

BEIJING: It has been almost two years since Bugra Arkin's father Aierken was abruptly snatched from his home in China's troubled Xinjiang region by national security agents. Aierken Yibulayin's publishing firm - one of the biggest in the region - translated thousands of books into Uighur before he was detained in October 2018. Arkin has not heard from him since. "My father had a strong impact on the Uighur publishing industry, and that made him a target of the Chinese government," said Arkin, who lives in California. "This is very unacceptable and our lives were literally destroyed."

He is not the only one. At least 435 Uighur intellectuals have been imprisoned or forcibly disappeared since April 2017, according to the Uyghur Human Rights Project. The rounding up of Uighur linguists, scholars and publishers is seen by overseas advocacy groups as part of a campaign by the Chinese Communist Party to erase the ethnic group's identity and culture and assimilate it into the dominant, Mandarin-speaking Han population.

Renowned Uighur linguist Alim Hasani was taken by authorities in August 2018 during a Beijing work trip, according to his son Ershat Alim. Alim believes that his father, a retired division head of the Xinjiang Ethnic Language Work Committee, was detained for his research, which aimed to standardize Uighur-Han translations. Hasani, who compiled several dictionaries, was a Communist Party member whose projects had previously been approved by the state and won awards. "When I first heard that my father was arrested, I never once thought that this could happen to him. He must have been very surprised as well," said Alim, who lives in France.

More than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim Turkic-speaking minorities have been held in re-education camps in Xinjiang following a spate of ethnic violence, according to rights groups. Chinese authorities describe the facilities as vocational education centers where Uighurs learn Mandarin and job skills to steer them away from extremism. — AFP

'Amtrak Joe'

The roughly 70,000 people of Wilmington know that in normal times, the best chance of spotting the man most refer to just as "Joe" is at the train station that bears his name. As Delaware's representative to the US Senate for nearly 40 years, he always preferred taking the train for the daily two-hour trip to Washington. The station was even where he announced his quickly aborted 1988 run at the presidency - the first of his three tries at the top office in the land. But the only trace there on a recent day of a man nicknamed "Amtrak Joe," for the US passenger train company, is the plaque at the station bearing his name.

"It's the oddest campaign I have ever seen," local Ray Saccomandi, 54, told AFP on a nearly deserted sidewalk on Wilmington's main commercial drag. "This campaign is done via Zoom and social media." He said he believes a major effort probably wasn't necessary locally given that Delaware, a tiny state with under a million residents, is a reliable supporter of Biden's Democratic Party. Yet Biden's subtle strategy has shown signs of success: the latest polls have him with a comfortable lead over Trump - though most polls did not favor the former reality TV star when he beat Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Another of Wilmington's civic sites to bear the name of the man Trump has attacked as "Sleepy Joe" is the Joseph R. Biden Jr. Aquatic Center, which is even adorned with the vice-presidential seal. It's an appropriate honor for Biden, who worked as a lifeguard at the pool in the primarily African-American area of Wilmington in his youth. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JULY 27, 2020

Uphill struggle of Amalfi's lemon growers

Italian lemon farmers feel like guarding human heritage

AMALFI, Italy: Squeezed by foreign competition and a lack of local labor, Italy's Amalfi lemon growers persevere in their grueling work on the steep terraces rising from the Mediterranean. "My father always tells me that we might not have blood in our veins but lemon juice," laughs sixth-generation lemon farmer Salvatore Aceto, 56.

"It could be true," he smiles, from beneath the rim of his straw hat. Salvatore and his brother Marco farm the land that their great-great-grandfather started to acquire in 1825 following in the footsteps of his own father. The farm has faced three "unprecedented" blows in the last eight months, Salvatore said, the last of which has been the devastating coronavirus pandemic.

Guarding 'human heritage'

Their father, Luigi, 85, also still works on the farm, which produces 50-70 tons of lemons a year, arriving at around 4 am or 5 am. He drives up the coast in a tiny 1960s Fiat 500, which his wife, an obstetrician, would use to help deliver the coast's babies.

The farm covers 13 hectares, of which 2.6 hectares are lemon trees. "Lemons are my life, they're in my heart," said Luigi, confessing with a cheeky smile that he himself was "conceived under a lemon tree".

Today, he feels like "the guardian of a piece of human heritage", which is farmed in much the same way as it has been done for centuries. "We have mules and donkeys to carry the harvest, as well as other types of donkey... us, we humans," jokes Salvatore.

"Here, everything is vertical. We work with our legs, shoulders, we're bruised, scratched... Some talk about 'heroic farming', but we're not heroes, just normal people," he said. Agriculture on steep terraces like these can also be found on the

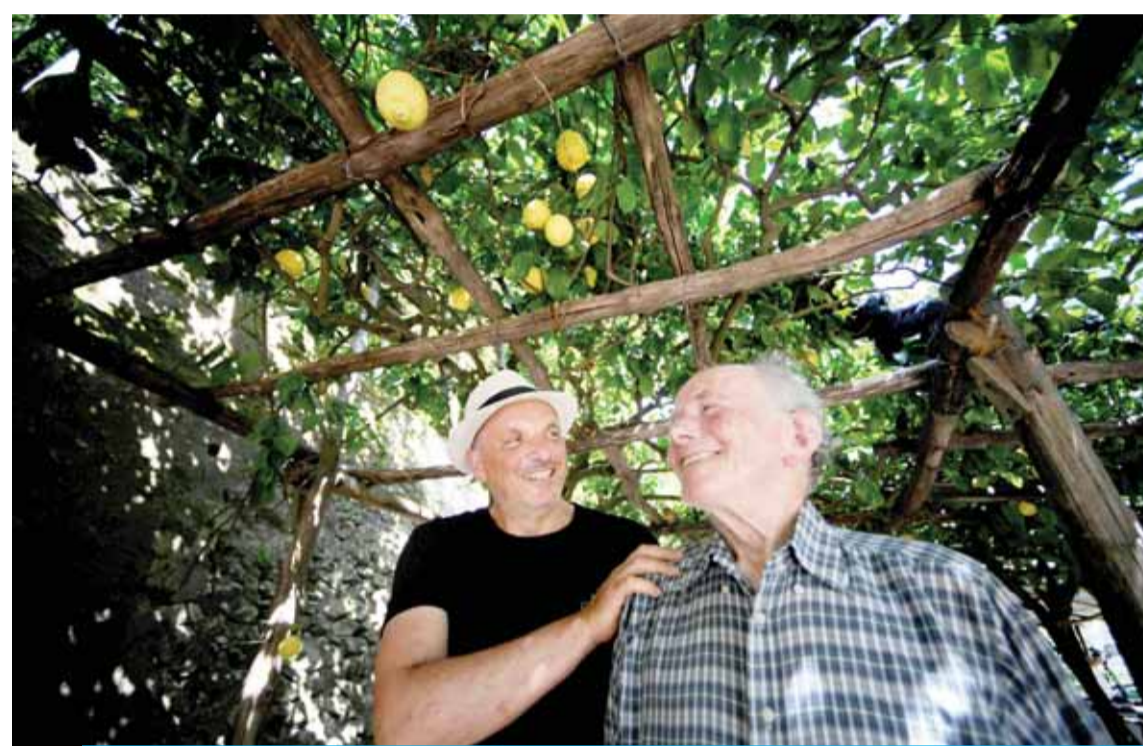


AMALFI: An employee peels lemons at the Limoncello factory, extension of the Aceto family lemon tree farm in Amalfi.

islands of Lampedusa and Procida, as well as in the northern Cinque Terre region. The job of climbing up and down hundreds of steps a day, carrying lemon-filled baskets weighing up to 60 kilos, is punishing, and not popular with young, local workers.

Who will cultivate the land?

"Until the '60s and '70s, the terraces of the Amalfi coast provided a livelihood for entire families," Salvatore said. "But the social and economic dynamic has changed. Today, 95 percent of the coast's economy is based on tourism. "Who can you get to cultivate the land?" he said, adding that a job as a waiter offers an easier life and doesn't involve having to climb 1,500-2,000 steps with 57 kilos on your back. "Nobody wants to make the sacrifice. Young people have practically all given up," he



AMALFI: Salvatore and Gigino Aceto pose in their lemon tree farm in Amalfi. —AFP photos

added. Like other farmers around here, he hires workers from Ukraine or Romania when necessary, praising the "priceless" job they do.

'Tragedy'

Salvatore says it's a "tragedy" to see so many local farmers give up in the face of the difficulties. "Seeing so many terraces abandoned is like a dagger in my heart," he added. He said they couldn't compete with the Argentine, Uruguayan, Moroccan, Spanish or Turkish markets, which are automated and have low growing costs.

"To cover our costs, we would have to ask over two euros a kilo (compared to 1.40-1.50 euros at the moment), that's not possible," he said. As a result, the decision was taken to open

up the precious terraces to "agriturismo" in 2013, allowing visitors to come, sample and buy homemade limoncello liqueur. No more than 100 people are allowed to visit a day to preserve the citrus trees and also the farm's way of life—although the family recognized that opening up to visitors was key to surviving.

Recent times have been hard. In December, the terraces collapsed because of heavy rain, which was "an economic disaster", Salvatore lamented. "Then the lemon harvest was bad because of the cold and wet weather, which affected the blossom," he added. Finally, he continued, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, halting tourism and slowing sales. "If we can survive this, we'll be invincible." —AFP



Cultivating on terraces: The grueling work

UK defends Spanish move; travellers angry

MADRID/LONDON: British foreign minister Dominic Raab yesterday stood by his government's abrupt decision to impose a two-week coronavirus quarantine on travellers returning from Spain, which has provoked anger and confusion among tourists. The move to take Spain off a safe-travel list was announced late on Saturday and took effect from midnight (2300 GMT on Saturday), leaving travellers with no time to dodge it or plan ahead.

Raab defended the imposition of the quarantine as a "real-time response" to a jump in Spanish coronavirus cases reported on Friday, the latest in a month-long resurgence in infections. "We can't make apologies...we must be able to take swift, decisive action," he said on Sky News.

The opposition Labour Party's health policy chief, Jonathan Ashworth, slammed Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government for its "frankly shambolic" handling of the measure, which has scuppered the plans of many would-be holidaymakers. The move will also hit hard at the Spanish tourism sector just as it is starting to recover from months of coronavirus lockdowns and travel restrictions.

At Madrid's Barajas airport Emily Harrison, who was taking a flight to London and faced the prospect of having to self-isolate for two weeks. "It's really bad because it's just come all of a sudden, it's



LONDON: British tourists returning to UK, check in their luggage, as Britain imposed a two-week quarantine on all travellers arriving from Spain, following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, at Gran Canaria Airport, on the island of Gran Canaria, Spain on Saturday. — Reuters

not given very much time to prepare so everyone is now panicking," said Harrison, from Essex. "We had a wedding to go to and we had plans to visit friends and family who we haven't seen in a very long time and now we are going to have to cancel all those plans, so it's really quiet upsetting."

