

# Friday Times

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## Local

## Heed the danger

IN MY VIEW

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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There is no doubt that everyone knows about the measures and precautions to be taken during our current circumstances, especially advice given by the health authorities through all types of media.

Yet, when I went on Wednesday morning to service my car at the dealership, I was surprised by the number of people waiting ahead of me, although I arrived at 7:00 am, while the place opens at 8:00 am! When the center finally opened and numbers were being distributed, I joined the line. When the queue got bigger, people were very close to each other, almost touching.

I could not bear the scene, so I, along with a few others, started to tell them that this was wrong and they should maintain a distance. The response of the majority was just to look at my face. Then a detective who happened to be in the place to service his car tried to organize the line, but most of those in the queue said "there is nothing wrong, leave us alone, we just want a number, no problem". Unbelievable!

Almost every doctor, official and person gives advice every day on how to avoid getting infected with this virus - and we are into it for almost six months. But I have become convinced that people are not totally aware of the gravity of the situation yet.

When the talk about opening up the country was being made, the commerce ministry issued steps to be followed by businesses of all types and included stipulations certain employees must pay attention to and make sure the rules are implemented.

During the few times that I ventured outside the house for absolutely necessary purposes, I noticed many people following instructions, yet a good number of those did not. I wonder if the concerned authorities have enough manpower or trained volunteers to place them in locations where large crowds gather to organize them, to continue the march towards reopening the country and restoring a relatively normal life.

However, we should bear in mind that the virus will be around for some time, and we can keep it off us by just following a few simple steps. To people out there, please be cooperative, because the life you will protect is yours, then the life of your brother in humanity! Thank you.

Final word: "No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another." - Charles Dickens

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



A mask-clad vendor waits for costumers at a fish market in Kuwait City on Wednesday. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Racism a reality in Arab societies

Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The year 2020 does not seem very promising to anyone, whether they are in the United States or the Middle East. At a time when the world is still suffering severely from the repercussions of COVID-19, a major spark suddenly exploded in the US at a very bad time, which is five months before the American presidential election and in the midst of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

The international media have not stopped following up on the developments of the killing of African-American citizen George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer a week ago. Since then, protests throughout the United States have not subsided, despite the curfew in dozens of US cities.

Local terrorism or racism are different political labels given to the tense situation now, but they all refer to several incidents committed over the past decades in the US against people who paid a heavy price because of hateful racism, whether because of their color or gender, and such events contributed to the promotion of many civil movements such as Black Lives Matter, which was established in 2013, as well as other move-

ments that reject discrimination.

I agree that racism is degrading and I reject it totally. I am not going to analyze the incident of the killing of the American citizen, but I would like to comment on it as an Arab journalist who read the views of some Arab media and their perspective of disregarding racism in Arab societies. Let me explain.

Unfortunately, some tried to use the incident of the killing of Floyd at the hands of the policeman as an indication of the spread of racism in the American society in a frightening way. This is something that I see is not true, especially since the media may exaggerate the truth and may hide it, and this is something that is found today not only in the Floyd killing, but in many other cases, including the issue of the coronavirus.

What is the status of the virus today in the world? A week ago it was occupying global headlines - where is it today? Do you remember the international media's position on IS? Why is no one mentioning it today? Is the epidemic over? Are we all safe? I think the incident of Floyd's death could end peacefully by presenting the policeman who caused the death before a fair judiciary.

So, what about our societies? How to stop these ill practices in our society and against each other? Racism is a hereditary idea and behavior, and unfortunately, mostly it is socially acceptable. I believe that there is no society today in our world that is free from racism. Racism is a set of wrong practices, whereby a specific group of people is treated in a tyrannical and different manner because they belong to a different religion, color or gender.

Another example is the laws that put men at the forefront in leadership positions and control in male-dominated societies. Discrimination and racism against women and inequality in treatment is practiced openly in Arab societies. I think people living in glass houses should not throw stones.

American cinema has addressed issues of racism towards African-Americans, and the Floyd case led the public to these films. But how many Arab films have been produced that talk openly about racism in Arab societies? Whenever I watch the American protests on television, I wonder about the people's demands. Speedily presenting the policeman who caused the death of the man to the judiciary will contribute to calming the protests, but the problem is that the political climate is very tense now.

The coronavirus epidemic and the high number of unemployed people have a negative impact on everybody. I think the use of this issue for political reasons against the US president's policies does not contribute to alleviating the unrest. I believe that the relationship between whites and blacks in America is complex, and it has historical and social backgrounds. Incidents of homicides like these contribute to fueling those feelings.

We have to remember the racism that exists here too, as in any other country. Democracy and the preservation of civil liberties and rights is still something that the United States is proud of, but what about us? The Americans will find their way, but do we really have a frank stand against racism in Arab societies?



## Local

# Zain offers thermal camera solutions to corporate customers

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced offering thermal camera solutions to corporate customers. The solutions allow government organizations and private businesses operating during the current COVID-19 pandemic to measure body temperatures from a safe distance using advanced tech solutions over Zain's superfast network.

Zain offers these solutions as part of its national commitment towards the nation during this crisis, through which the company reflects its role as a leading Kuwaiti private sector organization by making its tech capabilities available. The company is keen on offering the most advanced services and solutions as per the highest international standards to serve the needs of government entities and private businesses that work tirelessly during the current situation.

Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "today we reinforce our Zain Business services and solutions, which we specially designed for corporate customers, with a number of bundles featuring thermal camera solutions. This is an essential addition to our services portfolio amid the health situation in our nation and the entire world. With the gradual return to normal life everywhere, it has become crucial to check body temperatures to guarantee the health and safety of everyone, especially those who work directly in the work field".

Marzouq added: "Zain's thermal camera solutions witnessed great success with many corporate clients who were operating during the past exceptional period, most notably the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), Boursa Kuwait, and Al Hamra Business Tower. These organizations and many others commended the high efficiency of Zain's thermal camera solutions in guaranteeing the health and safety of their employees, customers, and families. This is something we take great pride in".

Marzouq explained that Zain now offers a wide range of multi-



Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq

use thermal cameras from Hikvision, a leading manufacturer and supplier of video surveillance equipment. The cameras are bundled with Zain's superfast Internet via a variety of flexible plans to guarantee the best operational efficiency. The plans feature fixed and handheld thermal cameras to suit customers' different needs, and all cameras are able to measure body temperatures from a safe distance of one meter without the need for physical contact, which achieves social distancing goals and commitment in official instructions as much as possible.

The thermal cameras Zain offers feature many unique tech solutions, such as measuring body temperatures in less than a second, allowing the measurement of a large group of people of up to 30 individuals at once. The cameras are also able to identify individual faces using artificial intelligence (AI), and compare pre-

viously recorded body temperatures even if the person is wearing a face mask. The cameras will notify the user immediately via visual and audio alarms in case an unusual body temperature was detected. Moreover, the thermal cameras can also be used as CCTV surveillance cameras that record footage 24/7 as well as measure temperatures at the same time.

As part of its continuous efforts during the current crisis, Zain recently collaborated with the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), to supply the quarantine center project at Al Zour area – that is executed by KIPIC – with a telecommunications and networking digital infrastructure. The collaboration came to support the country's tremendous efforts in these exceptional circumstances to fight the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Kuwait. Zain offered a wide range of advanced solutions and services as per the highest international standards to build an integrated digital infrastructure for telecommunications and networking at the Al Zour Quarantine Center project, which is fully executed by KIPIC. This came with the aim of allowing the quarantine's residents to benefit from wired and wireless telephone services, as well as high speed Internet services to communicate with their families while they reside at the center. In addition, the services will be used by the Ministry of Health's medical and administrative staff while they operate at the center to serve their personal and professional needs.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, especially during crises. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive print through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most crucial issues in the community, including the support of the country's entities by making its tech capabilities available.

## ICSK organizes online MCQ exam for students across Kuwait

By Dr V Binumon  
ICSK Principal & Senior Administrator

With the breakout of the global pandemic and its subsequent consequences of having schools and all other institutions shut down, there has been an all-out suspension of student development in terms of emotional connectivity, social interaction and creativity. Without an organized learning ambience, students' reading habits too have taken a hit. Holed up within the same surroundings and accommodating to the unfamiliar circumstances, the emotional and mental wellbeing of the learner is bound to incur some deficit.

The Indian Community School, Kuwait has therefore devised creative and original conceptions to steadily adapt with the shift to the online platform. With this in mind, the school is organizing an online MCQ examination – a historic and unique one – the first of its kind in Kuwait to stimulate and energize the spirit and vitality of the students.

This initiative planned by the Indian Community School, Kuwait is In'Quiz'itive 2020 – an online objective examination on the subject of environmental awareness and COVID-19, which is free of cost. The medium of the examination is English. The quiz is open to students all across Kuwait, going



beyond the Indian community and welcoming students from American, English and bilingual schools in Kuwait as well. The school expects participation from around 15,000 students. This MCQ examination is divided into 3 categories: Juniors (12 to 14 years of age), Seniors (14 to 16 years of age) and Super Seniors (16 to 18 years of age). The examination will be held on Tuesday, June 9, 2020 with a duration of 25 minutes and 30 questions per category. The timing of the exam is as follows:  
**Category 1: Junior: 2.30 pm to 2.55 pm**  
**Category 2: Senior: 3.30 pm to 3.55 pm**  
**Category 3: Super Senior: 4.30 pm to 4.55 pm**

Special Certificates of Excellence will be awarded to students who score above 90 points; and certificates of merit will be conferred upon students scoring higher than 60 points. All other participants will be presented with certificates of participation. Certificates to all participants will be gener-

ated and can be downloaded or sent to their registered email IDs immediately after the examination. Registration for the quiz begins on June 4 and ends on June 8, 2020. Students can register themselves through [www.icsk-kw.com](http://www.icsk-kw.com).

The online examination is entitled "The hunt for the smartest minds", engaging students to work through their boredom into making associations between the pandemic and its repercussions on the environment. Ultimately, students become aware of their roles in the environment and the methods of renewal achieved by the earth to safeguard nature.

The Indian Community School, Kuwait has long stood as the epitome of academic excellence and has been a beacon of light within the Indian community pioneering the field of education through novel projects and innovative concepts. ICSK has taken measured efforts to provide students with activities that can be accomplished from the comfort of their homes. The school now holds regular

virtual classes with students and teachers logging into online classrooms.

Students also have full access to their notes, the school library, and many activities online. Students are also tested on their knowledge through carefully developed evaluations and online tests. The school has collaborated with industry experts to organize multiple online seminars for the students, staff and even for parents, to help cope with the contemporary circumstances.

The most notable online achievement by the school is its virtual senate election and investiture, where students voted for their representatives online. The elected student leaders took their pledge online and stepped into their new positions through an impressive and earnest virtual investiture ceremony.

The school is also planning a virtual talent hunt program to give students a platform to display their artistic talents. A virtual summer camp for children is also going to be organized by the school to make the most of the kids' time with fun activities, games and workshops – all from the comfort and safety of their homes.

ICSK solicits your earnest cooperation in undertaking its various enterprises and expresses sincere gratitude in making its endeavors successful.



## Local



— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh

# Frustration and anger mount in isolated areas

## Lack of services, supplies and fuel add to sense of hopelessness

By Nawara Fattahova

**R**esidents in lockdown areas face daily challenges, including short supplies of food and basic necessities, long queues and lack of income.

The densely populated areas Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula were placed under lockdown in April and the original three-week timeline extended when the entire country was placed under a full curfew. Then when the curfew expired on May 30, these two areas were given an additional three weeks of lockdown along with Khaitan, Farwaniya and Hawally.

For those living in Jleeb and Mahboula, two months of total isolation has added to the fear, anxiety and frustration created by the global pandemic. Kuwait Times spoke with people living

in all the locked down areas to hear their concerns and problems.

"I haven't been able to leave the area for two months, so I feel frustrated. Also, I don't have a car, and no transportation is available since the lockdown. And with the hot weather, it's hard to walk for long periods. So for instance, I can't bring the gas cylinder, and have to wait for the truck that delivers the cylinders. In two months, we only received it once," Suhail, a resident of Jleeb, told Kuwait Times.

"Furthermore, I can't go to the main co-op as it's far, so I buy all my stuff from the baqala. Of course I don't find all my needs, so sometimes my friends bring me some food. I live in block 2, and those who distribute meals don't reach our block. My friends told me that food is distributed to around 1,500 people in other blocks. Also, a truck with bread came two weeks ago, which is

not enough, while before they were coming more frequently. My friends told me they waited two hours in the queue to enter the co-op," he added.

In Mahboula, the biggest concerns are maintenance services, food supply and petrol. "My dishwasher has stopped working. When I called the service center in my area, he said he doesn't have spare parts to fix it. I called various well-known electronics companies, but they had the same answer - our staff is not allowed to enter Mahboula," said Khaled, a resident of Mahboula. "We also face problems withdrawing money, as not all ATM machines are functional. Only two are working and every day, there are long queues for these machines. Medical services are available as we have a field hospital, and I haven't faced any difficulties in this regard," he added.