Spain had been on a list of countries that the British government had said were safe for travellers to visit - meaning tourists returning home would not have to go into quarantine. But it has seen cases rise in the last few weeks, prompting most regions to impose rules for masks to be worn everywhere and, in several areas including Barcelona, calls for people to stay at home.

"We're quite frustrated by it to be honest, because it actually feels safer in Spain," British tourist Carolyne Lansell, said of the quarantine decision. She was flying to Ibiza from Madrid for a 10-day holiday before going home.

A Spanish Foreign Ministry spokes-

rate cut which matched the forecasts of analysts in a Reuters poll, said there was still scope for lower rates. She added that the bank would need to assess the impact of previous rate cuts.

"If the situation develops in line with the baseline forecast, the Bank of Russia will consider the necessity of further key rate reduction at its upcoming meetings," the central bank said in a statement.

The central bank also revised the rate range it considers to be neutral from a monetary policy point of view to 5-6 percent from 6-7 percent, sending a signal to investors in Russian bonds that their yields will fall. The bank also revised its economic forecasts.

After gross domestic product shrank by 9-10 percent in the second quarter, the central bank now expects the economy to con-

woman said on Saturday evening that Spain "respects decisions of the United Kingdom" and was in touch with the authorities there. Spain was one of the worst hit countries in Europe by the pandemic, with more than 290,000 cases and over 28,000 deaths. It imposed very strict lockdown measures to contain the spread, gradually easing them earlier in the summer.

'Absolute disaster'

The British decision follows steps by Norway on Friday to re-impose a 10-day quarantine requirement for people arriving from Spain, while France advised people not to travel to Spain's northeastern region of Catalonia. But a collapse of tourism from Britain would have far more of an impact on the economy in Spain, where tourism accounts for 12 percent of GDP. Britons made up more than 20 percent of foreign visitors to Spain last year, the largest group by nationality. — Reuters

tract by 4.5-5.5 percent this year before returning to growth in 2021. The central bank had previously forecast a GDP contraction of 4-6 percent this year.

Inflation, the central bank's key area of responsibility, is expected to end this year at 3.7-4.2 percent in 2020, stabilizing near its 4 percent target in 2021 and 2022. Market experts, many of whom had expected a 50-basis-point cut on Friday, now say the central bank will continue lowering rates later this year. Russia's largest lender Sberbank said it expects the central bank to cut the key rate by another 25 basis points to 4 percent at the next board meeting on Sept. 18.

Analysts from BNP Paribas said they expected two more 25-basis-point cuts this year as Friday's decision "maintained a dovish bias." — Reuters

Fed convenes as virus puts US recovery on edge

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve meets next week amid mixed signals on the health of the US economy, with some sectors bouncing back from the coronavirus-caused downturn and others struggling. Retail and new home sales were among those showing growth over the last two months but the Labor Department said last week new claims for unemployment benefits had increased week-on-week after months of declines.

Analysts say the mixed indicators won't be enough to get the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) to change course, particularly not after it cut the benchmark lending rate to 0-0.25 percent in March as the pandemic hit.

"We don't expect much to come out of this particular meeting," said Jonathan Millar, deputy chief US economist at Barclays Investment Bank. The two-day meeting beginning Tuesday comes as cases of coronavirus surge again, particularly in the southern and western United States, raising fears that the world's largest economy is set for a prolonged downturn.

The Fed has offered trillions of dollars of liquidity to keep markets moving amid surging unemployment and sharp drops in activity, while warning in its "beige book" survey released earlier this month of a "highly uncertain" outlook.

Ready to help

The central bankers will convene via teleconference as lawmakers in Washington negotiate over whether to extend parts of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act rescue package passed in March to blunt the pandemic-driven downturn. The most recent Labor Department report on weekly unemployment claims was seized on by both Democrats and Republicans as they negotiate over aid.

Democrats pointed to the uptick in new claims as proof aid to the jobless is needed, while Republicans said declines in the four-week moving average of claims and the insured unemployment rate were evidence people are returning to work. Fed officials have repeatedly called for more fiscal support to get the country through the downturn. Mickey Levy of Berenberg Capital Markets said Fed Chair Jerome Powell would likely remain vague in any comments about the economy's health at his press conference following the FOMC meeting.

"He would respond by saying the Fed is aware of the recent rise in the spreading of the pandemic and how high frequency data suggest it is adversely affecting economic activity—and that the Fed is prepared if necessary to provide more support to the economy," Levy said.

Nothing political

Though inflation jumped 0.6 percent in June as gas prices rose, there are few expectations of it picking up pace since COVID-19 is continuing to hamper demand, even with interest rates low and liquidity plentiful. Oxford Economics predicted the Fed may in fact link their movement of the lending rate to inflation.

"We believe the Fed is leaning towards stating it won't lift interest rates off the effective lower bound until inflation is sustainably at or above the 2 percent target," they said. "We now forecast that rate lift-off will not take place until mid-2024 as inflation struggles to reach 2 percent on a sustained basis and the unemployment rate lags improvement in the overall economy." In an interview with The Washington Post earlier this month, Dallas Federal Reserve President Robert Kaplan echoed a call from public health officials for people to wear masks to prevent transmission of the coronavirus.

Yet even as more and more businesses mandate face coverings, some Americans have rejected them as an infringement on personal freedom, meaning Powell is unlikely to weigh in on the issue, Millar said. "I'd be surprised to see them come and make a political statement," he said. —AFP

Russian CB cuts rate to record low of 4.25%

MOSCOW: Russia's central bank cut the key interest rate to a record low of 4.25 percent and said more cuts were possible, given low inflation and a shrinking economy.

Russia has cut rates four times in 2020 in an attempt to support an economy pummeled by the new coronavirus and related lockdowns, as well as by lower prices for oil, Russia's key export. Governor Elvira Nabiullina, presenting the

Business

Ukraine's snail farmers fear collapse over EU lockdowns

Ex-Soviet Ukraine's budding snail industry now boasts some 400 farms

VOYNIVKA, Ukraine: When the first snail farm in Ukraine opened five years ago, local villagers couldn't hide their curiosity. Residents of Voynivka south of the capital Kiev would peek over the fence of the old dairy farm where manager Yulia Koretska kept the snails to ask if people really ate them.

"They called me the snail mother," she laughed, surrounded by wooden boxes of snails in a green field under the blazing summer sun. Ex-Soviet Ukraine's budding snail industry now boasts some 400 farms



Virus restrictions throw food service industry into crisis

which have found eager buyers in European countries like Italy and Spain.

But sweeping coronavirus restrictions that plunged the global food service industry into an unprecedented crisis have threatened to wipe out the fledgling farms in one of Europe's poorest countries. Most snail farmers in Ukraine—where the delicacy has yet to catch on—rely heavily on sales to restaurants in Europe where economies are still struggling to recover to pre-pandemic levels after months-long lockdowns. "Last year everything was great. This year is the exact opposite," says Sergiy Danilevko who owns

the Ravlik-2016 farm in Voynivka and runs a warehouse in Spain.

Lost orders from European Union countries have already cost Danilevko 55,000 euros (\$63,748), he said, while snails meant for delivery are perishing in refrigerators.

Pre-virus boom

Yuliya Nastasivna, director of Ravlykova Khata farm in the Zhytomyr region west of Kiev, has also struggled to shift stock. She concedes that domestic sales will probably not make up for losses from Europe, since snails are too expensive for most Ukrainians and are still a culinary curiosity.

"If there is no export, then I'm afraid all farmers will collapse," she says. Nastasivna worries the outlook will be especially bleak if France and Spain go into lockdown again later in the year if there is a surge in infections. "We must survive," Koretska told AFP at the Voynivka farm. "We can't give up all this."

Before the pandemic, Ukraine's snail industry was booming. Producers last year delivered nearly 250 tons to Europe—up from just 93 in 2018—according to data from Ukraine's consumer watchdog.

A national association of producers said it expected farmers to yield 1,000 tons this year compared to 200-300 tons in 2019. Ukraine's snails are in such high demand because they are cheap and of good quality, says Nastasivna. The exports include garden snails—which Nastasivna prefers and wild snails that she says "smell of soil".

"Many foreigners don't even believe there are snail farms Ukraine. When they find out, they want to know more and more".



Yulia Koretska is surrounded by wooden boxes of snails in a green field under the blazing summer sun. — AFP

'Escargot, puffs, burgers'

The country's main competitor, Poland, has the added advantage of being part of the EU, she said, and Ukrainian farmers are working to woo European clients by undercutting prices by around 10 percent. The strategy saw her secure sales in France for the first time this year and before the pandemic she was in talks with buyers in Italy.

Danilevko and his business partner meanwhile was negotiating with Asian markets and developing snail-based products, like spreads and frozen products. "We have a very large assortment of escargot, pastries,

frozen fillets, fillets in jars," said the 43-year-old who also mentors other farmers.

Despite their popularity abroad, Ukrainian snails have yet to find favor at home where they are prohibitively expensive and too peculiar for most restaurant goers. But Anna Miller, manager of the Tres Francais restaurant in central Kiev, says her clients are venturing from their gastronomic comfort zones and snails are becoming more popular. "If you compare to eight years ago, then, of course, snails have become more familiar to our guests," she says. — AFP

Britain's COVID lending schemes risk widening divides

LONDON: In the northern English seaside resort of Blackpool, the family-run Elgin Hotel is preparing to reopen in August after four months' enforced closure. The Elgin had a profitable 2019, but bookings so far suggest that the 89-room hotel yards from the seafront will be less than half full this summer, as coronavirus concerns deter older holidaymakers and social distancing reduces capacity.

To help cover lost revenue, the hotel tried to secure an 800,000 pound (\$1.02 million) loan under the UK's taxpayer-backed Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS). Owner Nigel Seddon said he had applied to five different banks offering loans under the government scheme but he's still waiting to secure the cash he needs, after some lenders said they could not take on new customers or quoted costly terms he would struggle to afford. Seddon fears that if businesses like his cannot tap sufficient support then deprived towns like Blackpool could fall further behind London and the comparatively wealthy South East of England.

"People feel that all the money is being spent down in London," he said. Blackpool has struggled since its pre-war heyday when families flocked to see its glittering night-time "Illuminations" lightshow and relax on its long, sandy beach.

Several deprived areas of England - some of which voted for Brexit and switched from supporting the Labour Party to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives in last December's national election - are now being disproportionately hit economically by the coronavirus. Johnson has promised to "level up" regional towns and cities. Yet a report published this month by The CityUK, a lobby group, forecast 30 percent of total lending by UK banks by next March would be in the capital, followed by 15 percent in the South East, and 10 percent in the East of England, with all other regions below 10 percent.