# Local

But many residents complain of limited food supply in the markets and lack of access to petrol. Beyond access to commodities, many residents in Jleeb and Mahboula wonder why their areas remain under isolation. Only in the last week has the ministry of health listed new infection cases by area. Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh has consistently high numbers of new infection cases, with an average of 73.6 new cases daily for the last five days. Mahboula, in contrast, has listed among the top areas only once in the last five days, with 42 cases.

These figures do not tell how many positive infections as a percentage of all tests conducted in the area nor how many tests were conducted in the area in total. It is impossible to know the likely infection rate of the area without more information. The growing frustration, anxiety and anger among residents of these two long-isolated areas is, however, clear.

### New to isolation

The other areas of isolation are still new to the experience and haven't faced as many issues with regards to food and basic necessities. Khaitan, where tens of thousands of people live, has numerous supermarkets and has had no issues with lack of food supplies. "We don't face difficulties buying foodstuff and necessary items, as all supermarkets operate 24/7, which relieves crowding," explained Abu Abdullah, a resident of Khaitan.

But lack of work and income for the residents is adding psychological stress and worry to the situation. "Many residents in this area are laborers. With the lifting of the total curfew in the country, the companies where they work are back in operation, but they can't go to work. So they have a big fear about how they will pay the rent if they don't get their salaries," Abu Abdullah added.

Ghanima, a resident of Hawally, said the situation there is good. "I only faced a problem with pharmacies, as they are not providing delivery services, and there is always a long queue in front of pharmacies. Also, I buy my stuff from the baqala to avoid the crowds in co-ops. My husband owns a store in Mubarakiya, and as the market is still closed, we are fine with the total isolation," she told Kuwait Times.



Islam, another resident of Hawally, also assured that the situation is good in this area. "Everything is fine - I don't need anything. In general, I haven't experienced any crowds, especially since all grocery stores are working round the clock," he said. Mustafa, a resident of Farwaniya also said that he hasn't faced any shortages in foodstuff or services. He only noted that there is always a long queue in front of pharmacies.

For the thousands now out of work, the main concerns are rent and food costs. Several non-governmental and charity organizations are working with the ministry of social affairs to provide basic foodstuff to those in need, but the numbers far outstrip the capacity.





## Local

# Indian ambassador distributes ICSG foodstuff kits in Jleeb



**KUWAIT:** Indian Ambassador to Kuwait K Jeeva Sagar visited Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh last week to participate in the distribution of food kits by the Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) to various Indian associations and Indian nationals.

Welcoming Jeeva Sagar, Rajpal Tyagi, convenor of ICSG, appreciated the deep concern and commitment shown by the Embassy of India in helping Indian nationals. He expressed special appreciation to the ambassador for his personal intervention in helping the distressed members of the community.

Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Jeeva Sagar praised the efforts of ICSG members, Indian associations and volunteers for their hard work and dedication in serving members of the community who were impacted by the coronavirus. In a touching address to the select gathering of community representatives, Jeeva Sagar pointed out that in these difficult times, the sig-

nificance of the community becomes apparent, and he is happy to represent a community that stands for each other.

“Even though I had the privilege of forming the Indian Community Support Group, the real effort has been done by them only,” the ambassador emphasised, urging the community to be united and work together, while expressing gratitude to all members and volunteers of ICSG.

ICSG, comprising of 14 prominent Indian community members, was formed by the Embassy of India on April 20, 2020 to respond to essential and basic needs of some sections of the Indian community during the difficult times of COVID-19. ICSG immediately raised funds from within their resources and provided food provision kits to distressed members of the community. They set up a network of volunteers including an application to register so that kits could directly reach the needy.

So far, 6,000 food kits (180,000 meals) have been distributed over a period of a month and more kits are being distributed directly and through associations. More than 40 Indian associations have come together to jointly participate in the distribution as well as contributing their resources. Chief Coordinator Suresh K P then invited Indian associations to receive their symbolic food kits from the ambassador and ICSG members.

Jeeva Sagar also thanked the Kuwait government for looking after Indian nationals as always and even in these difficult times. He also took various questions from members of the community, explaining in detail in some cases about repatriation flights, amnesty flights, etc. He also said the embassy responded to every query from the community during these times and would continue to do so.

The event was held at United Indian School



in Jleeb and all health protocols including social distancing and masks and gloves were adhered to. Representatives from Indian associations and leaders of major organisations expressed their deep appreciation over the efforts of ICSG.



**K**uwait Fire Service Directorate Director General Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad, accompanied by Director of the PR Dept Brig Khalil Al-Amir, visited the backup center in Rai to check the sorting and distribution of medicines by KFSD teams to patients' homes.

The number of prescriptions that were distributed since the end of March has exceeded 45,000. He thanked all the teams and acknowledged that this is not an easy task, but it succeeded in preventing coronavirus infections — Hanan Al-Saadoun





# Kuwait Times

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## Local



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al- Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets editors-in-chief of local newspapers at Seif Palace on Wednesday. — KUNA

## Premier discusses major issues with chief editors

### Govt to pursue corrupt individuals regardless of their status

**KUWAIT:** HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al- Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, accompanied by Minister of Information and Minister of Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri and Chairman and Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Sheikh Mubarak Duaij Al-Sabah, hosted a meeting on Wednesday with editors-in-chief of local newspapers at Seif Palace.

#### Health situation

The prime minister asserted that the health situation in the country is stable and reassuring, provided that people continue to abide by guidelines. He said “a vaccine for the coronavirus is not yet available, and therefore this disease will continue, but for how long, or how widespread are all subject to speculations “. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled explained: “We must adhere to health guidelines and provide all what they need to face the pandemic - those who work in hospitals and intensive care units: Respiratory equipment and protective clothing for medical staff and all those facing danger in all our institutions.”

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stated that the challenge is great and enormous, and the determination of the Kuwaiti people is also great, which gives us hope that the continuation of this patriotic spirit, which was manifested in difficult circumstances, will help to overcome this epidemic with the least possible damage. He pointed out the importance of the meeting today, which coincides with the entry of the first phase to return to normal life since the coronavirus crisis started four months ago, adding that we entered the fourth day of the plan to gradually return to life, which will be completed in five stages.

The premier stated that Kuwait, through its financial soundness, ability and network of relationships, has been able to provide all the needs for the country, and to provide the adequate health, pharmaceutical and preventive stocks needed for everyone.

“We must provide everything that citizens and residents need,” Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said, pointing out that implementing health guidelines in collaboration with other authorities was a difficult equation, but necessary to work on achieving the result needed. He added that this health crisis placed the whole world in chaos during the past three months and its effects and repercussions extended to all sectors in the world.

On his meeting with the chief editors of local newspapers, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled expressed his happiness at this meeting,



pointing out that it was planned, according to his first press meeting as prime minister in the beginning of December, that the frequency of these meetings would be regular, but the current circumstances prevented him from doing what was planned,

“Ideal population structure is to have Kuwaitis being 70% and non-Kuwaitis 30%”

stressing that this will be compensated in the future.

He reiterated his thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed and volunteered to work, challenging the risks during the past months. Kuwaiti individuals and institutions put their capabilities at the disposal of the government to manage the crisis, which helped us to have multiple options, he said.

The government, at the beginning of the crisis, activated the emergency plan, as 120 beds were allocated for intensive care, and it worked during the last period to increase the capacity of intensive care to 600 beds, “which is five times more than what we had, in addition to equipping hospitals and expanding their wards to receive those infected”.

The premier praised efforts of government agencies, including the oil sector, the Kuwaiti army, the National Guard, and all those who helped build and organize the establishment of field hospitals, expressing at the same time his sincere thanks and appreciation to all government agencies, civil society institutions and the private sector who participated and supported the government in facing the repercussions of this epidemic.

Sheikh Sabah also praised the efforts exerted by employees of the ministry of interior, men and women, for their efforts and hard work during the past three months, in addition to the services provided by the fire department to support various sectors.

#### Corrupt individuals

The government is determined to crack down on every individual with relation to corruption cases regarding public funds, money laundering and human trafficking, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled affirmed. “We will not stay silent nor keep our hands crossed regarding human trafficking and money laundering, and we will not accept these issues be associated with the State of Kuwait, no matter how influential this person is,” the prime minister underscored.

“No one is immune from prosecution and punishment as long as there is an assault on public funds,” he said. The prime minister said HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah instructed him, soon after he took oath as prime minister, to protect and preserve public funds and fight corrupt people. He said he considered these instructions a pathway he was pursuing. “Kuwait deserves a good reputation and deserves the title of His Highness the Amir as a ‘humanitarian leader’ and Kuwait as a ‘humanitarian



## Local



center'. We all have to exert efforts to fight whatever harms the reputation of our nation," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said.

Asked about the government's efforts against human traffickers, the prime minister said the government was "fighting human trafficking and all companies that violate the laws, and we have taken legal action against 224 companies and referred them to prosecution". Asked about the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund and alleged corruption-related charges against Kuwaiti individuals, he said: "We will not be covering up anyone, and no one is immune from prosecution, be it in relation to the Malaysian fund or any suspected abuse of public funds or money laundering or human trafficking. This is a government priority."

The prime minister said they referred the Malaysian fund issue to the competent authorities for investigation. He said he met former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad three times when he was foreign minister and he did not mention any "role of Kuwait in this issue".

#### Population discrepancy

Kuwait is facing a "big challenge" to address a discrepancy in the structure of the population, Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said. Kuwait has a population of some 4.8 million people - of them 1.45 million are Kuwaitis and around 3.34 million are non-Kuwaitis, or a 30 to 70 percent ratio, he said. "The ideal population structure is to have Kuwaitis being 70 percent and non-Kuwaitis 30 percent, so we have a big challenge in the future which is to address the discrepancy in population," he underscored.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said there are 750,000 foreign domestic helpers, which equal half of the Kuwaiti population. "The population structure needs time to be resolved, and it should be divided into phases until reaching a final adjustment to the population in future," he said. "We rely on our sons and daughters to work in all professions," he added, citing the forefathers who contributed to the building of Kuwait by working in all jobs.

The government, he said, was keen on cooperating with the parliament to reach fruitful results. Asked about resumption of air travel, the prime minister said competent authorities were paving the ground for the resumption of risk-free travel. "The right time will come to open this domain and everybody will be able to travel freely," he said.

#### Human traffickers

The prime minister stressed the government's seriousness in dealing with human traffickers. "We are responsible for every human being on this land; therefore, what happened cost the country's institutions a lot and affected the country's demography," he said. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled pointed out that 224 companies were referred to the public prosecution based on information regarding violation of laws and trading of workers. He expressed pride in the people's cooperation, understanding and appreciation of the government's efforts in dealing with the coronavirus crisis.

#### Financial situation

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled affirmed that Kuwait's financial situ-



ation is excellent, but the economy needs a major change in its structure. "We cannot rely on one depleted resource, which is oil, because this is difficult, and we must diversify the sources of income in the country," he said. "The repercussions of the coronavirus caused a huge collapse in oil prices from \$65 to \$11. Kuwait was investing all of its money and portfolios in world markets, but we had fenders that absorbed shocks as a result of planning to cope with any crisis," he added.

#### Rescue package

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said the government adopted a rescue package to address economic ramifications of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The package includes bills about public debt and bankruptcy, which aim at preserving many companies and save the jobs of 73,000 Kuwaitis in the private sector, he said. "We should act to mitigate the expected negative effects on the economic situation, and the (pandemic) crisis that has shaken the world and impacted the economy heavily," he said.

The prime minister called for addressing the economic conditions through a bundle of laws. "We might not need the public debt law today, but later. However, we need laws that precede it in order to lessen the damage caused by the health crisis," he added. He said the priority now was the health situation, but the government was also focusing on security and economic condi-

tions, specially of people living in areas under lockdown in Hawally, Khaitan, Farwaniya, Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

The government, he added, was working on approving the rescue package "which will decrease the impact and pave way for the next government to focus on the population structure, corruption and unstable economic situation." Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's instructions to honor people working during the pandemic included Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis.

#### Gulf dispute

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled affirmed Kuwait's continuous efforts in resolving the Gulf dispute. The prime minister stressed HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's keenness on the continuation of Gulf joint cooperation. The premier also reminded everyone that he was a foreign minister in the past, and he was close to the efforts exerted by the Amir to end the dispute.