Industry groups say Seddon's experience is common in some of Britain's less well-off regions.

Under CBILS launched in March and its sister initiative, the Bounce-Back Loan Scheme (BBLs), which followed in May, 45 billion pounds of loans have been granted to more than 1 million small and micro companies to help them survive the pandemic. But unlike in the United States, where the destination of around three quarters of the \$521 billion lent under its Paycheck Protection Program has been disclosed, neither the UK government nor finance industry has divulged exactly where the money has been lent.

"We're kind of flying blind at the moment ... we are concerned about regions potentially falling down," said Chris Wilford, the Confederation of British Industry's head of financial services policy, pointing to some regions' heavy dependence on ailing sectors like hospitality and manufacturing. "If one big business reduces its footprint or goes under in some of these towns, then that's devastating," he said.

Lack of transparency

The UK Treasury, which collates data on relief lending, declined a Freedom of Information request from Reuters for a regional breakdown on lending under the CBIL and BBL schemes.

It said it recognized a need for transparency regarding use of public funds but the regional data was supplied by the banks "in confidence" and disclosure of information "likely to prejudice the commercial interests of lenders would not be in the public interest." Trade body UK Finance also declined to provide the breakdown. UK Finance said it is working on supplying regional lending data for its membership in the next few weeks. Only one major lender, NatWest Group, shared a regional picture of relief lending, defining regions broadly. NatWest's data as of early June showed 27 percent of loans in the North, 24 percent in the Midlands & Eastern region and 22 percent in London & South East. The South West & Wales region and Scotland secured 18 percent and 8 percent respectively.



BLACKPOOL: A general view of the Elgin Hotel in Blackpool, Britain, is seen in this undated handout image. — Reuters

HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group and Barclays said regional data was either unavailable or problematic as each lender defined each region differently. The CBI's Wilford said the group had begun its own research into how the regions were faring through the COVID crisis, which would likely examine potential regional or sectoral disparities in lending and wider cash flow issues.

Business groups from the North East, South West and North West told Reuters they felt banks were running shy of lending in their areas, where economists predict far deeper economic slumps as a result of the pandemic. Forecasts published by Oxford Economics show economic output is expected to fall furthest in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, the North East, and Wales in a range of -6.6 percent and -5.7 percent in 2020 compared with 2019 projections.

London's output is seen falling by 4.1 percent. Even before the crisis, lending to small businesses in the North West, where the Elgin Hotel is based, fell 11 percent over the three years to December, compared to a 3 percent fall in London, according to the latest available data from UK Finance. Economic growth in the region was also outstripped by London by three to one, at 10 percent to 3 percent, over the three years to September, latest Office for National Statistics' data shows.

Britain has struggled for decades to find ways of fuelling regional growth outside London. The government already spends more than it generates in taxes in every part of Britain apart from London, the South East and the East, according to a Reuters analysis of public spending data.

Can't borrow, wont borrow

Naresh Aggarwal, associate director, policy & technical at the Association of British Treasurers, said any regional lending bias was unlikely to be deliberate but a consequence of banks' reluctance to lend to certain businesses, perhaps due to excessive exposure, which could in turn have a geographic bias.

Others cited poorer banking relationships and a lack of trust felt by borrowers towards banks, particularly since lenders had slashed regional branch networks as part of cost cutting measures since the 2008/09 financial crisis. "It still feels like there's an institutional bias against places like Cornwall when it comes to CBILS," said Kim Conchie, chief executive of the chamber of commerce in Cornwall, one of the poorest counties in England. Flagging the battle faced by many businesses to secure relief loans above 50,000 pounds, many cash-strapped firms had opted to apply for more modest BBL support instead, he said. BBL losses are covered 100 percent by the taxpayer and applications involve fewer affordability checks than CBILS loans, where banks remain 20 percent exposed to defaults.

But some of these borrowers would likely need fresh aid soon, as other government relief measures such as the Job Retention Scheme - known as 'furlough' - taper off and deferred rents and other taxes fall due this autumn. A survey by the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) found 65 percent of its members had accessed the government's furlough scheme, yet more than two thirds had not sought a state-backed loan. "For the banks, it feels like they want businesses - many of whom are in a short-term crisis - to prove their ability to survive over the next five years before they will help," said Jonathan Walker, the NECC's assistant director of Policy.— Reuters

ALSAYER committed to 'green facility' strategy

KUWAIT: As part of Group's strategic focus on environment friendly and energy efficient business practices, Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons is continuing to invest in clean and renewable energy technology.

Green building specifications

Renewable and eco-friendly measures adopted by the group for Toyota sales, service and parts operations include:

- Light-colored fire-rated aluminum panels for the external walls,
- Solar power comprised of the best components and advanced technology,
- High-performance large glass facades for natural daylight,
- Efficient heat insulation for the external walls and the upper roofs for effective air conditioning system,
- Latest LED light fittings,
- Photocell water mixers,
- which are available at first automotive center at Aswaaq Al-Qurain, Toyota showrooms at Al-Jahra, Mega Toyota Delivery Center in Ardiya, recently opened multi-level service center in Fahaheel as well as at parts distribution center in Subhan.

Optimize power consumption

The total electrical load that is generated daily



from all the locations is 6,500 kilowatts per hour and the annual energy yield is 2,445 megawatt per hour.

Environment friendly measures in the building at Ardiya features a two-tunnel automated car wash technology from Germany which incorporates water recycling (designed and built locally) reverse osmosis system reducing up environmental impact. With this technology up to 80 percent of the water used is recycled and reused.

State-of-the-art Toyota's Fahaheel Service Center also features advanced energy efficient equipment such as:

- Steam wash machines for better washing quality with minimum water consumption, estimated efficiency of 50 liters of water to wash 50 cars,
- Aqua vehicle lifters - water and air powered vehicle lifters, with zero electricity consumption,
- Oil water separator for safe discharge of wastewater,
- Concealed garage furniture design ensuring safety of both customers and staff.

Toyota Parts Division recently changed to maintenance free batteries which does not require filling of battery acid before dispatch to the branches. This initiative enhances safety, air quality and overall internal environment of the warehouse.

ALSAYER has installed solar power (PV Panels) on grid system in the following locations:

Location	Capacity
New car showroom At Jahra	100 KW
New Car Showroom at Aswaaq Al Qurain	100 KW
Toyota Service Center at Fahaheel	100 KW

To further enhance Mega Delivery Center, multi-level solar panel installation with a capacity of 1000 KW, is in progress which provides safe roof parking for up to 250 cars.

HSBC denies 'fabricating evidence' on Huawei

BEIJING: London-based HSBC bank has denied Chinese media reports that it had "framed" telecom giant Huawei or "fabricated evidence" that led to the arrest of a top company official. Washington's investigations into Huawei-for allegedly violating US sanctions on Iran started before the bank's involvement with the company in late 2016, the lender said Saturday in its first public comments on Huawei's legal battle in North America.

"HSBC has no malice against Huawei, nor has it framed Huawei," the bank said in a statement posted on the Chinese messaging app WeChat. "HSBC has not fabricated evidence or concealed facts, nor will it distort facts or harm any customers for our own benefit."

The HSBC statement comes a day after Chinese state media, including the communist party mouthpiece People's Daily, published reports accusing HSBC of lying about Huawei during an investigation by the US department of justice. The probe led to Canada arresting Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou in December 2018. China's internet censors blocked access to HSBC's statement within hours of publication, without offering an explanation.—AFP

Meng, the daughter of Huawei's founder, is under house arrest in Vancouver, Canada, fighting extradition to the United States. Washington says Meng had concealed Huawei's alleged dealing with Iran from lenders including HSBC. Meng's lawyers last week said HSBC was well aware of Huawei's activities in Iran, but claimed ignorance to dodge further US punishment. — AFP

Nordics to flirt with record recession in 2020

STOCKHOLM: Denmark, Norway and Sweden face among their worst economic downturns on record this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but will largely recover the lost ground in 2021, according to a Reuters poll of economists. The economic hit looks slightly worse than was expected in an April poll, with much of the region on course to see the biggest contraction in a single year since World War Two. The region's export-orientated economies are built on trade, and major exporters like truckmaker AB Volvo, shipping giant Maersk and oil company Equinor have been hamstrung by the pandemic, which closed businesses and disrupted global supply chains.

Sweden and Norway's gross domestic product is likely to contract by 5.0 percent and 4.5 percent respectively in 2020, according to median predictions in the July 21-23 poll, the biggest drop since World War Two. Denmark's economy is expected to shrink by 4.3 percent, its worst contraction since the financial crisis in 2009. Governments and central banks have pumped money into their economies in a bid to fight the crippling effect of the pandemic. Norway cut its key interest rate to a record low in May, while Sweden's Riksbank has vastly expanded bond-buying schemes and kept its key rate at zero. Yet a rapid turnaround is forecast for 2021, better so than expected in an April poll, with percentage growth rates almost matching this year's losses as restrictions are lifted and the effects of fiscal stimulus kick in.—Reuters

Rising virus cases dampen US economic recovery outlook

US dollar incurs heavy losses amid pivotal shift from FX market

KUWAIT: The economic calendar last week was exceptionally light, in spite of it, there was a pivotal shift from the FX market. Risk taking is back with the US dollar incurring heavy losses across the board. Positive news flow for a vaccine, strengthening of EU foundations and spiking daily Corona virus cases in America paved the way for the pivotal shift. The United States is still struggling to contain new infections and deaths from COVID-19, therefore a negative impact on the US economic recovery in the coming months is being factored in. In addition, US states will stop paying the extra \$600 unemployment benefits that is bound to expire this month, while unemployment claims rose for the first time in nearly four months. The net result has been a sharp depreciation for the US dollar index to the lowest since September 2018. The index is currently trading at 94.692 and is 8.05 percent lower from this year high of 102.992.

According to the CARES act, July 31 is the termination date for extra benefits. However, all states will stop paying after July 25 or 26 due to the administrative calendar, according to CNBC. Congressional Republicans and Trump's administration have agreed on a \$1 trillion stimulus relief package, but are facing strong opposition by Democrats in Congress. Concluding the stimulus legislation was already problematic since the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives had passed a \$3tn bill, and unlikely to accept a far smaller package. Once unemployment benefits expire, the pressure on the government to cut a deal will increase exponentially as the risk of a slowdown intensifies. As a result, the US dollar could continue its downward momentum till a deal is approved in Congress.

Labor market uncertainty

US citizens demanding unemployment benefits increased for the first time in nearly 4 months and also revealed that almost a total of 32 million individuals were collecting unemployment claims. The rise of claims from 1.3 million to 1.4 million, suggests that the continuous labor market recovery in the past months has come to a halt. At the same time, the entire number of COVID-19 cases surpassed 4 million in the US, elevating fears of further jobs cuts as businesses may close down.

Signs of promise for a vaccine

The first human trial by AstraZeneca and Oxford university for a COVID-19 vaccine showed signs of promise. The results released on last week revealed that the experimental vaccine was safe and produced an immune response in early-stage clinical trials. The aforementioned vaccine called AZD1222, has been labeled by the WHO's chief scientist as the leading candidate in a global race to halt the Covid-19 pandemic. However, Sarah Gilbert, Professor of Vaccinology at the University of Oxford stated that "We still do not know how strong an immune response we need to provoke to effectively protect against SARS-CoV-2 infection and researchers needed to learn more about Covid-19." Late stage trials have begun with 1,077 healthy adults aged 18 to 55 years with no history of Covid-19. Overall, the positive results have raised some hopes for a vaccine by year end and equity markets globally rallied as the news reached markets.

Fiscal deal brings EU nations more closer

In the FX sphere, riskier currencies took charge with heavy gains versus the US dollar. On a weekly basis, the Australian dollar gained as much as 2.58 percent in value and reached the highest level in 15 months at 0.7182. The New Zealand currency climbed to a six-month peak and the Canadian dollar advanced to its strongest level in six weeks. However, the dollar's weakness was not only against riskier currencies. The safe-havens JPY and CHF also gained significantly against the greenback, despite recent optimism in markets. The rise of safe-haven currencies versus the USD indicates dollar weakness across the board, which has not been the case for quite a while. The USD/CHF pair depreciated to 0.9201, the lowest level in more than 4 months.

EU fiscal deal

European leaders took a step of unity last week after agreeing on a fiscal rescue package worth 750 billion euros together with a 7-year budget amounting 1.074 trillion euros. The conclusion of the deal brings the EU nations closer to each other as financial burdens will be shared by agreeing to borrow and spend together to save the economy out of a recession. In details, the European Commission will raise the funds from capital markets then disburse

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.1408	1.1658	1.1400	1.1654	1.1455	1.1860	1.1677
GBP	1.2563	1.2803	1.2516	1.2789	1.2595	1.2990	1.2795
JPY	107.09	107.52	105.66	106.12	104.20	108.20	106.00
CHF	0.9399	0.9410	0.9201	0.9206	0.9005	0.9410	0.9182

390 billion in grants and 360 billion in cheap loans to EU countries most affected by the virus.

The euro continues its dominant performance in the FX market as the outlook for eurozone economies brightened drastically. Market indicators measuring eurozone break-up risk have diminished drastically last week, since EU fiscal deal came to fruition. The spread between Italian five-year bond yields and credit default swaps has lessened by around 100 basis points from April levels. The wider the gap between the aforementioned contracts, suggest investors perceive the Italian bond as riskier. Italy's 10-year bond yield spread over Germany's 10-year narrowed around 70 basis points from May, when the recovery fund plan was unveiled. Moreover, Spanish and Portuguese spreads are 15 to 20 basis points slimmer since the idea of a fiscal plan emerged. Overall, financial markets perceive that insurance policies for Italian bonds is less needed and EU leaders showed unprecedented solidarity, which should keep any anti-EU sentiment at bay for now. The EUR/USD appreciated to 1.1658 last week, the highest level since September 2018. Since the start of the month, the euro has gained as much as 425 basis points against the buck.

Brexit deadlock

The Brexit saga lingers on as Chief negotiators on both sides fail to agree on two key issues. EU's representative Michel Barnier, stated "by its current refusal to commit to conditions of open and fair competition and to a balanced agreement on fisheries, the UK makes a trade agreement at this point unlikely." On the other side, David frost, UK's top negotiator mentioned that the UK must "face the possibility" that it may not agree a deal on its future relationship with the EU by the end of this year. The deadline for

the transition period is December 31st, and the deadline for extending the transition period has already surpassed. Only five months remain before the UK's transition period draws to a close and significant changes will take effect on 1 January 2021 whether or not a trade deal is agreed. Free movement of individuals will end and UK businesses trading with the EU will have to follow new rules.

Chinese yuan fails to gain on dollar

The US dollar continues to trade lower against most currencies, however the Chinese yuan failed to take advantage of the dollar's weakness as tension between China and the west resurface. Last week, the US ordered the shutting down of China's consulate in Houston amid accusations of spying. US claims two Chinese hackers were seeking out American businesses working on virus research and were stealing information from companies around the globe for profit on behalf of the Chinese government. China immediately responded to the US action by stating the order was an "unprecedented escalation" by Washington and was considering the closure of the US consulate in Wuhan. Mounting tensions between China and the US are likely to remain a downside risk for the Chinese currency even with a weak dollar. The broader market fall-out has been restricted so far as investors have gotten used to the rising tensions in recent years. The phase one US-China trade deal remains intact for now which helps to limit the fallout. The USD/CNY pair rose to a 1.5-month high of 7.0232 and the dollar gained 0.34 percent last week over the yuan.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30655.

ABK reopens all its branches to serve clients

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced yesterday the reopening of all branches, as well as providing a new 'drive through ATM service' in Hawally. In addition, ABK's ITM services are also now fully operational at Marina Mall, 89 Mall, and Jazeera Terminal. Reopening all branches in the current period, when use of digital transactions and e-services are on the rise, demonstrates the bank's commitment to service continuity and supporting clients in conducting their day-to-day banking needs during today's "new normal" era.

Branches are open from 8:30am to 1:00pm, except for Al-Bahar Center which operates from 10 am until 2 pm. All branches follow rigid health and safety guidelines. Employees will continue to conduct temperature screening via non-contact thermometers, wear masks and gloves, practice social distancing, and enforce the social distancing queue markings for customers to ensure their safety.

Despite reopening the branches, the bank urges its customers to continue taking advantage of the virtual channels that are available 24/7. Through ABK's eahli Online and Mobile banking, customers can enjoy digital



services like ABK Pay, Global View and ABK SecurePay, and make remote transactions including online payments, applying for a loan or Credit Card, opening a fixed deposit account, or requesting a new cheque book. Furthermore, the bank offers a home delivery service for new or renewed ABK credit and debit cards to limit branch visits during this period.

ABK's progressive response and efforts to provide contactless experiences and increased branch locations, highlights the bank's readiness scale. Its smart investment in technology, both digitally and remotely for physical locations including branches and ITM kiosks, made it possible to pivot and adapt more quickly and efficiently.

AUB announces winners of first and 2nd draws

KUWAIT: As part of its innovative banking initiatives, Ahli United Bank (AUB) continued "Al-Hassad Characters" competition, which is the first of its kind in Kuwait in terms of uniqueness and suspense, by announcing the first and second winners in this campaign.

Last Thursday, AUB held the second draw in "Al-Hassad Characters" campaign. The prize of this draw totaling KD 7800 went to the winner Sabika Abdullah who correctly calculated the balance in the account of "Hamad". Hamad was the second of the four characters in the campaign.

During the same day, AUB launched the third character "Rami" competition, while the draw and winner announcement will be done after Eid Al-Adha. AUB held the first draw "Al-Hassad Characters" campaign last week for a prize totaling KD 7300 and announced the winner Seif Abdul Nasser who gave the correct balance in the account of "Auntie Ghanima", the first of the four characters in the campaign. On this occasion, Faten Al-Tameemi, Head of Marketing & Product Development at AUB expressed congratulations to the winners in the first and second draws. She affirmed that every participant will see himself/herself in one of these four characters, and by solving the exciting puzzle, they will learn more about the features of Al-Hassad Islamic Account, which continues to achieve success as the first Islamic prize account known as the Best Prize Draws Account in Kuwait.

All individuals in Kuwait can take part in "Al-Hassad Characters" competition and receive a chance to win, as the competition is not limited to only the customers of Al-Hassad Account or AUB Clients.

The idea of the campaign is to present four puzzles, each of which is about a different character that has Al-Hassad Islamic Account with AUB. The answer to the puzzle is to figure out the balance in the account of each character that will be presented successively. Each character will be presented for a week or more. A demo video will also be posted about the story of each character, their aspiration and ambitions. Each video contains hints that help the participants solve the puzzle, in addition to several clues through social media platforms that will help the participants solve the puzzle. The correct answers will be collected and a draw will be made to select the winner who will win the amount in character's account. Each participant is qualified to submit only one answer for each character.



Faten Al-Tameemi

ABK congratulates winners of salary transfer draw

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the names of 2 winners for the month of July for the "Transfer your Salary and Find Reasons to Smile" monthly draw campaign, held on 20 July 2020, under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The lucky winners who each receive the equivalent of their monthly salaries are: Pariyarth Krishna Dasan and Sudhirchandra Parekh

The next draw will be on the 20th August, with the last draw taking place on the 10th December 2020. To be eligible to enter the draw, customers must have their salaries transferred to the bank at least one month prior to the draw date. The draw is open to both Kuwaiti and expatriate customers who hold Elite, Prestige or Al-Raed Salary Transfer Accounts. In addition to the draw, the salary campaign offers ABK salary account customers a range of exceptional rewards. Kuwaiti salary account holders will receive cash gifts up to KD 1,000 provided they transfer a salary equivalent to/or higher than KD 500. Moreover, Kuwaiti customers are eligible for an interest-free loan of up to KD 10,000 and expatriates up to KD 5,000. These loans are subject to ABK's terms and conditions, as well as the Central Bank of Kuwait's regulations and policies.

Couch potatoes snap up robot vacuums, PB&J in pandemic

NEW YORK: Consumers sticking close to home as COVID-19 cases spike around the world are reaching for more pantry staples like mayonnaise and peanut butter and are buying Roomba robot vacuum cleaners and computers.

As companies report quarterly earnings and look to the second half of the year, pandemic winners and losers are becoming more apparent. Companies that sell electronics, comfort food and other products for the home continue to benefit from quarantines and lockdowns. "Being at home - or at least out of their normal routines - the majority of the day, consumers are embracing technologies that enhance their at-home lifestyle, whether through entertainment, or assistance with chores around the house," said Daniel Binder, partner at Columbus Consulting, a firm that advises on the retail sector.

This week, electronics retailer Best Buy Co Inc said its online sales jumped more than three-fold in the current quarter through July 18, while overall sales rose about 15 percent. And Roomba maker iRobot Corp flagged meaningful growth in demand for its robotic vacuums that can cost \$800.

Roombas, which can speak more than a dozen languages including Chinese, automatically zip around carpets and floors sucking up crumbs, dirt and pet hair. Keeping a clean home has taken on greater prominence in the pandemic. Colin Angle, chief executive of iRobot, said in the company's earnings release on Tuesday. Shares of Best Buy, the Minneapolis-based retailer, rose to a record high of \$99.42 on Wednesday, after the company reported robust sales of computers, tablets and appliances to homebound consumers and students. Almost all its stores had reopened to shoppers as of Wednesday.