"I am sure that all Gulf states see the path of the Gulf Cooperation Council as important to them and to the region and the world," the prime minister added. "Unfortunately, we are now in the fourth year of the Gulf dispute, but attempts are still continuing and hopes are greater than they were," he said. — KUNA



# Friday Times International

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2020



In Senegal's north, the Fulani herders boxed in by virus

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## Snapchat curbs Trump for inciting 'racial violence'

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MARYLAND: In this file photo, US President Donald Trump greets Secretary of Defense James Mattis (right) as he walks to board Air Force One prior to departing from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. —AFP

# Trump trying to 'divide' America

## Ex-Pentagon chief issues a stinging rebuke

WASHINGTON: Former Pentagon chief Jim Mattis issued a stinging rebuke of his erstwhile boss Donald Trump on Wednesday, accusing the president of trying to "divide" America and failing to provide "mature leadership" as the country reels from days of protests. Mattis, who resigned in December 2018 over Trump's ordering of a full troop withdrawal from Syria, also voiced support for the demonstrators whose anti-racism rallies have roiled the country. "Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people - does not even pretend to try," Mattis wrote in a blistering statement posted online by The Atlantic. "Instead, he tries to divide us," added the retired Marine general, who had previously argued it would be inappropriate for him to criticize a sitting president.

"We are witnessing the consequences of three years without mature leadership," he stated. Mattis described himself as "angry and appalled" after witnessing events of the last week, which saw Trump threaten a military crackdown on American citizens as nationwide protests turned violent in some cities. The fury was ignited by the May 25 killing of George Floyd, a black man who suffocated beneath the knee of a white police officer, and whose agonizing death was filmed by bystanders. The demonstrations have mostly been peaceful, but some have de-

generated into violence and looting as night falls.

Mattis wrote that the protesters' call for equal justice was a "wholesome and unifying demand." And he slammed the decision to use force to clear peaceful protesters from near the White House on Monday to allow Trump to pose for photographs at a nearby damaged church, calling it an "abuse of executive authority." The photo op has become a lightning rod for criticism of Trump's handling of the crisis, with religious leaders, politicians, and onlookers around the country expressing outrage. "When I joined the military, some 50 years ago, I swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution," Mattis stated.

"Never did I dream that troops taking that same oath would be ordered under any circumstance to violate the Constitutional rights of their fellow citizens - much less to provide a bizarre photo op for the elected commander-in-chief, with military leadership standing alongside." Trump dismissed Mattis with a tweet, rehashing his claim that he "essentially" fired his Pentagon chief. "Probably the only thing Barack Obama and I have in common is that we both had the honor of firing Jim Mattis, the world's most overrated General," the president wrote. Mattis was head of US Central Command when Obama fired him in 2013 over his hawkish views on Iran.

### 'We can unite without him'

For months after Mattis resigned, he refused to criticize Trump publicly, insisting the military must remain apolitical. Wednesday's statement appeared to signal he no longer felt bound by that sentiment, as he called for solidarity - with or without the president. "We can unite without him, drawing on the strengths inherent in our civil society," Mattis wrote.

Retired Marine Corps General John Allen echoed Mattis' criticism of Trump after his speech threatening to deploy the US military against American citizens. "To even the casual observer, Monday was awful for the United States and its democracy," the former commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan wrote in Foreign Policy.

"The president's speech was calculated to project his abject and arbitrary power, but he failed to project any of the higher emotions or leadership desperately needed in every quarter of this nation during this dire moment." Allen, president of the Brookings Institution, also took aim at the president's church photo-op. "Donald Trump isn't religious, has no need of religion, and doesn't care about the devout, except insofar as they serve his political needs," he wrote.—AFP



## International

# New criminal charges against four Minneapolis policemen

## Nights of escalating unrest give way to peaceful protests

**MINNEAPOLIS:** Prosecutors on Wednesday leveled new criminal charges against four Minneapolis policemen implicated in the death of a black man pinned by his neck to the street during an arrest that sparked more than a week of nationwide protest and civil strife. The added murder charge filed against one officer already in custody and the arrest of three more accused of playing a role in the killing of George Floyd, 46, came as several nights of escalating unrest gave way to mostly peaceful protests.

Thousands of demonstrators massed near the White House lit up their cellphone flashlights and sang along to the 1970s soul tune "Lean on Me," before resuming a chorus of anti-police chants. In a further display of self-policing seen in Washington and elsewhere this week, a number of protesters urge some of their more provocative cohorts to stop taunting police and leave. Several major cities scaled back or lifted curfews imposed for the past few days. But not all was calm. In New York City's Brooklyn borough, police in riot gear charged into a crowd of about 1,000 protesters defying a local curfew, albeit peacefully, near an outdoor plaza, and clubbed demonstrators and journalists as they scurried for cover in a downpour of heavy rain. The confrontation in Brooklyn seemed to be the biggest exception to a calmer night, hours after the new charges in Minneapolis.

### More charges

Derek Chauvin, jailed Friday on charges of third-degree murder and manslaughter, was

newly charged with second-degree murder. The added charge, defined under Minnesota law as unintentionally causing another person's death in the commission of a felony offense, can carry a sentence of up to 40 years, 15 years longer than the maximum sentence for third-degree murder. Chauvin, 44, was the white officer seen in widely circulated video footage kneeling on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes as Floyd gasped for air and repeatedly groaned, "Please, I can't breathe." Floyd, whom police suspected of trying to pass a counterfeit bill to pay for cigarettes, was pronounced dead at a hospital shortly after the May 25 encounter. Three fellow officers fired from the Minneapolis police department along with Chauvin the next day were charged on Wednesday - each with aiding and abetting both second-degree murder and manslaughter.

The three men - Thomas Lane, J Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao - have also been taken into custody. Aiding and abetting second-degree murder carries the same maximum punishment as the underlying offense - 40 years in prison. Floyd's death has become the latest flashpoint for long-simmering rage over police brutality against African Americans, propelling the issue of racial justice to the top of the political agenda five months before the US presidential election on Nov. 3. The spectacle of city streets flooded with angry though mostly peaceful protesters - punctuated by scenes of arson, looting and clashes with police - have fueled a sense of crisis. The upheavals have flared following weeks of social lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic,

city, a curfew is a "balancing act."

"The idea is not to interfere with people's ability to protest, to demonstrate, to express their frustrations, to have their say," he told AFP. "But it is to create a tool... so that the police have the ability to intercept them beforehand and prevent them from doing the sorts of activities that we obviously all are opposed to." New York had not used such a measure since August 1943, when the historically black neighborhood of Harlem was placed under a strict curfew for three days following riots. That rioting was also sparked by police brutality: a white police officer shot and wounded a black soldier called Robert Bandy after he intervened in the arrest of a black woman, according to reports at the time.

As tensions soared over the weekend, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Chicago announced on Saturday that they were introducing the extreme measure of nighttime curfews. Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed and the epicenter of the violence, had already introduced one. Washington DC followed suit on Sunday, with New York announcing its own the following day.

Authorities said the curfews were not intended to curtail people's right to protest - as protected by the First Amendment - but to crack down on violence and looting which was generally taking place after dark. —AFP



This combination of handout photos shows (left to right) ex-officers Derek Chauvin, Tou Thao, J Alexander Kueng and Thomas Kiernan Lane. The Minneapolis police officer accused of killing George Floyd, an unarmed African American man was arrested and charged with murder on May 29 as authorities sought to restore peace after three nights of violent protests left parts of the city in flames. — AFP

which has forced millions of Americans out of work and disproportionately affected minorities.

### Trial months away

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, a black former US congressman, has requested bail of \$1 million for each of the four former officers charged in the Floyd case. "This is a significant step forward on the road to justice, and we are gratified that this important action was brought before George Floyd's body was laid to rest," Benjamin Crump, attorney for the Floyd family, said in a statement. Ellison told a news conference winning a conviction "will be hard," noting that Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman, whose

office filed the original charges against Chauvin, is the only prosecutor in the state to have successfully convicted a police officer for murder. Fully investigating the case "is going to take months," he said. Protests erupted in Minneapolis the night after Floyd's death and quickly spread to dozens of cities large and small across the United States. In many cities, demonstrators defying nighttime curfews have been met by police in riot gear firing tear gas, mace and rubber bullets to disperse unruly crowds. National Guard troops have been activated in several states to assist local law enforcement. Authorities and some protest organizers have blamed much of the lawlessness on outside agitators and criminal elements. — Reuters

## America's curfews: Controversial, but are they effective?

**NEW YORK:** Violent protests over the death of a black man in police custody led several US cities to impose curfews, but do they help maintain order or merely further antagonize demonstrators? The demonstrations were sparked by the killing of George Floyd, who suffocated on Monday last week when Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

America's worst civil unrest since the 1960s ensued, and saw New York - the fabled "City that Never Sleeps," already reeling from the coronavirus - impose its first curfew in almost 80 years. Widespread looting, arson and clashes between police and protesters led authorities to also introduce ad hoc curfews across a host of other cities, including Washington DC, Los Angeles and Chicago. For Dennis Kenney, an expert in criminal justice at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, part of New York's City Univer-

## Mixed messages as sports world backs protesters

**LOS ANGELES:** If Megan Rapinoe decides to take a knee at next year's Olympic Games, she could get a reprimand. If she does it at the women's World Cup in 2023, she could get a round of applause. Over the past week, athletes, sports teams and leagues have expressed solidarity with protesters demanding an end to systemic racism and police brutality in the United States. But the chorus of concern has, in several cases, highlighted a sharp contrast between the solemn statements of support and how some sports bodies view protests by their own athletes.

In Germany, three Bundesliga players including Borussia Dortmund's Jadon Sancho and Schalke's US midfielder Weston McKennie were placed under formal investigation by the German FA (DFB) for protesting against racism during matches last weekend. Sancho marked his goal by removing his shirt to reveal a t-shirt with the slogan "Justice For George Floyd" - the African-American man whose death during an arrest by police in Minneapolis last

week triggered the wave of US protests. McKennie wore a black armband with the message "Justice for George."

German authorities said they were obliged to investigate the players because of longstanding FIFA regulations which forbid footballers from displaying any "political, religious or personal" messages on their kit during games. Yet all players under scrutiny were told Wednesday they will not face punishment. That followed a statement from FIFA which appeared to mark a clear softening of the previous stance, with the world football governing body stating that leagues should now consider the "context" of each protest and apply "common sense." FIFA President Gianni Infantino later went even farther. "For the avoidance of doubt, in a FIFA competition the recent demonstrations of players in Bundesliga matches would deserve an applause and not a punishment," Infantino said. That shift in FIFA's position could easily create headaches at some point in future as administrators wrestle with the subjective standards of "context" and "common sense." The FIFA edict would already appear to contradict rules put in place by the United States Soccer Federation. US Soccer - which this week posted a "United Against Racism" message across social media - introduced a regulation in 2017 requiring players to "stand respectfully" during the playing of the US national anthem. —AFP



## International

# Coronavirus casts spotlight on S Africa's housing blight

## A legacy of apartheid regime

**JOHANNESBURG:** Over three years, Isaac Mbatha grew accustomed to the suffocating summer heat and icy winter drafts that pierced the canvas walls of his tent in Wilgespruit, a township on a hilly outskirts of Johannesburg. He also came to terms with the lack of space, running water and electricity in the makeshift home he shared with his wife and three children. But he never got used to the rain. "When it's raining you can't even sleep," said the 38-year-old, recalling the deafening sound of water splattering against the flimsy sheets and the constant fear of flooding. "Life is very difficult if you don't have a roof over your head." Coronavirus brought unexpected respite to those wet sleepless nights.

Thanks to the pandemic, 70 Wilgespruit families have been relocated to wooden cottages nearby - free of charge. "No more rain inside your home, no more cold in the morning," Mbatha exclaimed. "Our life will be better now." Wilgespruit is one of South Africa's 2,700 so-called informal settlements. A section of it known as Plot 323 came into being in 2017, when hundreds of squatters were evicted from a nearby property where they had been living in shacks for over a decade. Thrown onto the streets, they were allowed to settle on the government-owned Wilgespruit hill - its name in Afrikaans means "stream of the weeping willow" - living in

donated khaki tents. Most scrap a meagre living from informal recycling of plastics.

### 'Not safe'

Such bubbles of extreme poverty are a legacy of the apartheid regime, whereby black South Africans were stripped of land ownership and moved to subpar neighborhoods away from inner-city areas. More than a million families continue to live in these informal settlements more than 25 years after the end of white-majority rule. The townships, usually only remembered by politicians when its election season, were dragged back to the government's attention by the coronavirus outbreak. Amid fears that overcrowding and squalor would hinder efforts to stem the disease, authorities rushed to boost access to sanitation and relocate the poorest. "For corona, the government gave us sanitizer (and) toilets," said another resident thirty-four-year-old Rebecca Jane.

"But we don't have water and there are several families living in one tent," she added. It's "not safe." "Plot 323" was the first on a government-compiled list of dozens of settlements in South Africa to be urgently "de-densified". At the inauguration ceremony last week, Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu said the residents' "dignity" had been "restored". She rebutted dryly against anyone who asked why the

curb the virus have coincided with the hardest months of the dry season. Unable to travel far in an inhospitable landscape, herders have been forced to spend what little money they have on animal feed. "Pastoralists are part of the population that has been the most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis here in Senegal," says local MP Yoro Sow. "They are extremely vulnerable."