"People see getting a Roomba to get their houses cleaner or upgrading to the latest iPhone as a means of getting back some sense of control in their lives," said Dave Marcotte, senior vice president, Insights, at retail consulting and analytics company, Kantar.

UK-based home improvement retailer Kingfisher Plc on Wednesday reported exceptionally strong demand for DIY and gardening products. Lockdowns drove a 21.6 percent jump in second-quarter same-store sales.—Reuters

Classifieds

Monday, July 27, 2020

Kuwait Times
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

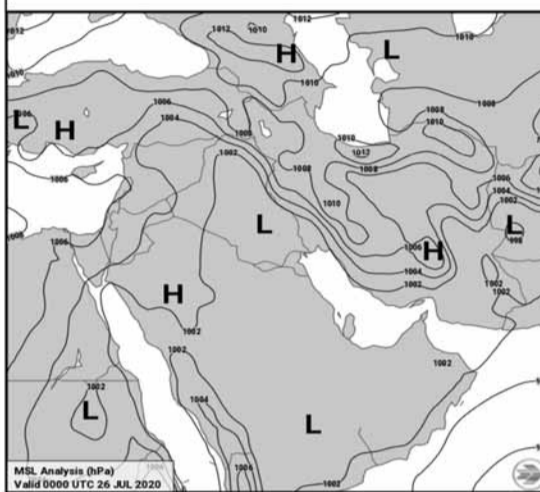
BY DAY: Hot and Humid specially over coastal areas with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Hot to rather hot and Humid specially over coastal areas with light to moderate south easterly wind to south westerly wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas and

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	43 °C	33 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	45 °C	32 °C
ABDALY	46 °C	31 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	47 °C	32 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	39 °C	32 °C
SALMIYAH	39 °C	33 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	41 °C	31 °C
WAFRA	45 °C	31 °C
SALMY	48 °C	32 °C

SFC. CHART 26/07/2020 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	07/27	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas and some scattered clouds will appear	49 °C	34 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 35 km/h
Tuesday	07/28	Hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas and some scattered clouds will appear	46 °C	33 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 35 km/h
Wednesday	07/29	Hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas	46 °C	32 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 32 km/h
Thursday	07/30	Very hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas	50 °C	35 °C	NW-SE	08 - 32 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:34
Sunrise	05:04
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	15:30
Sunset	18:44
Isha	20:12

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	43 °C
MIN. Temp.	34 °C
MAX. RH	81 %
MIN. RH	28 %
MAX. Wind	SE 43 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Saji Yohannan**, Indian Passport No. S0582077, have changed my given name as Saji and surname as Yohannan for all purposes henceforth. 24.07.2020.

I, **Simi Saji Yohannan**, Indian Passport No. N8641775, have changed my given name as Simi Saji and surname as Yohannan for all purposes henceforth. 24.07.2020.

I, **Saji Yohannan**, Indian Passport No. S0582077, have changed my daughter's name Kezia Saji Yohannan, Indian Passport No. S4690175, given name as Kezia Saji and surname as Yohannan for all purposes henceforth. 24.07.2020.


I, **Saji Yohannan**, Indian Passport No. S0582077, have changed my daughter's name Sharon Saji Yohannan, Indian Passport No. S4690176, given name as Sharon Saji and surname as Yohannan for all purposes henceforth. 24.07.2020. **(C5752) 26-7-2020**

EMERGENCY ☎ 112

Airlines

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

Word Search



Al Capone

1899 - 1947

"Do I do business with Canadian racketeers? I don't even know what street Canada is on."

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

ALCATRAZ	ELIOT NESS	MOBSTER
ALPHONSE	FLORIDA	NEW YORK
BOOTLEG	GAMBLING	PRISON
BOWERY BOYS	GANGSTER	PROHIBITION
BRIBES	GREAT DEPRESSION	PROTECTION
BROOKLYN	IRS	RUTHLESS
CAPONE	ITALY	SCARFACE
CHARITY	JOHNNY TORRIO	TAX EVASION
CHICAGO	LIQUOR	UNTOUCHABLES
CRIME BOSS	MASSACRE	VALENTINES DAY

Join the Dot



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today you should work to tune into the larger, slower-moving trends in your life, Aries. Consider making some long-term monetary and emotional investments. There is a great deal of prosperity available to you now, but beware of deception on the part of others. Watch out for fast talkers and people who promise everything yet deliver nothing. Have confidence that you can decipher what's real and what isn't.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Get things out in the open today, Cancer. If someone seems to insult you, call them on it. Letting things fester inside only destroys your self-esteem. You'd also be in danger of losing the respect of others. This could very well be a situation in which everyone but you sees the truth. Try not to let this happen. Be bold and assertive, and don't let others pull the wool over your eyes.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

You may need to adjust today in order to relate well to people and situations, Libra. Things are a bit off kilter, and you may find that the harder you try to fit in, the more liable you are to feel like an oddball. Try not to get caught up in others' battles. Maintain a balance between real life and fantasy. Don't get so caught up in someone else's world that you forget to deal with your own.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Tune into your dreams today, Capricorn. Do you often feel intensely jealous thinking the people around you are living amazing lives while you're stuck in a dull, boring routine? The only person who can pull you out of this rut is you, so stop complaining and do it. Change is easier than it seems at first. Let your imagination take control and work toward manifesting your most fanciful goals.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Let your artistic nature loose today, Taurus. Add a touch of creativity to whatever project, situation, or person you encounter. Let your fantasy world extend to every aspect of your being and keep an open mind for new ideas and methods. Incorporate traditional values into new concepts. The new and the old methods may seem incompatible at first, but it's your challenge to make them work together.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Stick to the tried and true today, Leo. Don't be afraid to make any last-minute changes of plan. Compliment others when they do something well, and show appreciation for their positive qualities. You'll gain their respect. Celebrate the small things in life and appreciate all that you have - physically as well as emotionally. Let other people share in your warm and generous spirit.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Be yourself today - 100 percent you, Scorpio. The world needs more individuality. Revel in your unique qualities and be generous about sharing them with the world. Feel free to adopt a new and unconventional way of doing something - anything. Beware, however, that there may be a strong, grounding force that's trying to tie you down to tradition. Don't feel pressured to give in to the social norm.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

There are extremely slow-moving, subtle energies coming into play today that may not be so easily felt, Aquarius. What they provide is a key to manifesting your wildest dreams. Fantasy can become your reality, but it may only come one small, subtle step at a time. Don't give up. Focus on the unconventional way to get things done. You'll eventually achieve everything your heart desires as long as you truly believe you can.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Don't gamble away your resources, Gemini. Take the safest route. There's a great deal of energy out there encouraging you to act, but beware of adopting too stubborn of an attitude. This will only succeed in alienating you from the very people you rely on for support. Maintain a strong, healthy balance between old and new. Try to be more open to change and, by all means, adopt a more flexible attitude.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Reap all the riches that a new day has to offer, Virgo. Every day brings new opportunities and the chance for rapid advancement. Grab the things offered to you. You have a great deal of potential, but potential is one of those things that does no good until you realize it and harness it. Today is one day in which you can take an important step toward manifesting your dreams.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Today is a very expansive day in which you can make great progress in all of your endeavors, Sagittarius. Be careful of deception by others. There may be a surreal cloud that covers up reality. You may need to do a little digging to locate the truth. Maintain a mellow attitude in order to stay safe. Sudden, extreme actions fueled by anger or fear are likely to get you into trouble.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

There may be a great deal of conflict in your life today, Pisces. Different people and situations seem to be pulling you in all directions. Your sanity is being put to the test. Try not to be too stubborn, because this will only cause more tension between you and the situation. You have the potential to stress out about the smallest things. Try to avoid this if you can.



Ice cream maker David Wesmael, awarded "un des meilleurs ouvriers de France" (one of France's best craftsmen) poses at his workshop in Lille.—AFP photos



Ice cream maker David Wesmael is at work, at his workshop in Lille.



FRENCH CHEF GIVES TRADITIONAL ICE CREAM A WHIPPING



He's the new wizard of French ice cream who is sending a chill down the spine of traditionalists. David Wesmael has nothing against a scoop of well-made gelato or a cone of whipped ice cream. But the restless innovator is taking a blowtorch to the "archaic" conventions which he claims have left ice cream frozen in the past. His creations often skate daringly over the thin line between ice cream and the more sophisticated domain of French patisserie.

Biting through the thin chocolate shell of one of his ice cream bars, flavours and textures explode—from crunchy praline to runny caramel and vanilla spiked with lemon confit. "There are so many things you can do with ice cream—more perhaps in terms of texture and taste than even with patisserie," he told AFP in the chill of his laboratory in the northern French city of Lille. "There is infinite potential, and so many possibilities which have yet to be explored in ice cream making," said the former star pastry chef. From his spherical "vacherins" of filled meringue to ice cream bonbons, bars and "tubes" which can be cut into slices, Wesmael is determined to give the summer treat a place at the top table of haute cuisine.

Putting on the Spritz

"I am trying to do something different and show the public that ice cream is not something that just comes in a pot or a cornet," he said. It's a chilly 11 degrees Celsius (53 Fahrenheit) in his lab, but his artisan "glaciers" are not feeling the cold in their



Ice cream maker David Wesmael poses at his workshop in Lille.

white coats. Every second out of the freezer counts when you are piping a chilled hazelnut and almond praline onto shortbread in a bar mould. The same speed and precision is needed for the next step of floating the caramel and candied lemon in vanilla ice cream, so that the middle melts as soon as you bite through the crisp coating.

Vanilla, celery and lemon

Wesmael also loves making the standard ice creams that he himself calls "archaic". But even with traditional ice creams and sorbets he adds his own touch, decorating every tub by hand and

coming up with new flavours every week for his shops in Paris and Lille—from strawberry and red pepper to Spritz and even vanilla, celery and lemon. When it comes to miraculously transforming raw materials, "nothing beats ice cream and sorbet", Wesmael argued.

It was this alchemy and the untapped potential of ice cream that tempted him away from pure patisserie, which has undergone a huge renaissance in France in recent years. Even his standard vanilla ice cream is the product of deep research, mixing pods from Madagascar and New Caledonia to get a "stronger and longer-lasting flavour". For his competition entry in 2004 to join the tiny elite of French artisans officially proclaimed the country's best, the young Wesmael created a frozen sculpture of "an angel pregnant with the world" that represented the Italian Renaissance.