The Fulani herders' main source of income - selling livestock - has also been cut off, because the local government has banned large markets over contamination fears. Even when the restrictions lift, it is not clear that all the herders will have the money to leave for better grazing. In the hamlet of Mbetiou Peulh, which is inhabited for only part of the year, Adama Ba says he must travel nearly 100 kilometers (60 miles) south soon, to a refuge containing pasture. A shortage of cash means his car has to stay behind. Ba's phone rings as he's walking across the scrub. A stroke of luck: A local official arrives in a blue pick-up, and agrees to transport one of his cows to the nearest town to be sold.

Weekly markets known as "loumas," which can draw traders from as far as the seaside capital Dakar, were the region's economic heart until they closed in March. To help herders, local authorities are distributing animal feed and are allowing them to sell livestock in small numbers, but it is not enough. Mamadou Cisse, 51, the livestock ministry's veterinary inspector in the region, said that the dry season is always grueling for herders. — AFP



**JOHANNESBURG:** Customers queue while waiting for the opening of a shop at the Bara taxi rank in Soweto, Johannesburg. — AFP

resettlement had taken so long. "We didn't know about their terrible conditions," Sisulu said. "The most important thing is (that) when we were aware of it, in less than a month we were able to solve it ... and we will continue to do it because we are a caring government."

As expected, Wilgespruit's re-location rapidly became a political football. "These people had been

put by what I would call an uncaring government into these tents and forgotten about," blasted Geoffrey Makhubo, mayor of Johannesburg and member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party. Makhubo, who took office in December, was making reference to his predecessor Herman Mashaba - a former member of the main opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) party. — AFP

## In Senegal's north, the Fulani herders boxed in by virus

**IN THE DESERT:** Scores of white cattle plod into the village for their only drink of water of the day. Herders, wearing brightly-coloured robes, walk in tow. Soon, they will wander miles back across the semi-desert of northern Senegal in search of sparse yellow stubs poking through the sand. "There is no water, there is no pasture," says Adama Ba, a herder whose 100-head of cattle is his lifeblood, in his native Pulaar. "I'm scared now. There is nothing here". The 56-year-old is one of thousands of semi-nomadic Fulani pastoralists who have been stuck in Senegal's Louga region, in the Sahel, since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The sparsely populated area is a sandy flatland, dotted with spindly gum arabic trees. The odd donkey shelters underneath them to escape soaring noon temperatures.

Pastoralists move with their cattle from north to south across Louga, and further afield, as pasture dries up, before returning north again with the summer rains. But recent times have been hard. Less rainfall, attributed to climate change, has meant less grazing. Worse, months of government restrictions on movement designed to

## Surge in Germans seeking alcoholism help

**BERLIN:** When the coronavirus lockdown started in Germany, all Marco wanted to do was get drunk. The musician from Berlin, 38, was downing roughly a bottle of gin every night. "I was like, why not, come on! It's quarantine, let's party!" But as the days went on, he started to see things differently.

"Because of quarantine you're forced to look at yourself and realize, wait a second, this is not OK. This is actually a problem, this is addiction." Marco - speaking on condition of anonymity - reached out to a local Alcoholics Anonymous group and made the decision to get sober after 20 years of drinking heavily almost every night. And he is far from alone in Germany, which has seen a surge in numbers of people seeking help for alcohol addiction since lockdown measures were introduced in early March. According to a spokesman for Alcoholics Anonymous, enquiries to the group's national helpline have roughly doubled - from about 10 calls per day to about 20.

### National culture

Germany has one of the highest rates of alco-

hol consumption in Europe, with drinking occupying a prominent place in national culture through events such as the Oktoberfest beer festival. According to a recent study by the German Center for Addiction Issues (DHS), three million Germans between the ages of 18 and 64 had an alcohol problem in 2018. Sales of alcohol rose sharply during the initial phase of the lockdown as many people turned to drinking at home as a substitute for banned social events. Wine sales at the end of March were 34 percent higher than during the same week in February, and sales of spirits went up 31 percent, according to a study published in the Spiegel magazine.

But the pandemic has also prompted many people to confront problematic alcohol use, whether through increased self-reflection or because family members finally became aware of how much they were drinking, according to the Alcoholics Anonymous spokesman. "Some people use or abuse the way to work and the workplace as a drinking opportunity, and in many cases this is now no longer available," he said. "People have to start drinking at home, and then their spouse or family can see how much they really drink. They get to the point where they realize that there is no way to hide it." Alcoholics Anonymous holds about 2,000 regular meetings across Germany. A spokesman for one of the groups in Berlin said it is now getting roughly one enquiry a day, compared to one or two a month before the pandemic started. — AFP



## International

# Record deaths in Brazil and Mexico spur defense efforts

## South and Central America become the new hotspots

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Brazil and Mexico reported record daily coronavirus death tolls as governments in Latin America battled to fortify defenses against the accelerating pandemic with fresh lockdown orders and curfews. European nations are emerging from months of devastation with some borders re-opening, but South and Central America have become the new hotspots in a crisis that has claimed at least 385,000 lives worldwide. Mexico on Wednesday announced more than 1,000 coronavirus deaths in a day for the first time, while Brazil reported a record 1,349 daily deaths.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has staunchly opposed lockdowns but many local authorities have defied him and, with the crisis deepening, a vast section of Bahia state was on Wednesday placed under curfew. There was more cause for concern in Chile, where the government said it was extending a three-week shutdown of the capital Santiago after a new record for daily deaths. And in more evidence of the scale of the crisis in Latin America, the journalists' union in Peru said at least 20 reporters had died from the coronavirus.

The outbreak in Peru has been so intense that oxygen tanks needed in hospitals have become scarce, with many lining up to buy them for their loved ones. "We haven't found oxygen yet," said Lady Savalla in the capital Lima. "I'm worried about my mom more than anything else, because

she's going to need a lot of oxygen and the hospital doesn't have enough."

Experts have warned that travel restrictions will be needed around the world in some form until a vaccine is found — and efforts to develop one are gathering pace. Britain is set to host a major meeting on Thursday, with more than 50 countries as well as powerful individuals such as Bill Gates taking part, to raise money for Gavi, the global vaccine alliance. Gavi and its partners will also launch a financing drive to purchase potential COVID-19 vaccines, scale-up their production and support delivery to developing nations.

Tests on one potential vaccine, being developed by Oxford University, will begin on 2,000 health services volunteers in Brazil next week. But months of lockdowns that left half of humanity under some form of confinement have battered the global economy, and there is desperation in many countries to reopen and revive businesses. Italy opened its borders to European travelers on Wednesday, hoping tourism will revive its recession-hit economy three months after its shutdown, though a full recovery seemed a long way off. "I don't think we'll see any foreign tourists really until the end of August or even September," said Mimmo Burgio, a cafe owner near Rome's Colosseum. "Who's going to come?"

The United States remains the hardest-hit na-



**MANAUS:** Aerial view of the Nossa Senhora Aparecida cemetery where COVID-19 victims are buried daily, in the neighbourhood of Taruma, in Manaus, Brazil during the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

tion in the world, with 1.85 million infections and more than 107,000 deaths, and there are fears that the ongoing wave of protests in the country over racism and police brutality could fuel the spread of the virus. Massive rallies have been held around America despite the risk of COVID-19 and restrictions on public gatherings. Many have said that while they were aware of the risk of infection, the issue of police brutality and racism was so

widespread and longstanding that they had to come out. Cav Manning, a 52-year-old emcee from New York, was among the tens of thousands across America willing to risk infection as he joined a protest in Brooklyn earlier this week. "What we saw is so disturbing that we've got to be out here right now," he told AFP. "Despite COVID, despite the fact that you might get infected." — AFP

## 'Recycles' help shield Mexico health workers from COVID stigma

**MEXICO CITY:** Daniela Chavez, a doctor, took up cycling to work after she felt discriminated against by a taxi driver. Her bicycle was a gift from activists who have been rounding up bicycles - dubbed by one organization as "recycles" - to donate to healthcare workers in Mexico City, in a bid to protect them from being stigmatized for looking after patients with COVID-19. Chavez said that as soon as she climbed inside the cab after a hard day in a public hospital, the driver asked if she was a doctor and where she worked.

Fearful she would suffer an aggressive response if she told him, as some colleagues have, the 26-year-old decided to get out instead. "I don't know if it's psychosis! We know we're people at risk, we always have been, but now that people discriminate against us for doing a dignified profession it's unprecedented," she told AFP. As coronavirus spread in Mexico, health care workers faced physical aggression on top of suspicion by people who viewed them as sources of infection. But in April, two cycling organizations came to their help, launching an initiative on social media inviting people to donate unused bicycles or spare parts to be given to healthcare workers. Simultaneously, Bicitekas and Alcadia de la Bicicleta invited health care workers to apply online to receive a bicycle.

At their workshop in the central neighborhood of La Escandon, between pedals, wheels and saddles, a group of activists spend 20 hours a

week repairing and assembling bicycles. The initiative is also aimed at reducing the risk of doctors and nurses infecting people while using public transport in the city of more than 15 million. "At the start of this outbreak we asked ourselves what we could do to support healthcare personnel who were being discriminated against on their journeys, and unfortunately, attacked due to their profession," said Agustin Martinez, the founder of Bicitekas. The organization has received 240 requests for a "recycle", as its bikes are called. So far they have delivered around 50.

For Diana Garduno, a 30-year-old nurse, it was a welcome boon as her bike was stolen in a burglary. She says she's been afraid since one of her colleagues was doused with a hot drink while walking in the street. "It's depressing how we give everything for a patient to be well and once we're outside we suffer this type of aggression," said Garduno. Loic Jaeger, the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) director for Mexico and Central America, told AFP that these attacks were taking place in a context of "the normalization of violence" that spills over from organized crime. "If we had more knowledge, there wouldn't be these kind of actions against healthcare workers," added Diego Villafuerte, 23, an intern in a private clinic who has received a bike.

### 'A healthy distance'

On Monday, Mexico began the reopening of "essential" sectors of its industry, including mining, aviation, construction and the manufacture of transport equipment, following more than two months of lockdown. The country of 127 million people has recorded more than 10,600 deaths and almost 100,000 coronavirus cases. Under the easing of virus restrictions, Mexico City has also allowed the sale of bicycles, the mode of transport celebrated internationally on Wednesday in an annual event inaugurated by the United Nations in 2018. The Mobility Secretariat is due to build 54 kilometers (34 miles) of cycle lanes to help give some of the five million people who used the metro every day before lockdown another option. —AFP

## HCQ ineffective at preventing the COVID-19: Trial

**WASHINGTON:** Taking hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) shortly after being exposed to COVID-19 does not help prevent infection in a statistically meaningful way, scientists reported Wednesday following a clinical trial. The medicine has been touted by US President Donald Trump, who has said he used it as a prophylaxis against the novel coronavirus. But an experiment involving 821 people across the United States and Canada showed it did not work significantly better than a placebo for this purpose. The study was led by a team at the University of Minnesota, and their paper was published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Researchers enrolled adults who had come into contact with someone who had a confirmed case of COVID-19 for more than 10 minutes at a distance of six feet (about two meters) or less.

The majority of them - 719 - were deemed to have had "high-risk" exposure because they wore neither a face mask nor an eye shield at the time, while the rest were "moderate-risk" because they covered their face but did not have goggles. All participants were randomly assigned to receive either hydroxychloroquine - which is certified for use against malaria, rheumatoid arthritis and lupus - or a placebo, within four days. The researchers then looked at how many patients went on to develop COVID-19 over the next two weeks, which was confirmed either by a laboratory test or by clinical signs. —AFP



## International

# COVID frustrates Saudi women's push for financial independence

## Pandemic hits nascent non-religious tourism industry hard

**AL ULA:** Abeer al-Howayan despaired of ever working after spending eight years trying to find a job that would put her chemistry degree to use in the Saudi Arabian town of Al Ula. She eventually abandoned her scientific ambitions and turned to selling homemade cakes, before she was chosen last year for a government training programme to support a \$20 billion flagship tourism project in the kingdom's northwestern region. The 31-year-old learned how to make artisanal soap from French experts flown in by Saudi authorities, and in late December started selling her creations at a booth near the rock-hewn tombs of Madain Saleh, site of an ancient civilisation.

She also started offering her wares online. Then the coronavirus struck. Even after all her compromises, Howayan's future is uncertain once again. The pandemic has hammered Saudi Arabia's nascent non-religious tourism industry - among the few new sectors to have emerged under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's drive to diversify the economy from oil and create millions of jobs. "It is very tough, but I keep telling myself things will get better after corona. One has to remain optimistic," Howayan, whose online business has also slowed, told Reuters.

Women in the United States and Europe have taken an outsized hit from the wave of unemployment caused by the coronavirus, but for

women in Saudi Arabia the downturn is particularly damaging because it struck just as their efforts to enter the workforce and gain greater financial independence were gaining traction. Howayan is among nearly one million unemployed Saudis - 12% of the working-age population - pinning their hopes on the prince's vision to modernize the conservative and patriarchal country with ambitious projects. Women make up about 83% of the jobless, according to the Saudi statistics office. And it's an educated group; 70% of those women have high school diplomas or university degrees. And many were counting on the new sectors such as tourism to provide their entry to the workforce.

### Private sector squeezed

Tackling unemployment is a main pillar of Prince Mohammed's plan. He promised in 2017 "better unemployment numbers by 2020" and to cut the jobless rate to 7% over the next decade. But the rate has fallen by less than 1 percentage point. A tough task has become even tougher as coronavirus disruptions and austerity measures have squeezed the finances of the private sector. "To reduce unemployment, the private sector will need to create at least 500,000 to 1 million jobs for Saudis, said John Sfakianakis, a Gulf expert at the University of

Cambridge, "But this year alone, the private sector will unavoidably contract by 7% ... and that's just this year." Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan told Reuters that the government remained committed to job creation targets and was still funding training and capacity building. "Coronavirus is with us this year and possibly for a part of next year, but then it will go away and when it goes away we need to make sure that we have seized this time to build more capacity and train more people to be ready when we start offering services again," said Jadaan. He did not specifically address the issue of women.

According to regional experts, a faltering of the reform drive could lead to the public questioning the social contract between the ruling Al Saud family and the people in a country where 80% of the population is under 30. Oil wealth is shared across the kingdom in exchange for popular submission to absolute monarchical rule. However there could be some social discontent if jobs do not materialize and Saudis find themselves paying more taxes with less state benefits, according to Yasmine Farouk at the Carnegie Middle East Center. "It will eventually guide the country into a political discussion that the leadership doesn't want," she said.

Saudi Arabia has largely struggled to lure

foreign capital outside the energy sector as many investors hesitate over Riyadh's human rights record and the commercial viability of some domestic mega projects. But the entertainment and tourism industries started taking off last year, accompanied by social reforms to open up the kingdom, including ending gender segregation in most public places and introducing public entertainment. Thousands of jobs were created and Saudis flocked to concerts, festivals and sporting events. Last year, the kingdom attracted international acts from Cirque du Soleil to Mariah Carey, Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli and Greek musician Yanni. Saudis also cheered female WWE wrestlers in Riyadh, and heavyweight boxers Anthony Joshua and Andy Ruiz Jr in a custom-built 15,000 person stadium.

However the Saudi tourism minister told Reuters in April that the industry, including Muslim pilgrimages, could decline by 35-45% this year due to coronavirus measures. Abeer Mohammed Jumuah is another example of a woman who benefited from the prince's reform drive. She spent years looking for a job as a teacher after graduating from university in home economics, and eventually joined a government training program last year to learn cooking skills in Paris—Reuters

## Virus-hit Mumbai largely unscathed by Cyclone

**MUMBAI:** At least three people were reported dead as coronavirus-hit Mumbai appeared to escape the worst of Cyclone Nisarga Wednesday, the first severe storm to threaten India's financial capital in more than 70 years. The city and its surrounds are usually sheltered from cyclones - the last deadly storm to hit the city was in 1948. Authorities had evacuated at least 100,000 people, including coronavirus patients, from flood-prone areas in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat ahead of Nisarga's arrival. The cyclone ripped roofs off buildings in nearby coastal towns, but appeared to have left the sprawling, crowded port megacity of Mumbai largely unscathed. Local media reported at least three fatalities in Maharashtra. One man died after an electric pole fell on him, and a woman and man were killed in their houses after tin sheets over their roofs blew away, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

The storm made landfall near the coastal town of Alibag, around 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Mumbai, on Wednesday afternoon, meteorologists said. It crossed Maharashtra's coast, with its path veering to the east of Mumbai, and gradually weakened to a deep depression by Wednesday evening, they added. The cyclone brought heavy rainfall with winds of 100-110 kilometers per hour and gusts of up to 120 kph. Mumbai experi-



**MUMBAI:** People walk under the rain along Marine Drive as rain falls in Mumbai yesterday - the day after cyclone Nisarga's landfall in India's western coast. — AFP

enced downpours throughout the afternoon, with strong winds toppling trees in some cases. City authorities said there were no reports of injuries or deaths, though the rains caused compound walls to collapse in some neighborhoods.

The beach town of Alibag fared worse, with the cyclone tearing roofs off homes and overturning mobile food stalls. A 45-year-old professor who evacuated from his house near the sea told AFP he could see corrugated roofing flying through the air as Nisarga's powerful winds struck. "The intensity is very strong and nothing like weather events we've seen before," said Milind Dhore, who lives in Alibag with his wife and son. The coastal town is a favored haunt of Bollywood stars and industrialists, who own holiday homes there. —AFP

## Snapchat curbs Trump for inciting 'racial violence'

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Snapchat on Wednesday became the latest social network moving to curb the reach of US President Donald Trump, claiming the president has been inciting "racial violence." The youth-focused social network said it would no longer promote Trump on its Discover platform for recommended content. "We will not amplify voices who incite racial violence and injustice by giving them free promotion on Discover," a statement from Snapchat said. The move came days after Twitter took an unprecedented stand by hiding a Trump post it said promoted violence, heating up the White House war with Silicon Valley and social media.

Snapchat parent Snap chief executive Evan Spiegel over the weekend sent a lengthy memo to employees condemning what he saw as a legacy of racial injustice and violence in the US. Snapchat will not promote accounts in the US that are linked to people who incite racial violence on or off the messaging platform, according to Spiegel. "Every minute we are silent in the face of evil and wrongdoing we are acting in support of evildoers," Spiegel wrote as companies responded to the outrage over the police killing of a black man in Minnesota. "I am heartbroken and enraged by the treatment of black people and people of color in America." The Discover feature at Snapchat is a curated platform on which the California-based company gets to decide what it recommends to users.—AFP



## International

# US suspends flights by Chinese airlines in spat with Beijing

## China to allow limited US passenger flights

**WASHINGTON:** Washington on Wednesday ordered the suspension of all flights by Chinese airlines into and out of the United States after Beijing failed to allow American carriers to resume services to China.

The move adds to a growing friction between the world's two largest economies amid the coronavirus crisis and in the wake of a two-year trade war that has not been fully resolved. The US action takes effect June 16 but could be implemented sooner if President Donald Trump orders it, the Department of Transportation (DOT) said.

The suspension applies to seven Chinese civilian carriers, although only four currently are running services to US cities, including Air China and China Eastern Airlines, the Department of Transportation (DOT) said. "US carriers have asked to resume passenger service, beginning June 1st. The Chinese government's failure to approve their requests is a violation of our Air Transport Agreement," the department said in a statement.

US air carriers had sharply reduced or suspended service to China amid the COVID-19 pandemic. United Airlines and Delta Air Lines submitted applications at the beginning of May to resume flights but have been unable to receive authorization from Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC), the DOT said.

The latest spat between Washington and Beijing centers partially on the CAAC deciding to determine the flight limit for foreign airlines

based on their activity as of March 12.

But US carriers had suspended all flights by that date due to the pandemic—meaning their cap was calculated to be zero—while Chinese-flagged flights continued.

The "arbitrary 'baseline' date... effectively precludes US carriers from reinstating scheduled passenger flights to and from China," the US order says. The department also said there are indications Chinese airlines are using charter flights to get around the limit of one flight a week to increase their advantage over US carriers.

"Our overriding goal is not the perpetuation of this situation, but rather an improved environment wherein the carriers of both parties will be able to exercise fully their bilateral rights," the order said.

### Downgrade for American

In early January 2020, before the pandemic struck, US and Chinese carriers operated approximately 325 weekly flights between the two countries.

"We support and appreciate the US government's actions to enforce our rights and ensure fairness," Delta spokesperson Lisa Hanna said. And Katherine Estep of industry trade group Airlines for America said the order should "ensure fair and equal opportunity for passenger airlines with respect to service to and from China."

Airline shares jump on Wall Street, with



**LOS ANGELES:** In this file photo, a family watches a China Airlines plane landing at LAX airport at the start of the Memorial Day holiday weekend in Los Angeles.—AFP

United gaining 12.5 percent in an upbeat market.

Meanwhile, China yesterday said foreign airlines blocked from operating in the country over virus fears would be allowed to resume limited flights, lifting a de facto ban on US carriers, a day after Washington ordered the suspension of all Chinese travel into and out of the US.

The apparent decision to step back by Beijing comes as tensions between the world's two

superpowers are sent soaring by a series of issues including Donald Trump's accusations over China's handling of the pandemic, Hong Kong and Huawei.

The latest spat was rooted in the Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC) deciding to impose a limit on foreign airlines based on their activity as of March 12. Because US carriers had suspended all flights by that date their cap was set at zero, while Chinese carriers' flights to the US continued. —Agencies

## Robot dog hounds Thai shoppers to keep hands virus-free

**BANGKOK:** A scurrying robot dog named K9 dispenses hand sanitizer to curious children and wary shoppers—one of the more unexpected measures Thai malls are taking as the kingdom relaxes virus restrictions.

The hi-tech hound is controlled using 5G, a technology promising super-fast internet speeds with immediate reaction times that is still in the initial stages of roll out in Thailand. Mimicking an excited puppy, K9 roams around the popular Central World mall in downtown Bangkok, drawing the attention of delighted children eager to get gel from a bottle attached to its back.

"It's convenient for people to wash their hands, just like a preventive measure... especially in this COVID-19 situation," said Petra Saktidejbanubandh, a marketing officer for mobile operator Advanced Info Services (AIS). AIS is aiming to roll out a 5G network for smartphones by the end of the year.

K9's 5G-powered comrades include ROC, which checks temperatures, and LISA, a customer service-bot.

"For K9 especially, people just think it's really cute," Petra told AFP, adding they hope to dispel any fiction-fueled fear of a robot takeover.



**BANGKOK:** A 5G K9 robot distributes hand sanitizer to visitors in a shopping mall in Bangkok yesterday.—AFP

"The robots are here to assist people, not to replace them." But shopper Lapassanan Buranapatpakorn was unconvinced, saying that she found K9's skeletal mechanical frame "creepy". "I think the execution, like the robot itself, is a bit scary," the 29-year-old said, though she admitted that giving out hand sanitizer is a "good idea". Thailand has gradually lifted restriction on businesses, which have taken precautions such as seating customers apart in restaurants or erecting plastic dividers in massage parlors. The kingdom currently has 3,101 confirmed cases of the virus and 58 deaths. —AFP

## Knife attack in Chinese primary school wounds 39

**BEIJING:** A knife-wielding attacker wounded 37 students and two adults at a primary school in southern China yesterday, officials said, with local media identifying a security guard as the perpetrator. All the victims, including teaching staff, were sent to hospital but were not in a life-threatening condition, authorities in Cangwu County, Guangxi region, said. The incident at the Wangfu Central Primary School happened at 8:30 am when children would normally arrive for class. The attacker, reportedly aged around 50, was "under control", the government said.

"37 students suffered mild injuries and two adults suffered more severe injuries. All of them were sent to a hospital for treatment, and none of their lives are in danger," it said. Schools in the region had only reopened in May after being closed for months due to the coronavirus outbreak. —AFP



## International

# India and Australia seal deal to use each other's military bases

## Modi and Morrison hold virtual summit

**NEW DELHI:** India and Australia sealed a deal yesterday to get access to each other's military bases, the Indian foreign ministry said - a pact that would clear the way for more military exchanges and exercises in the Indo-Pacific.

The mutual logistic support agreement was signed during a virtual summit between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison.

India has a similar pact with the United States which is seen as part of a broader security cooperation to balance China's growing economic and military weight in the region.

The agreement to provide access to each other's military bases in line with a similar accord that India has struck with the United States is seen as part of a broader strategy to counter China's military and economic weight in the region.

Indian troops are locked in a standoff with Chinese troops on their disputed border, the most serious crisis in years, on top of concerns about a huge trade imbalance in Beijing's favor.

Australia's trade frictions with China are also

growing and its push last month for an international review into the origins and spread of the novel coronavirus drew opposition from China. Morrison was due in India in January but was forced to cancel the trip because of the bushfires crisis in Australia. The holding of the summit now, in the middle of the pandemic, showed the importance the two leaders attached to bilateral ties, officials said.

"This is the first time that Prime Minister Modi will be holding a 'Bilateral Virtual Summit', this signifies the strengthening of ties with Australia and its upward trajectory," Indian foreign ministry spokesman Anurag Srivastava said. The Mutual Logistics Support Agreement under which military ships and aircraft can refuel and access maintenance facilities at each other's bases is ready for signing, another official said.

India is also considering Australia's participation in annual naval exercises it holds with the United States and Japan in the Indian and Pacific Ocean in a cementing of security ties between the four countries, military officials said. A similar exercise in 2007 had angered China. —Reuters



**NEW DELHI:** A man wearing a facemask watches on a monitor as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during a bilateral virtual summit with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison from his office in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

## Japan's 'mosh pit' trains spark fear of new virus cases

**TOKYO:** As Japan returns to work from coronavirus restrictions, its notoriously crowded trains - almost a symbol of its celebrated work ethic - are raising fears about a resurgence of infections.