Around it were frozen desserts based around basil, lemon, balsamic vinegar and Sicilian pistachios. As it happens, pistachio is the bestselling ice cream in both his shops. But he is most proud of his "tubes", which are easy to cut and can survive out of the freezer for two hours thanks to the cylinder they come in. "You can slice them into rounds, put different flavours together or add different elements from the garden like a coulis of fresh mint or strawberries in season, he said.—AFP



Disney pushes back 'Mulan,' 'Star Wars,' 'Avatar' due to pandemic

Disney announced on Thursday that the coronavirus pandemic had forced it to indefinitely postpone the release of big-budget film "Mulan," while pushing back upcoming instalments of "Star Wars" and "Avatar" by a year. The live-action "Mulan" had already been postponed twice, with its release most recently delayed to August 21. Following the postponement of "Tenet," a sci-fi thriller that theatre operators were counting on to jump-start attendance, it appears the summer film calendar is collapsing.

"Over the last few months, it's become clear that nothing can be set in stone when it comes to how we release films during this global health crisis, and today that means pausing our release plans for 'Mulan' as we assess how we can most effectively bring this film to audiences around the world," a Walt Disney Studios spokesperson said in a statement. Disney also announced that the release schedule for future instalments of the "Star Wars" and "Avatar" sagas has been pushed back by a year. The "Avatar" sequel will be released in December 2022, and the tenth episode of "Star

Wars" in December 2023, rather than in 2021 and 2022 respectively. The releases will then be staggered, with "Avatar" films in 2024, 2026 and 2028, and "Star Wars" in 2025 and 2027.

"Avatar" director, screenwriter and co-producer James Cameron said on Twitter that the coronavirus had delayed live-action filming in New Zealand, and that special effects work in Los Angeles had yet to restart—forcing the postponement of the film's release. Disney had decided in early April to push back a dozen Marvel films, including "Black Widow," starring Scarlett Johansson. That is now scheduled to come out November 6, forcing all the other films in the franchise to shift back. Following "Black Widow"—the next Disney studio film set to hit screens—comes "Soul," Pixar's new animated feature under the Disney banner, slated for November 20. Disney has also postponed, to an unspecified date, "The French Dispatch" by director Wes Anderson, which was previously set to debut on October 16.—AFP



Tom Cruise

Norway reimposes quarantine for Spain travellers, but not Tom Cruise

Norway on Friday reimposed quarantine on arrivals from Spain over a spike in virus cases, but also said such restrictions would not apply to the team behind the latest "Mission: Impossible" blockbuster. Star Tom Cruise and the rest of the crew will be allowed to enter the country in the autumn to film scenes for the seventh instalment of the action franchise without facing any quarantine requirements, regardless of their previous destinations. The filming "will take place under a strict health regime and the members of the production will be kept apart from others during their stay in Norway", Agriculture Minister Olaug Bollestad told a news conference.

"This means not everyone will be able to see these beautiful guys because they will be kept relatively apart," she added. The filming, partly subsidised by the Norwegian Film Institute to the tune of nearly five million euros, is due to take place amid the majestic fjords of the northwest. Bollestad said the film was important to show the world "the nature, culture and history" of Norway, which also featured in the last instalment, "Mission: Impossible - Fallout". By contrast, Norway has reimposed restrictions on travel to Spain, after a rise in coronavirus cases. —AFP

Miro sculpture expected to sell for nearly \$7 million

More than 40 monumental sculptures by artistic giants including Miro, Rodin and Calder—which have not seen in decades—will go under the hammer in Paris in October, Christie's said Thursday. The Catalan master's colourful painted bronze "The Caress of a Bird" is expected to go for between four and six million euros (\$6.9 million) while a mosaic by the Franco-Chinese artist Zao Wou-Ki could reach two million euros, the auction house said. "In my 40-year career I have had very few sales of this size," said Christie's director of collections Lionel Gosset.

All the sculptures come from the collection of the late French art dealer Paul Haim. He kept the work at his estate in the Basque country of southwest France along with sculptures by Leger, Maillol, Niki de Saint Phalle and Antoine Bourdelle. Even before Haim's death in 2006, they were kept away from prying eyes. But those being sold off will be brought out of their seclusion for a week before the sale on October 22 and will be shown at the 17th-century former Paris hospital that now houses the headquarters of fashion giant Kering. Other highlights of the sale are a large bronze nude by Auguste Rodin and work by the American sculptor Alexander Calder, famous for his mobiles.—AFP



In this file photo US-Chinese actress Yifei Liu attends the world premiere of Disney's "Mulan" at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.—AFP



Norwegian artist Kjell Elvis (Kjell Henning Bjørnstad) performs at the start of his challenge of the world's longest Elvis Presley singing marathon.



Norwegian artist Kjell Elvis (Kjell Henning Bjørnstad) performs in central Oslo in an attempt to beat the record of the world's longest Elvis Presley singing marathon in Oslo.—AFP photos

All Shook Up: Norwegian Elvis impersonator sets world record

A Norwegian Elvis Presley impersonator set a world record on Saturday by singing the legendary entertainer's songs for more than 50 hours straight in an online competition. Kjell Henning Bjørnstad, whose stage name is Kjell Elvis, sang non-stop for 50 hours, 50 minutes and 50 seconds, smashing the previous record, recognised by the Guinness Book of Records, by more than seven hours. The title of the previous Elvis champion, a German by the name of Thomas "Curtis" Gaethje, had remained intact for more than 16 years. "I'll never

do this again", Bjørnstad, dressed in an Elvis costume, told Norwegian television after completing his challenge early Saturday in an Oslo bar.

His manager said Kjell Elvis, who sang through two days and two nights, had been told to go easy on the coffee, and to rely instead on smoothies, fruit and energy snacks to keep his voice in shape while staying the course. He did, however, sound increasingly hoarse during the final hours. Bjørnstad, who is 52, had set two Elvis singing records before. The last time, in 2003, it took 26 hours of nonstop performing to come out on top.

This time, he called on fans to make donations during the event which are to be used in part to finance a hospital in Myanmar. Elvis Presley, who died in 1977 and was known as "The King", was among the 20th century's cultural icons. He had dozens of number one hits and sold more than 146 million albums, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, and won more gold albums than anybody else.—AFP

US talk show legend Regis Philbin dies at 88

Regis Philbin, an award-winning fixture of American talk show culture, has died at the age of 88, media reports said Saturday. Philbin, a playful and self-deprecating New Yorker with a thick Bronx accent, died Friday of natural causes, People magazine reported, quoting a statement from the family. Philbin was best known to many Americans as co-host of a daytime talk show that began in 1988 called "Live! With Regis and Kathie Lee." Working with Kathie Lee Gifford and later with another co-host, Philbin appeared on the show for 23 years. Part of his popular shtick was to spend a few minutes at the beginning of each show talking about banalities like where he had dinner the night before.

Philbin also hosted the wildly popular "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" game show, which ran from 1999 to 2002. He won Emmys as a talk show and game show host. And he held the Guinness record for number of hours spent on television in America—about



In this file photo taken on May 22, 2017 Regis Philbin (right) and his wife Joy Philbin attend the New York Premiere of 'Churchill' at The Whitby Hotel in New York City. — AFP photos

17,000, according to The New York Times. In 2011, as Philbin was preparing to leave his talk show, the Times paid tribute to him as someone who stood out on TV. "In a daytime landscape filled with bland, polished hosts and smarmy good cheer, Mr Philbin

was crumpled, nasal and histrionic. He was a snaggletooth amid cosmetic dentistry and porcelain veneers," the paper said. Among those remembering Philbin on Saturday was a fellow New Yorker, Donald Trump. "He was a fantastic person, and my friend. He kept



Flowers are placed on television host Regis Philbin's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California.

telling me to run for President," the US president tweeted. "Holds the record for 'most live television,' and he did it well. Regis, we love you."—AFP

Fleetwood Mac guitarist Peter Green dies aged 73

Peter Green, the influential blues guitarist who co-founded British rock giants Fleetwood Mac, has died at the age of 73, his family's legal representatives announced on Saturday. Described by the late guitar legend B.B. King as having "the sweetest tone I ever heard...., the only one who gave me the cold sweats", Green formed Fleetwood Mac with drummer Mick Fleetwood in London in 1967. The virtuoso blues/rock guitarist was behind songs such as "Albatross" and "Oh Well" that helped define the band's unique sound and propel them to worldwide fame.



Fleetwood Mac guitarist Peter Green.

Green also penned "Black Magic Woman", covered famously by Carlos Santana in 1970. "It is with great sadness that the family of Peter Green announce his death this weekend, peacefully in his sleep," said a statement from Swan Turton solicitors. "A further statement will be provided in the coming days." Green, who was born Peter Greenbaum in London's Bethnal Green into a Jewish family, was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1998, along with the rest of the band. "...with the original Fleetwood Mac, he was Britain's most progressive blues guitarist," said Rolling Stone magazine, which in 2015 included Green in its 100 Greatest Guitarists.

The Smiths guitarist and songwriter Johnny Marr, also paid tribute to Green. "R.I.P Peter Green. A unique artist and a beautiful guitar player," he tweeted. In 1970, mental health issues and substance abuse forced Green out of Fleetwood Mac and he ended up sleeping rough and later underwent electro-convulsive therapy in hospital. Fleetwood drafted in Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham and Christine McVie, wife of original member Jon McVie, as the band went on to record iconic albums "Fleetwood Mac" and "Rumours". —AFP

Video of Heard's sister shows actress 'beat' her, Depp trial hears

Johnny Depp's legal team played an anonymous tipster's video at his libel trial Friday aimed at proving ex-wife Amber Heard had a violent streak and once beat up her sister. The last-minute submission came in the third week of Depp's lawsuit against Britain's tabloid The Sun in London's High Court over a 2018 story accusing him of being a "wife beater". The "Pirates of the Caribbeans" franchise actor says the false allegation ruined his reputation and cost him lucrative Hollywood jobs. The Sun counters it can back up its claim by 14 cases of abuse against the 34-year-old model and actress in a three-year span leading up to Heard's 2016 decision to file for divorce.

Depp's lawyer David Sherborne interrupted planned testimony Friday and asked judge Andrew Nicol to allow him to play what he called "critical" new evidence in the case. Nicol agreed despite the star-studded case running behind schedule on what was supposed to be its last day. The undated video showed Amber's sister Whitney chatting with a group of women by a sunny pool. "Did

you get in a fight or something?" one woman asks Whitney in the video. "Oh ha ha thank you. Got into an altercation," Whitney replies with a laugh. "I already talked about it. I won't talk about it any more." "I can't believe Amber beat your ass," the woman tells Whitney with a smile on her face. "I know you can beat her ass." A woman then appears to inspect Whitney's cheek and arm. "She really whooped your butt," she tells Whitney. "Yeah, I'm done. I guess I'm done talking about it," Whitney replies in a more serious tone.