Authorities in Tokyo had hoped to solve the problem of crowded commuting with staggered hours and remote working but the trains appeared almost back to normal yesterday, days after the lifting of a coronavirus emergency.

Health experts and politicians have blamed night spots and concert venues, known as live houses, for cultivating clusters of infection and have advised them to stay closed. But while no coronavirus cases have been linked to trains, many Tokyo residents say they are just as packed as any nightclub.

"It's such a contradiction that crowded trains are OK but live houses still can't open," said Twitter user Rimiken. "Crowded trains are like a music festival. They're a festival mosh pit."

Tokyo recorded 34 new infections on Tuesday, the highest daily increase since early May.

The Tokyo Metro subway is taking steps to prevent infections with open carriage windows and the disinfecting of ticket machines, spokesman Hisao Asano said. But it has no plan to limit passenger numbers or insist on spacing, he said.

"Given the various needs of our customers, we're not thinking about such a blanket restriction," Asano said. But a study by one of Japan's top research institutes indicated it may have to. The Riken Center for Computational Science found that even with open windows, the air flow concentrated above passengers' heads on crowded trains. —Reuters

## Virus spreads in Taliban bastions

**KUNDUZ:** The Taliban boasted of their readiness to fight the deadly coronavirus when it first reached Afghanistan, but now the insurgents are struggling to curb its spread in their strongholds. For months, Habib Rahman, a resident of a Taliban-controlled area in the south of the country, has been unable to test whether his persistent cough is due to the virus.

"I have a cough, fever and chest pain," said Rahman, 32, who owns a grocery store in Helmand province. "There is neither a center here to diagnose or treat coronavirus patients, nor is there any effort to create awareness of the disease. Official figures show Afghanistan has more than 17,000 confirmed cases—including thousands in Taliban-controlled territories. But an overall shortage of testing kits, medical supplies and a dilapidated health system were compounding problems in tackling the spread, said Ahmed Saeedi, an independent analyst.

Years of war have left Afghanistan with a crumbling health sector, hampering the government's fight against COVID-19. In an attempt to bolster their narrative that they can run Afghanistan better than the struggling administration, the Taliban launched a campaign to tackle the virus in March.

They posted images online showing insurgents distributing masks and soap to villagers—albeit without any social distancing. In one image, masked militants wearing white protective suits check residents' temperatures and explain about personal hygiene as a machinegun is seen on a nearby table.

### Disbelief about virus

The virus entered Afghanistan as infected migrants returned from neighboring Iran, the region's worst-hit country, and the Taliban ordered hundreds of returnees into quarantine. In some areas they controlled, the insurgents allowed government health officials to monitor the virus's spread—something rare for a group blamed for the deaths of dozens of medics over the years.

But in recent weeks, residents from provinces such as Kunduz, Helmand, Uruzgan and Kandahar—where the Taliban hold sway over large areas—complain they have been abandoned to their fate. In Kunduz, where the militants fought a fierce night battle before a short nationwide ceasefire last month, insurgents have barred medics.



**In this file photo,** Taliban prisoners walk in line during their release from the Bagram prison, next to the US military base in Bagram, some 50 km north of Kabul. —AFP

"They said they would handle the virus on their own," said Sebghatullah, a doctor from a nearby district, worried about the residents' lack of awareness when it came to personal hygiene. Haji Quadratullah, a resident of Helmand, said he recently saw a group of Taliban fighters film a promotional video at a neighborhood clinic, but they never returned. "I have not seen anybody do anything to raise awareness about the virus here," he said.

Taliban commanders insist they are helping fight the virus. "People who are suffering from high fever, cough and body pain... are taken to Trinkot," said Hafez Mohammad, a Taliban commander, referring to the capital of Uruzgan province.

Even during the Taliban's rule in the late 1990s, Afghanistan's health sector was hit by poor infrastructure, little international aid and underpaid medics. The disease is also sweeping through the Taliban itself, with several high-level militants believed to be sick with COVID-19, according to international media reports. The group denies any of their senior leaders are ill.

In his annual message marking the Eid holiday, the Taliban's top leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, urged people to seek medical help for the disease. But he also insisted the virus was caused by mankind's "transgression against Allah's religion". —AFP



## International

# India launches jobs plan for migrants in 'testing times'

## Thousands of migrants returning from Gulf amid crisis

**NEW DELHI:** India on Wednesday unveiled a jobs plan for "testing times" in a bid to get migrants back at work after the world's biggest coronavirus lockdown stripped millions of their livelihood.

With a mammoth repatriation effort underway, tens of thousands of migrant workers are returning to India and the government scheme aims to hook up the incomers with vacancies and kickstart the slowing economy.

"These are testing times," Mahendra Nath Pandey, Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, said in a statement. India put commercial jets, military aircraft and naval warships into action last month to bring back nearly a million Indians from neighboring countries, the Middle East, Singapore, Britain and the United States. [

More than 57,000 people have so far come back, according to the civil aviation ministry, in a repatriation mission spanning workers, students and vulnerable citizens stranded overseas by travel bans and closed borders. India recorded more than 211,700 confirmed infections and nearly 5,900 deaths on Wednesday, according to a tally by the Johns Hopkins University.

The government enforced one of the world's strictest lockdowns on March 25, shutting most commercial and industrial activity and leaving millions who rely on daily wages without a job. India has since eased its lockdown rules, allowing restaurants, malls and religious places to reopen from

June 8. Now that Indians are returning home, the government said it would create a database collating their skills and experience to help fill jobs in Indian and foreign companies "and bridge the demand-supply gap".

Migrants fill out a form online, listing their sector of work, job title, employment and years of experience. About 7,000 people had registered between May 30 - when the program went live - and Wednesday afternoon, when the program was official unveiled. Most said they worked in the sectors of oil and gas, construction, tourism and hospitality in the Middle East. Critics said the scheme failed to address low and semi-skilled workers, who make up more than 90 percent of Indian laborers in the Gulf and Southeast Asia, according to the International Labor Organization.

Others said the government was not doing enough to provide jobs to millions of internal migrants who have been pushed into hunger and poverty after losing their livelihoods. The country has witnessed scenes of mass internal migration, with countless workers forced to walk thousands of miles back home in scorching heat after losing their work, many dying of exhaustion or in accidents along the way.

India has announced a slew of measures to regularize the employment of migrant workers - from offering universal minimum daily wages to the launch of a registration system that opens the door

billion from Facebook and money from private equity firms Silver Lake, Vista Equity Partners, General Atlantic and KKR & Co Inc, value Jio Platforms, where Reliance last year announced it was consolidating its digital offerings, at roughly \$65 billion.

They also put Jio on track toward a goal Ambani described last year: an eventual listing that would mark a milestone for his effort to unite the digital offerings of his sprawling conglomerate, from set-top boxes to e-commerce and home automation.

Reliance declined to make Ambani, Asia's richest man, available for interview or respond to a detailed list of questions. But interviews with a dozen people familiar with the company's development efforts show how Reliance has pushed aggressive pricing for a one-stop digital commerce platform that incorporates features modeled on the American tech heavyweights it sees as rivals.

When Jio set out to launch a set-top box, it tasked a team with analyzing - and in some cases replicating - some 100 features of an Apple TV set-top box last year, according to a person close to the project and internal Jio documents seen by Reuters. "Presentation and listing of menu items should be similar to Apple TV," one of the documents says, assigning the task a "Priority 1" rating. One document compares the products' features, like average weight. Another includes instructions like "Matching the background theme of Launcher



**MUMBAI:** Migrant workers and families wait outside Dharavi slums for transportation to a railway terminus to catch a train back home after the government eased a nationwide lockdown imposed against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Mumbai.—AFP

to aid for workers who have lost their job.

But Nilanjan Ghosh, a director at the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation think tank, said economic slowdown risked unleashing a "survival of the fittest" syndrome. "If governmental

schemes do not work and the service sector shrinks, there will be large-scale unemployment that can be associated with increase in crime rates, social unrest and conflicts," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. — Reuters

## Amid pandemic, investors bet on India's Jio

**MUMBAI:** From its Silicon Valley-like campus near Mumbai, Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Jio telecom carrier is emerging as a winner from changes in the way Indian consumers plug into a digital economy made more urgent by the coronavirus pandemic.

For Indian shoppers who prefer to order online, it is launching a grocery ordering service with Facebook Inc's popular WhatsApp messaging. For Bollywood fans who would prefer to avoid a crowded theater, it is readying same-day-release on the Jio platform.

Those plans had been in the making for months, but the pandemic has given them a shot in the arm. India's 10-week lockdown has also led to a surge in demand for data, boosting Jio's phone and broadband offerings.

And, over the past six weeks, the digital business of Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd, known as Jio Platforms, raised a striking \$10 billion from global investors. The investments, including \$5.7

(home screen) to that of Apple TV."

Jio's set-top box comes included in its broadband plans, with the cheapest annual deal costing around \$110, whereas Apple TV 4K is selling for around \$210 to \$230 on Indian e-commerce sites.

Apple Inc did not respond to requests for comment. Jio also analyzed Amazon's Alexa voice assistant with the aim of coming up with its own offering, according to one person with knowledge of Jio's strategy. "They wanted to say: 'Hey Jio, can you switch on the lights?'" said the person. Reuters could not determine the status of the project. Amazon declined comment. In other areas, Ambani has shown a willingness to bet big on emerging technology. In India, Jio was an early adopter of voice-over-LTE, which is more efficient than traditional networks. The company expects that to give it an edge in rolling out 5G services.

"Few companies have the potential to transform a country's digital ecosystem in the way that Jio Platforms is doing in India," said KKR's co-founder Henry Kravis in announcing his investment.

In partnership with Facebook's WhatsApp, Reliance has launched a new service that allows consumers to order from their local grocery stores at a time when many Indian consumers, like shoppers elsewhere, are trying to minimize trips to stores. The service was rolled out in April in three areas of Greater Mumbai.

"Reliance wants to be a global technology pow-



erhouse," said Rahul Malhotra, an analyst with Bernstein. "With the Facebook partnership, they will build the WeChat of India," he added, referring to Tencent Holdings' messaging, payments and social media app that is ubiquitous in China.

Ambani dominates a dizzying array of sectors: Jio is India's leading telecoms carrier, Reliance Retail Limited is its top brick-and-mortar retailer, Reliance's Network18 Media & Investments Limited is one of its biggest news networks, and Reliance's Jamnagar is its largest oil complex.

His empire also produces films at Jio Studios and runs India's top soccer tournament, the Indian Super League. By providing Indian consumers access to everything from groceries and clothes to banking and home automation via an integrated system running through Jio, Ambani hopes Reliance can become what he calls an "everything company."—Reuters



## International

# Health workers, slum-dwellers face housing bias as lockdowns ease

## Slums from Brazil to the Philippines emerge as virus hotspots

**BANGKOK:** The easing of coronavirus lockdowns in cities around the world could lead to a rise in evictions of slum dwellers, housing experts warned on Wednesday, with healthcare workers and migrants also facing difficulties finding homes.

More than 6 million people have been reported infected with the coronavirus globally, according to a Reuters tally, with slums from Brazil to the Philippines emerging as hotspots.

As eviction moratoriums and rent holidays end, those who have lost jobs will be vulnerable to evictions, with authorities also likely to use the pandemic as an excuse to clear slums, said Theresa Williamson, a Brazil-based city planner.

"Certain government officials would like nothing more than the opportunity to permanently evict these neighborhoods," said Williamson, executive director of Catalytic Communities, a non-profit supporting Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

"Government officials will use the high death count to push evictions, arguing that it was these communities' unhygienic conditions that produced the deaths, rather than recognizing their own neglect of sanitation and health," she said.

About a third of the world's urban population lives in informal settlements, according to the United Nations, with poorly ventilated homes,

little or no running water, few toilets and inadequate sewage systems.

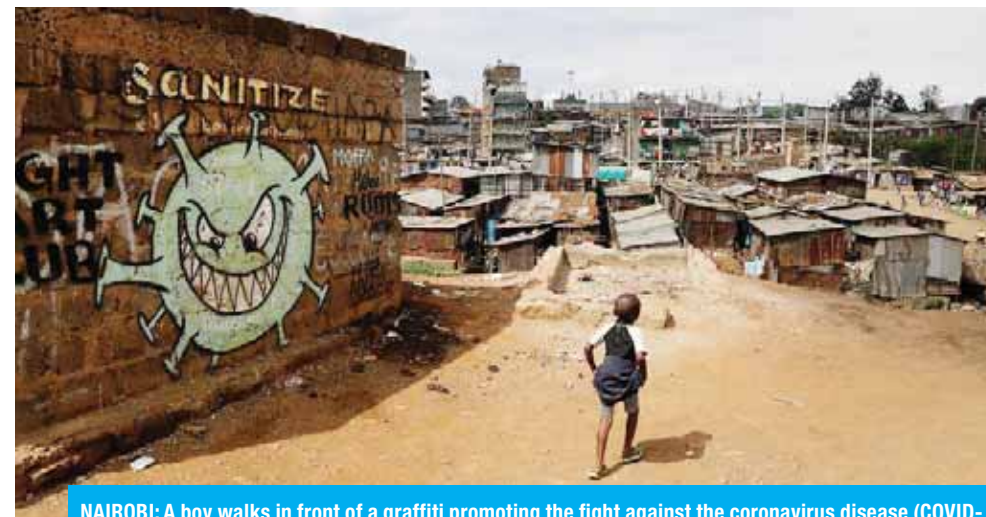
Most residents lack property records and face the constant threat of eviction, made worse now with job losses and plans for redevelopment, said Shivani Chaudhry, executive director of Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) in Delhi. In India, there was no moratorium on evictions during a months-long lockdown, and several were reported then, she said.

"If evictions could be carried out during the lockdown when people were asked to stay at home, there is a genuine fear that these will continue or even rise after restrictions ease," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. More than 11 million people in India risk being uprooted from their homes as authorities build highways and cordon off forests, HLRN forecast before the pandemic.

"We could see evictions on account of the inability of people to pay rent, as well as for infrastructure projects being promoted under the guise of economic recovery," Chaudhry said.

### Housing 'gate keepers'

The stigma around those infected or exposed to the coronavirus has also led to doctors, healthcare providers, sanitation and low-skilled workers being denied housing,



**NAIROBI:** A boy walks in front of a graffiti promoting the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Mathare slums of Nairobi, Kenya. — Reuters

said Chaudhry. The Indian government last month launched an affordable rental housing scheme for migrant workers and the urban poor, and proposed stringent punishment for those harassing or attacking healthcare personnel.

But landlords can still refuse to rent to them,

said Nirat Bhatnagar, founder of Belongg, a social venture that aims to register homeowners willing to rent without discriminating. In addition, landlords may insist on health certificates or for new tenants to use India's coronavirus contact-tracing app, which might exacerbate discrimination, he said. — Reuters

## Protest disrupts HK debate over national anthem bill

**HONG KONG:** Police and firefighters entered Hong Kong's legislature yesterday after two pro-democracy lawmakers threw foul-smelling liquid to protest against China's "murderous" crackdown by Chinese troops in and around Tiananmen Square 31 years ago.

Lawmakers Eddie Chu and Ray Chan rushed to the front of the chamber during a debate over a controversial bill that would criminalize disrespect of China's national anthem, splashing the reeking fluid as guards grappled with them. Police and firefighters later arrived on the scene. "A murderous state stinks forever. What we did today is to remind the world that we should never forgive the Chinese Communist Party for killing its own people 31 years ago," Chu said later, before he and Chan were removed from the chamber.

A final vote on the bill was expected later with people in Hong Kong set to commemorate the bloody 1989 crackdown by lighting candles across the city. For the first time, police have banned an annual vigil to mark the event that is usually held in downtown Victoria Park, citing the coronavirus outbreak. The disruption in the legislature came after pro-establishment lawmakers vetoed most amendments to the anthem bill proposed by democrats.

If passed, the bill could punish those who insult the anthem with up to three years jail and/or fines of up to HK\$50,000 (\$6,450). It states that "all individuals and organizations" should respect and dignify the national anthem and play it and sing it on "appropriate occasions". Tensions in the Chinese-ruled city have ramped up after Beijing gave the green light last week to move ahead with national security laws to tackle secession, subversion and foreign interference. —Reuters

## HSBC, StanChart back China law for Hong Kong

**HONG KONG/LONDON:** HSBC and Standard Chartered banks gave their backing to China's imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong on Wednesday in a break from their usual policy of political neutrality.

HSBC's Asia-Pacific Chief Executive Peter Wong signed a petition backing the law, the bank said. HSBC "respects and supports all laws that stabilize Hong Kong's social order," it said in a post on social media in China. StanChart later said it believed the law can "help maintain the long term economic and social stability of Hong Kong".

Both banks are based in Britain but have a significant Asia focus. Now Europe's largest bank, HSBC has its origins in Hong Kong, a British colony until 1997. It has previously avoided weighing in on the political situation there in recent months, while facing increased calls in Chinese state media to make its position clear.

A Hong Kong-based spokeswoman for the bank declined to comment beyond the contents of the post. Wong, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, told the official Xinhua news agency in an interview published on Wednesday he hoped the law could bring stability to Hong Kong.

HSBC moved its headquarters to London in 1993, but Hong Kong is still its biggest market. It has invested billions of dollars in China to grow its market share in the world's second-largest economy, and it has become harder for the

bank to follow an apolitical line as it faces criticism from both the pro- and anti-Beijing camps. "The US no longer considers Hong Kong autonomous from China and there are risks that HSBC becomes a political football after Peter Wong's declaration of support for the new national security law," Will Howlett, analyst at HSBC shareholder Quilter Cheviot, said.

Western human rights groups were critical.

"Does HSBC feel compelled to weigh in on other laws in other countries? We have watched over the past week China clearly assert pressure on businesses and other actors to show their support for the law to create the illusion of support," said Sophie Richardson, China director for US-based Human Rights Watch.

HSBC was caught up in Hong Kong's months-long anti-government protests, with its branches vandalized and bronze lion statues outside its headquarters defaced during a protest march on Jan 1. Some protesters accused HSBC of being complicit in action by the authorities against activists trying to raise money to support protesters, accusations the bank denied.

Some of HSBC's corporate peers have faced retribution from Beijing for perceived support for the anti-government protesters. Cathay Pacific Airways last year was forced to suspend staff involved in the protests, and chief executive Rupert Hogg and his top deputy resigned in August.

Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with the guarantee of freedoms, such as an independent legal system and right to protest, not enjoyed on the mainland.

The city was rocked by unrest last year by pro-democracy protesters fearing an erosion of those freedoms by Communist Party rulers in Beijing. China denies this and accuses the West of stirring up trouble. — Reuters



# Friday Times Lifestyle

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2020

www.kuwaittimes.net



A man adjusts a facemask with his face's image printed on it created at a photo studio as other facemasks are hung amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus in Chennai.—AFP

**Women in Egypt's restive Sinai bring Bedouin embroidery to virus fight**

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## Lifestyle | Features

Show goes on for **Turkish drama despite virus rules**

On a TV screen split into squares, a group of people speak on their laptops, taking turns and trying not to talk over each other. What looks like a corporate video conference is in fact a Turkish television soap opera shot in isolation during the coronavirus pandemic. Turkey is known for its obsession with TV dramas—also a massive export success—and not even virus restrictions could stop the cast of “Tutunamayanlar” from keeping the show going.

The drama, known as “The Outcasts” in English and aired by state-run TRT channel, kept viewers entertained by respecting the strict lockdown regulations throughout the pandemic even if it meant no makeup and no actors working together. The last six episodes of the season, which wrapped up this week, were shot on video-conferencing platform Zoom. Dogu Demirkol, who plays jobless man Tarik who keeps failing in life, said actors are adapting even though the virus upended how they perform.

“There’s nobody next to me. I act on my own and the others are on their own, sometimes our dialogues clash. We try to perform without breaking into each other’s roles,” Demirkol told AFP in the wooden house where the series was being shot at a set complex in Beykoz on the Asian outskirts of Istanbul. “It doesn’t feel like real life, it’s a bit artificial. I see how it is after I watch later... but still we’re having fun,” he said. The coronavirus pandemic sweeping the globe forced Turkey into lockdown from mid-March, and has caused more than 4,500 deaths. The government has now

eased most of the restrictions including allowing restaurants and cafes to reopen this week.

**‘No costume, no makeup’**

At the set, technical team members wear their protective “spacesuits,” Demirkol said, and adjust the camera angle and settings before leaving him alone. “There is a limited number of staff here. We’re not wearing costumes, nobody takes care of our hair or makeup.” Demirkol earned international renown in 2018 for his performance in the film “The Wild Pear Tree” by top Turkish modern filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan. On the set, Demirkol gazes at the remote controlled camera and delivers his lines along with fellow cast members joining him on Zoom.

The director, who is in another city, interacts with the actor also via Zoom. But the actor’s cast mates act from home. Demirkol said he preferred to work on set because he appeared in “half” of the series. “If I keep sitting then everyone in the series will be doing so” which would bore the audience, he added. “People are already bored at home. At least they see someone on the TV who moves.”

**Challenging early days**

Emrah Gurel, a viewer, said he spent more time in front of the television screen while he was forced to stay at home. “The series managed to make me laugh in those tough times. “I didn’t find the Zoom scenes bizarre. On the contrary, I thought it’s quite like real life because in this process, we also spoke with friends via Zoom.”

For technical staff, the first weeks of the outbreak proved challenging because it was hard to work in the protective gear, said Yener Yalcin, video assistant. “We have adjusted our script accordingly, it’s not like those we used to film. We have a different script, it’s much more adjusted to the house setting.” University student Calgan Aygun, 18, said Demirkol played a big part in keeping the viewers glued to their screens. “Dogu Demirkol’s performance is key to the laughter and making the show watchable because he’s also a stand up comedian,” he said.

**‘Trademark’**

Turkey’s soap operas are taking the Arab world by storm, prompting TV executives to start importing Turkish series even to Latin American countries—a region more used to exporting its own “telenovelas”. Recently, Turkish drama Resurrection: Ertugrul—the five-season series featuring the makings of the Ottoman Empire—earned praise in the Arab and Muslim world, gripping audiences and smashing television records.

Basak Aykut, art director for “The Outcasts”, said Turkish soap operas ranging from modern romances to historic dramas, filled with cliff-hanger plots and strong production, have achieved success worldwide. “Turkey’s series sector has become a trademark in the last decade and we have a major share in the world (industry),” she told AFP. “I don’t believe the current circumstances will harm the future of the sector because as long as people stay at home, they will watch television.” —AFP



Turkish actor Dogu Demirkol speaks during an interview with AFP on how TV sets work, in Beykoz, in the outskirts of Istanbul.—AFP

## Prosecutors seek trial for **Kardashian jewellery heist suspects**



In this file photo Kim Kardashian-West arrives for the 2018 LACMA Art+Film Gala at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Los Angeles, California.—AFP

The trial of 12 men accused over a Paris heist in which reality TV star Kim Kardashian was robbed of millions of dollars’ worth of jewellery appeared one step closer after prosecutors asked for the case go to court, a source told AFP. Five members of the gang stormed the luxury residence where Kardashian was staying during Paris Fashion Week in 2016, holding the star at gunpoint and making off with a huge diamond ring and other gems worth a total of nine million euros (\$9.5 million). Prosecutors will seek to take the case to court for all 12 - who are currently at liberty but under legal supervision - charging them with armed robbery, kidnapping and criminal association, a judicial source said Wednesday.

Examining magistrates must now decide whether the case will proceed to trial, the source added, although any trial is not expected to begin until 2021. Wearing police uniforms, the gang burst into Kardashian’s apartment, gagged and bound her and locked her in a bathroom before helping themselves to gems including a 20-carat Lorraine Schwartz diamond ring worth some four million euros. One of the alleged robbers, Yunis Abbas, fleeing the scene on a bicycle, dropped a diamond-encrusted cross worth 30,000 euros, which was found by a passer-by a few hours later. It remains the only piece to be recovered from the brazen heist, the biggest jewellery theft from an individual that France has seen in more than 20 years.

The alleged mastermind, Aomar Ait Khedache was arrested after his DNA was found at the site. He told investigators he had struggled to find a buyer for the Lorraine Schwartz ring, complaining it was “too recognisable” and that he had given it to an unidentified third party.—AFP

## Nigeria’s Nollywood gets creative to cope with virus crisis

As coronavirus closed businesses around the world and forced billions to stay home, Nigerian director Obi Emelonye came up with an innovative way to keep filming. Inspired by his wife’s teleconferencing calls from their isolation in Britain, he wrote and put together a short feature about a couple separated between London and Lagos. There was just one day for rehearsals and two for filming, and relatives shot the actors on mobile phones in their homes on two continents. “I said to myself, ‘What if I shoot a film remotely? I can direct my actors and produce it from home, and the cost is zero,’” the well-known 53-year-old director told AFP. “I wanted to show young people that despite the countless difficulties of our profession, despite the coronavirus, you can make a film without funding, without even a real camera.”

Inventiveness has always been a hallmark of Nigeria’s Nollywood—the second most prolific film industry on the planet—as it has risen from shaky homemade movies to slickly-produced blockbusters. But now, in the face of the coronavirus crisis that has seen social distancing rules shut down shoots and cinemas closed, the sector has needed that spirit more than ever. “We are an endangered species, we have to be innovative and to push the boundaries,” said Emelonye, whose short “Heart 2 Heart” was released for free on YouTube last month. “Things are very bad? You can make them better!”