'Bad reality TV'

Depp's lawyer said he received the video after Whitney on Thursday denied that Heard had a temper and regularly attacked her husband. Sherborne said the tipster understood Whitney was lying and had video proof. The lawyer added that it showed that Whitney was tailoring her testimony to fit her sister's own account. "There is no denial of the fact that Ms Amber Heard beat up Whitney Heard and that there are injuries," Depp's lawyer said. Depp

claims that Heard attacked him regularly and he only acted out against her in self defence. Whitney explained Friday that the video was an outtake of a "really bad reality TV show" in which the cast was trying to make "a very, very boring story more interesting". "We were referencing a verbal argument my sister and I had got into the night before," she said.

Whitney added that other members of the cast were "looking for injuries that were not there". The Sun's lawyer Sasha Wass dismissed the video as "flippant, certainly not serious". "This is a light-hearted exchange, there is no evidence of any injuries and it will take the matter... no further," Wass insisted. Both legal teams have accused the other sides' witnesses of lying under oath. Whitney testified Thursday that Heard only hit Depp on one documented occasion and had never been violent toward her or anyone else. The case is due to finish after legal submissions on Tuesday.—AFP



In this file photo US singer/songwriter Taylor Swift arrives for Billboard's 2019 Woman of the Year at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles. — AFP

Taylor Swift announces surprise new album

Pop icon Taylor Swift delighted fans by announcing on social media that she would release a surprise new album at midnight on Thursday. Swift tweeted that "Folklore," her eighth studio album, would comprise 16 songs that "I've poured all of my whims, dreams, fears, and musings into." "Most of the things I had planned this summer didn't end up happening, but there is something I hadn't planned on that DID happen," said the 30 year-old. "Before this year, I probably would've overthought when to release this music at the 'perfect' time, but the times we're living in keep reminding me that nothing is guaranteed.

"My gut is telling me that if you make something you love, you should just put it out into the world. That's the side of uncertainty I can get on board with," added the singer-songwriter. Swift hasn't released any tracks yet from the album, in which she collaborates with indie folk group Bon Iver and Aaron Dessner of rock band The National. Dessner co-wrote or produced eleven of the songs on "Folklore," Swift said. The megastar's last album, "Lover," was released in August 2019.—AFP



US actor Johnny Depp gestures holding a bunch of flowers as he leaves after a hearing in his libel trial against News Group Newspapers (NGN).



US actress Amber Heard (left) leaves hand-in-hand with her sister Whitney Heard (right) from the High Court after a hearing in the libel trial by her former husband US actor Johnny Depp against News Group Newspapers (NGN) in London.—AFP photos

Sports

Photo of the day



Participants turn the first corner during the Formula One Grand Prix of Styria at Red Bull Ring. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Liberty, Storm players walk off court during national anthem

NEW YORK: Members of the WNBA's New York Liberty and Seattle Storm teams, in protest of racial inequality, walked to their respective locker rooms during the playing of the US national anthem prior to their season opener yesterday. Players from the Women's National Basketball Association and other athletes from around the world are joining in anti-racism protests sparked by the high-profile deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police officers. "We are dedicating this season to Breonna Taylor, an outstanding EMT who was murdered over 130 days ago in her home," said Liberty guard Layshia Clarendon prior to the tip-off at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida.

Taylor, a 26-year-old Black emergency medical technician, was killed on March 13 after police officers entered her apartment, executing a "no-knock" search warrant. "Breonna Taylor was dedicated and committed to uplifting everyone around here. We are also dedicating this season to 'Say Her Name' campaign, a campaign committed to saying the names and fighting for justice of Black women," she said.

"Black women are so often forgotten in this fight for justice, who don't have people marching in the streets for them... We will be a voice for the voiceless." The Storm defeated the Liberty 87-71 behind 18 points, eight rebounds and four steals by 2018 league MVP Breanna Stewart. The game was played without fans in attendance to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus, which halted US sports in mid-March. —Reuters

Dominant Brumbies keep clean sheet against Force

Brumbies power to the top of Super Rugby AU

SYDNEY: A dominant ACT Brumbies powered to the top of Super Rugby AU Saturday with a 24-0 thrashing of Western Force, who remain winless on their return to the top flight. The Canberra-based team got off to an electric start on a wet night in Sydney, with breakout tries to Tom Wright and Irae Simone in the first five minutes. Will Miller and Connal McInerney also crossed in the second period, highlighting how much work the Perth side still have in front of them as they adjust to Super Rugby after a three-year absence.

"The best thing was how we started both halves and then it was backed up by good defence, so really proud of the boys," said Brumbies captain Allan Alaalatoa. "I think our big improvement was our defense, to keep (a clean sheet) you've got to be proud of the effort. That's

something we'll continue to build on for next week." The slick Brumbies have now won their last eight games against the Force stretching back to 2013, reinforcing their credentials as favorites in the domestic Australian competition.

They top the five-team ladder with 14 points from three games, four ahead of the Queensland Reds, with the Force anchored at the bottom. "It was a physical game out there and unfortunate start for us, I guess, with back-to-back tries... which put us in a bit of a hole that we tried to get out of," said Jeremy Thrush, the Force

skipper and a former All Blacks lock. "It shows your where the benchmark is with the Brumbies, and where we need to get to. But I was still proud of the boys' effort. We kept fighting."

Boosting an all-Wallabies front row of Scott Sio, Folau Fainga'a, and Allan Alaalatoa, and a backline featuring powerhouse runners Simone, Tevita Kuridrani, and Solomon Kata, the Brumbies immediately stamped their authority on the game. In a red-hot start, Tom Wright raced over for a try after just 90 seconds in a flowing move from a scrum deep within their own

half. And in another top-notch counter-attack, they bagged a second minutes later, running the ball 80 meters with quality passing before Simone dotted down and young prospect Bayley Kuenzie kicked the conversion.

The Force were shellshocked, but spearheaded by Thrush and the experienced Jono Lance, slowly found their feet, tightening up their defense only for handling errors to let them down when they created chances. To their credit, they prevented the Brumbies scoring again in the first half, but Alaalatoa's team burst out of the blocks in the second half as they did in the first. They notched another quick try after the impressive Wright sucked in two defenders and offloaded to Miller who scrambled over as rain poured down, with McInerney getting their fourth from a driving maul to guarantee the win. —AFP



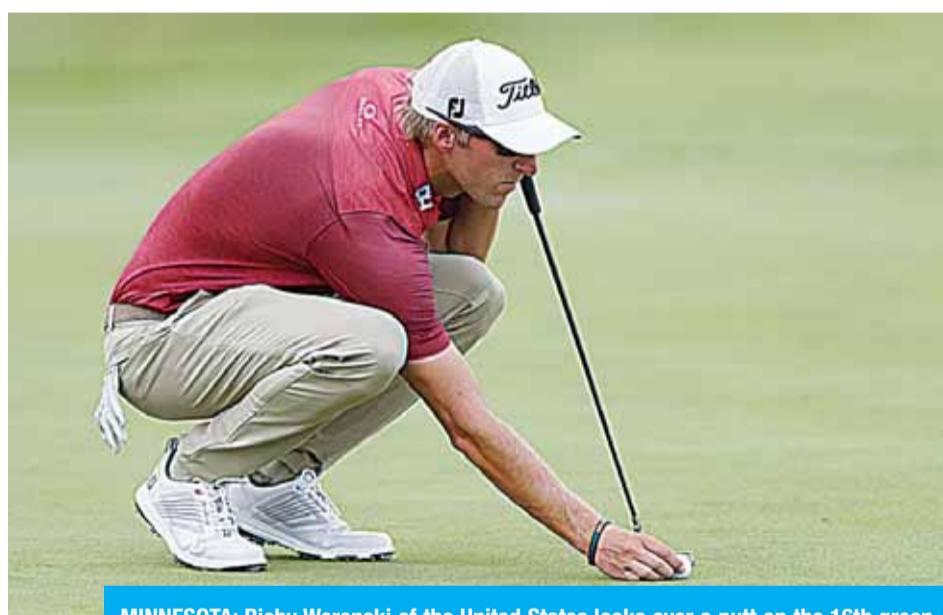
ACT Brumbies thrash Western Force 24-0

Werenski, Thompson share 54-hole lead at PGA 3M Open

WASHINGTON: Richy Werenski, seeking his first US PGA title, closed with an eight-foot birdie putt to match Michael Thompson for the lead after yesterday's third round of the 3M Open. Thompson, a 2012 US Open runner-up, and American compatriot Werenski, who birdied three of the last four holes, each fired three-under par 68s to stand on 15-under 198 after 54 holes at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minnesota.

"Definitely good to have a strong finish like that," Werenski said. "It just kind of clicked in and I gave myself a chance going into tomorrow." Charl Schwartzel, the 2011 Masters champion from South Africa, and US standout Tony Finau shared third on 200 with American Max Homa another stroke adrift. Thompson, whose only PGA title came at the 2013 Honda Classic, led by four strokes on the 15th tee but made bogey on the only hole Werenski didn't birdie down the stretch to leave them deadlocked at the top, just as they began the day. "I'm pretty happy with the round," Thompson said. "The game doesn't need to be more complicated than it is. If I keep it simple (Sunday) I'm going to have a good day." Werenski closed strong after being unable to match Thompson's early pace. "I did a good job of just hanging in there, grinding along," Werenski said. "I feel really good this week. Everything feels solid. I just want to keep hanging around and hopefully something happens."

Thompson rescued par at 18 after finding water off the tee, sparking his spirit for the final



MINNESOTA: Richy Werenski of the United States looks over a putt on the 16th green during the third round of the 3M Open on July 25, 2020 at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minnesota. —AFP

round. "Made a really nifty par at the last that I think is going to keep the momentum going for me tomorrow," said Thompson. This is the first time Thompson has led or shared the lead entering the final round since his 2013 triumph. "I haven't been in this position in a long time," Thompson said. "It was nice to get my feet wet." Thompson dropped his approaches inside three feet to set up birdies at the par-4 fifth and par-5 sixth and made it three in a row by holing a 24-foot putt at the par-4 seventh.

"Those three birdies in a row were a great jump start for me," Thompson said. "I played really solid on the back nine. I just couldn't get any putts to fall." Thompson, who birdied five and six for the third day in a row, went three strokes ahead of the field when Werenski made a bogey at 11. A two-putt birdie from 40 feet at the par-5 12th put Thompson on 16-under, stretching his edge to four shots. Werenski charged with birdies at the par-4 15th and 16th holes, the latter from 16 feet, to trim Thompson's lead to two strokes. —AFP

Marquez quits MotoGP; Quartararo grabs pole

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA: World champion Marc Marquez will not start the Andalusia MotoGP in Jerez after dropping out of qualifying yesterday four days after an operation on a broken arm. "I understood that it would be very difficult to ride the bike and to finish the 25 laps in the race," Marquez said. "But after surgery I saw there was a small possibility," he said. "When you are a sportsman, and you have a passion, you try."

The six-time world MotoGP champion broke his right arm in a crash at the delayed season-opening Spanish Grand Prix on the same track last Sunday and underwent surgery on Tuesday. He was declared fit to race on Thursday after passing a medical which, he said yesterday, included 40 push-ups using his broken arm. "A champion cannot stay at home if he thinks he has the option or a slight chance," Honda boss Alberto Puig said after qualifying. The Honda rider sat out practice on Friday and struggled in yesterday's third session before dropping out of opening qualifying without recording a time.

Frenchman Fabio Quartararo, who won

his maiden MotoGP race last week and rides for the Yamaha satellite team, grabbed pole with a lap of 1min 37.007sec to edge Yamaha's Maverick Vinales by 0.095sec. Francesco Bagnaia, an Italian with Pramac Racing, was third fastest, 0.169sec behind Quartararo, to complete the front row of the grid. Veteran Italian Valentino Rossi was fourth for Yamaha. In the opening practice session of the morning, Marquez managed only the 20th best time, 1.3sec behind Vinales, who set a course record. "I was kind of surprised at being able to ride in a good way," Marquez said.

In the second session, Marquez began to struggle, slowing on corners and swinging wide. "When I went out again immediately there was a big pain in the elbow, not the bone. My body at that moment said stop," he said. He started the first qualifying session but returned to the pits without posting a time. "I followed my instinct," Marquez said. "My instinct said go to Jerez. It's what I did. My instinct today said ride the bike. It's what I did. My instinct in Q1 said stop and I did." "I will sleep well because I tried and now I know I couldn't." —AFP



ANDALUSIA: Repsol Honda Team's Spanish rider Marc Marquez takes part in the third MotoGP free practice session of the Andalusia Grand Prix at the Jerez race track in Jerez de la Frontera on July 25, 2020. —AFP

Capitals lose goalie Samsonov for NHL restart, playoffs

WASHINGTON: Russian rookie goaltender Ilya Samsonov will miss the National Hockey League's COVID-19 return and Stanley Cup playoffs with an undisclosed injury, his Washington Capitals team announced yesterday. The Capitals, who captured the 2018 NHL crown, went 41-20 with eight overtime losses for 90 points, third in the Eastern Conference, before the season was stopped March 12 by the coronavirus pandemic. Samsonov will not travel with the Capitals to Toronto, the hub city where East teams will resume play in a bubble environment. He will remain in Washington to continue treatment. "He has made some strides and put

together a pretty good run this year, so to be without him is certainly disappointing," Capitals coach Todd Reirden said.

NHL return to play rules forbid disclosing player injury details, but Reirden said Samsonov, 23, had not tested positive for COVID-19. Samsonov went to Russia after the NHL season was shut down, returning July 2, but he has not taken part in any team practices. Before the shut-down, Samsonov had gone 16-6-2 this season with a 2.55 goals-against average and a 91.3 save percentage, at times outshining veteran Braden Holtby, who is set to become a free agent after the season.

"He's a player that had a big impact on our team this first year and is going to have a big impact on the team for many years to come," Reirden said. "But this is what it's all about, making adjustments and adapting to the unpredictable." The Capitals, ignited by nine-time NHL goal-scoring champion Alexander Ovechkin of Russia, play Tampa Bay, Boston and Philadelphia in a round-robin to determine top-four seedings for the Stanley Cup playoffs while eight other East clubs meet in a play-in series to decide their opening-round foes. —AFP

14 Werenski and Thompson share 54-hole lead at PGA 3M Open



15 Broad sparks West Indies collapse in Test decider



15 Nats take down Yankees as Brewers batter Cubs



ABU DHABI: Robert Whittaker of New Zealand punches Darren Till of England in their middleweight championship fight during the UFC 251 event at UFC Fight Island in Abu Dhabi's Yas Island yesterday. —AFP

Whittaker bounces back, beats Till

Whittaker back to best as 'Fight Island' draws to a close

ABU DHABI: Former middleweight champion Robert Whittaker bounced back to defeat Darren Till yesterday as UFC's first "Fight Island" drew to a successful close in Abu Dhabi. "My brain is on overload," Whittaker said after throwing everything at England's Till in unanimous points win, with all three judges scoring 48-47 for the Australian. "That fight was so stressful," Whittaker added. "I hope the fans and everybody can appreciate it because that was one of the most technical fights I've ever had."

Whittaker's win brought the curtain down on the Ultimate Fighting Championship's successful excursion to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The 26 square kilometer Yas Island resort complex was sealed off as the Las Vegas-based UFC shielded its fighters from the coronavirus pandemic. Around 2,500 staff and fighters set up camp under strict bio-secure protocols with constant testing for COVID-19 before, during and after arrival and then regular follow-up checks throughout.

Those who tested positive for coronavirus were excluded, with the biggest casualty being Brazilian Gilbert Burns, who lost his shot at Nigerian-American UFC welterweight champion Kamaru Usman two weeks ago as a result. The 29-year-old Whittaker (22-5) said before the contest that the only thing that worried him was Till's powerful left fist, a weapon that had given the man from Liverpool 10 knockout victories in an 18-2-1 record coming into the fight. But it was a left elbow from Till (18-3-1)

instead that put the Aussie on the floor in the first.

'Just got my head down'

Whittaker shook it off quickly and then got down to work, lashing out constantly at Till's leading leg and picking away with jabs. By the end the total strike count was 156-81 to Whittaker, who landed 52 to Till's 29 with Whittaker also showcasing superior wrestling skills. Whittaker lost his belt when knocked out by Nigerian-New Zealander Israel Adesanya (19-0) in October. But this was a welcome return to form for the Australian who had questioned his future in the sport because of the relentless grind of training. "He felt me out. In the first round he caught me, he didn't do that again," said Whittaker.

"I had to really adapt on the go. It was such a dynamic fight. Things went his way then my way. I just got my head down and that got me across the line." UFC will return to Las Vegas but boss Dana White said we might see more of Fight Island in the future, while the world continues to contain the pandemic. Earlier, two veteran Brazilian light heavyweights rolled back the years with 38-year-old Mauricio Rua (27-11-1) taking a split decision over 44-year-old fellow Brazilian Antonio Rogerio Nogueira (23-10).

It was Rua's third victory over his compatriot, but only by the narrowest of margins 29-28, 28-29, 29-28 after three torrid rounds. The main card opened with a



ABU DHABI: Robert Whittaker of New Zealand celebrates after his victory over Darren Till of England in their featherweight championship fight during the UFC 251 event at UFC Fight Island yesterday. —AFP

glimpse into the possible future of the UFC welterweight division. Swede Khamzat "Borz" Chimaev (8-0) made it two wins in two weeks on Fight Island with a first-round knockout of Northern Ireland's Rhys McKee (10-3-1). "Everybody in my division, I'm going to smash them," Chimaev said.—AFP

Four Sassuolo goals offside

Genoa are four points above the relegation zone with two games left this season. In Naples, Napoli beat Sassuolo 2-0 with the visitors having four goals ruled offside—two in either half. Three were chalked off by VAR. Albanian defender Elseid Hysaj opened the scoring for Napoli after eight minutes in the San Paolo Stadium. Filip Djuricic then had two goals ruled out as did Francesco Caputo and Domenico Berardi following VAR viewings before Brazilian Allan sealed the points for the hosts three minutes into injury time.

Seventh-placed Napoli—already through to the Europa League as a result of their Italian Cup victory—extend their lead on pursuing Sassuolo, in eighth, to 11 points. Mid-table Parma saw off relegated Brescia 2-1 in a win inspired by on-loan Juventus midfielder Dejan Kulusevski. The 20-year-old Swede set up Matteo Darmian for the opener just before the hour mark before Daniele Dessena pulled the hosts level three minutes later. A spectacular solo effort from Kulusevski sealed back-to-back wins for Parma who had struggled after the lockdown.—AFP

Lukaku double pulls Inter second behind Juventus in Serie A

MILAN: Romelu Lukaku scored in either half as Inter Milan claimed a 3-0 win against struggling Genoa to move second in Serie A behind Juventus who can win a ninth title in a row. Antonio Conte's title ambitions took a knock with back-to-back stalemates against Roma and Fiorentina. But Inter pulled back ahead of Atalanta, and within four points of leaders Juventus, who are poised to claim a 36th 'Scudetto' when they play Sampdoria in Turin.

"The problem is how you see the glass, whether half full or half empty," said Conte of second position. "There are vintages where you sow little and you reap a lot and others in which you sow a lot and reap little, like this one. "But there are numbers that speak clearly, that comfort. I think these lads are doing very good

things. Of course, we can and must improve. "We won't win the league but we have to be hungry to finish as high as possible." Lukaku nodded in Cristiano Biraghi's cross after 34 minutes in the northwestern port city, with the former Manchester United forward accelerating to finish off an individual effort three minutes into injury time. The 27-year-old Belgian brought his tally to 23 league goals this season, and 29 in all competitions. Alexis Sanchez, on-loan from United, was also on target with eight minutes to go, picking up a Victor Moses cross to volley in for his fourth league goal this season.

Atalanta were held 1-1 at AC Milan on Friday, with the Bergamo side due to meet Inter Milan in the final game of the season next week. "On a personal level, I'm happy, but as a team we can do so much more," said Lukaku, who moved third behind Hungarian Istvan Nyers (26) and Brazilian Ronaldo (25) for the most league goals scored by an Inter player in their debut season. "It's not easy for us to be in second place, because we want to win and go as high as possible. "Now we want to do well in these final rounds and then the Europa League."

Sydney FC clinch record-breaking fourth A-League

SYDNEY: Sydney FC were celebrating yesterday after securing a record-breaking fourth A-League premiership, but club boss Steve Corica vowed no let-up with another grand final in their sights. The team won the Premiers' Plate after second-placed Wellington Phoenix drew 1-1 with Adelaide United late Saturday, giving them an unsailable lead with four games of the regular season to play.

"I want to thank the club, my players and my staff who have been exceptional all season," said head coach Corica. "We will enjoy this ... but we still have four games to go and targets left to hit. We want to go on and win the grand final and become back-to-back champions, a feat achieved by only one other club." The top six in the 11-team A-League make the finals series, which is due to start on August 22, with Sydney defending their title.

The A-League kicked off in October and was nearing the end of its regular season when it was suspended in mid-March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rebooting the event proved a logistical nightmare with borders between some Australian states shut, but it finally resumed this month. Football Federation Australia chairman Chris Nikou hailed Sydney's achievement. "Having won the inaugural A-League championship in 2006 and the Premier's title for the first time in 2009/10, Sydney FC have been one of the most successful clubs in the history of this competition," he said.—AFP