**‘Difficult times’**

The Nigerian film industry is riddled with contradictions. On the surface are the red carpets, glitz and glamorous stars with millions of

Instagram followers. But underneath, much of the sector is poorly-funded, salaries are miserly and rampant piracy robs it of crucial revenues. The arrival of the virus has dealt a major blow just as producers try to focus on higher-quality movies, cinema audiences grow and giants like Netflix push to tap into the country of 200 million, the most populous in Africa. Moses Babatope watched in dismay as a government order to close saw income evaporate over the past three months at the Filmhouse, a cinema chain he co-founded in 2012. “We’ve been through other difficult times, but this crisis is even worse,” he told AFP.

Babatope estimated losses for the sector had reached over \$9 million (eight million euros) so far due to the virus. Dozens of film shoots have been put on hold or scrapped and the legion of workers in the industry—from make-up artists to technicians to ushers—are going unpaid. Netflix has suspended the filming of its first original series made in Nigeria and French media giant Vivendi has delayed the opening of its first cinema in the capital Abuja. Distributors reckon some 50,000 jobs are under threat since the sector juddered to a halt. “It’s going to take a while before it really starts up again,” Babatope said.

**‘New experiences’**

To navigate the current troubles the industry has begun pushing its boundaries. Producer Charles Okpaleke teamed up with two local cinema chains Genesis and Silverbird to launch open-air “Drive-in” facilities. A first screening in Abuja in late May saw all tickets sell out in just a few hours as viewers flocked to watched his film “Living in Bondage” from the comfort of their own cars. “COVID forces us to rethink our habits, but it is also an opportunity to try new experiences,” Okpaleke told AFP.

Producers and directors are also looking increasingly to the release their films on online streaming services like Netflix and its local competitor Iroko TV. And even up-and-coming industry hopefuls were given the opportunity to keep on honing their skills despite the disruptions. French start-up LAFAC has partnered with cinema school Femis and Nigerian television channel Wazobia to offer online training to would-be scriptwriters via a mobile app.—AFP



# Women in Egypt's restive Sinai bring Bedouin embroidery to virus fight

In El-Arish, the provincial capital of Egypt's North Sinai, a group of women sew colourful Bedouin designs on masks to combat coronavirus, as an insurgency simmers in their restive region. Egypt's toll from the COVID-19 pandemic has reached over 28,600 cases, including more than 1,000 deaths, while North Sinai itself remains the bloody scene of

tatraz—weaving and beading rich geometric and abstract designs on garments, cushions and purses—has been passed down from generation to generation for centuries. It has survived in the Sinai Peninsula, whose north has been plagued by years of militant activity and terror attacks spearheaded by a local affiliate of the Islamic State (IS) group.

## Keeping Bedouin heritage alive

Security forces have been locked in a battle to quell an insurgency in the Sinai that intensified after the military's 2013 ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi. In February 2018, authorities launched a nationwide operation against militants, focusing on North Sinai. Around 970 suspected militants have since been killed in the region along with dozens of security personnel, according to official figures. Local and international media are banned from entering heavily militarised North Sinai.

But for Amany Gharib, who founded the El-Fayrouz Association in El-Arish in 2010, the violence has not dissuaded her from keeping Bedouin heritage alive while at the same time empowering local women. She now employs around 550 women like Mohammed—many of them casually or part-time—as part of a textiles workshop. “The masks are composed of two layers—one inner layer directly on the face which is disinfected, and the colourful, beaded one outside,” Gharib explained to AFP. All the women take the necessary precautions while working, including wearing gloves and masks while using sewing machines.

The finished products are washed, packed and shipped off to distribution centres in Cairo, where they are sold online in partnership with Jumia—Africa's e-commerce giant—for about 40 pounds (\$2.50) each. The beading process takes about two days for each mask, Gharib said.



## Living with terror

Amid the volatile security situation, Mohammed has been able to eke out a meagre living with her embroidery skills. “We work and are given our dues depending on the orders we get... with the masks it has been a new challenge we've tackled,” she said. Dire economic conditions in Egypt have been even tougher for women of the Sinai since the pandemic began. “Times are really tough for the women but we have adjusted,” Gharib said.

And while militant attacks on security checkpoints have continued, Gharib expressed confidence in the army. “We feel a sense of security and stability with the military presence. We trust them,” she said. The region witnessed the deadliest terror attack in Egypt's modern history when militants killed more than 300 worshippers in a mosque in November 2017. Gharib said that in North Sinai's tight-knit community, each family knew someone who had been killed in an attack. “Anyone of us who is killed, we consider them a martyr,” she said. “We are in a war with terror... but the people have learnt to live with it.”—AFP



A handout shows a woman sewing colourful bedouin-styled face masks, at the city of El-Arish the capital of Egypt's North Sinai province, to be sold online to customers as part of COVID-19 coronavirus prevention. — AFP photos

a long-running Islamist insurgency. “I learnt how to embroider when I was a young girl watching my mother,” homemaker Naglaa Mohammed, 36, told AFP on a landline from El-Arish, as mobile phone links are often disrupted. A versatile embroiderer, she also beads garments and crafts rings and bracelets.

Now with the pandemic, she has been designing face masks showcasing her Bedouin heritage. Bedouins are nomadic tribes who traditionally inhabit desert areas throughout the Arab world, from North Africa to Iraq. Many have now integrated into a more urban lifestyle. Egypt's Bedouin textile tradition of



Colourful bedouin-styled face masks made by women members of the association are shown.





## On a caravan with one of the Sahara's last European explorers

Thierry Tillet rides his camel during his expedition.

**C**limbing into the saddle, he adjusts the scarf protecting his head from the sun and, with a tap on the camel's back, the caravan sets off. Thierry Tillet is again off to explore the vast Saharan desert, at the head of a nine-camel convoy with three other riders. At 68, the Frenchman is one of the last European explorers since the end of the 19th century to dedicate much of his life — 47 years—to crisscrossing the Sahara. This expedition, which began before the coronavirus epidemic, starts and ends at two desert jewels in central Mauritania. From Tichitt, the convoy is headed east to Oualata, 300 kilometres (185 miles) away, travelling in single file over a sandy, rocky landscape.

For the first time, Tillet—or Ghabidine, as a Tuareg friend renamed him—is taking journalists along “so that this knowledge reaches the general public”. Perched on the back of his swaying camel, Tillet wears an old, holey T-shirt and worn sandals. With his tousled, white hair and stubbled chin, it's easy to forget he's an authority in his field. For many years he was a member of the anthropology laboratory at France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS).

He was also professor of prehistoric archaeology at Grenoble University and taught in Chad, Niger and Mali. Throughout, he would go back and forth to the Sahara. He has documented Neolithic civilisations, overseen the in-

ventory of Malian archaeological sites and discovered a dinosaur skeleton in the Tenere desert in Niger. “Sometimes, small fragments of discovered tools contain more information than a dinosaur, even if it's less spectacular,” Tillet says.

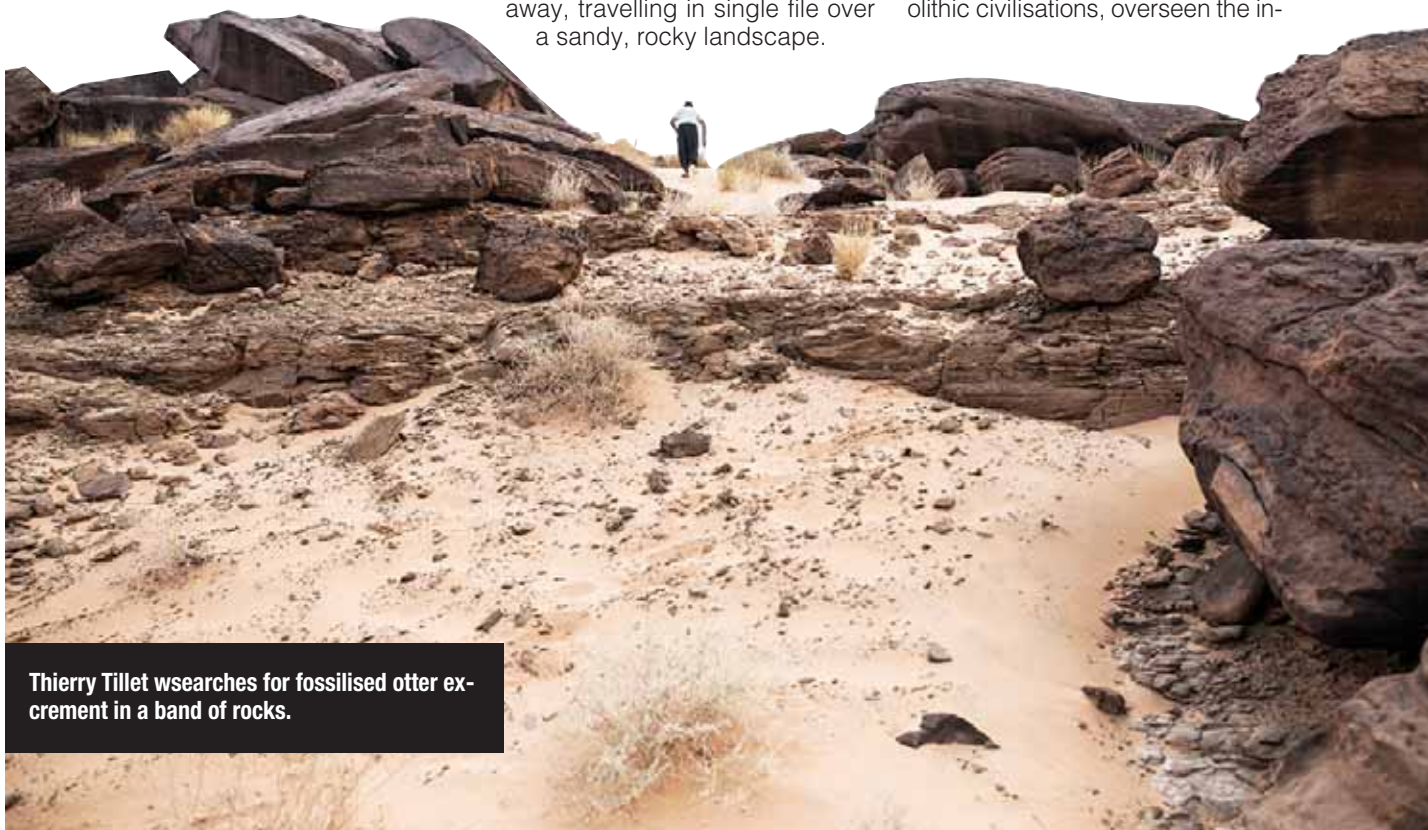
### In all its diversity

Exploring the history of the world's largest expanse of arid land is a hugely diverse venture. It can range from the forgotten religious centres of Sufi brotherhoods in northern Mali, to the sandstone plateaus in northeastern Chad and prehistoric Saharan settlements in Niger. But trading his camel for the comfort of an air-conditioned vehicle as his mode of transport isn't an option for Tillet. “You're going at the speed of the camel, and that allows me to observe and spot a number of things on the ground,” he says. “In a car I wouldn't be able to do that, it moves too quickly.”

Each trip brings something new, be it publications in scientific works, “a few stones brought back for research” or photos of objects from the Neolithic era, the last period of the Stone Age. Currently it's an 11th-century caravan depot lost in the Mauritanian dunes, the Ma'den Ijafen, that begs to be found. “It was Theodore (Monod, the late French explorer) who discovered it in 1956,” Tillet says. “He asked me to go back there.” For three years now, he has been searching and, on this expedition, wants to ask around among nomadic shepherds.

### The revealing winds

Tillet does not consider himself an adventurer or a daredevil. “Exploration carries with it a fantasy. I'm not trying to discover the unknown, but to discover what exists!” he says. “That is true scientific exploration.” In this part of the Sahara, prehistoric artefacts are everywhere, constantly revealed by an omnipresent wind, but indistinguishable to the untrained eye. “In a continental climate, it's often necessary to dig... Here, it's all on the surface.” Without warning, he pulls the



Thierry Tillet searches for fossilised otter excrement in a band of rocks.





A woman walks through the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



Thierry Tillet studies rock engravings inscribed onto the ancient rock formation, Makhrouga, in Mauritania.

reins to stop, on spotting something interesting. If he doesn't know what it is, he takes notes and—in his only recourse to 21st-century technology—satellite coordinates using a GPS. Once home in southwestern France's Perigord region, he will transfer them onto a map, tirelessly completing what he calls his "spider's web". The hundreds of GPS points are not only a scientific record but suggest the route of his next expedition.

#### Searching for a bull

Tillet, the son of Parisian bakers, said his love of Africa and archaeology began after hearing stories as a child. But it was his first university professor who ignited the desire

Sheih and Ahmed, whom he has known for many years. Looks, gestures and common phrases in mixed mother tongues make up for any language barriers.

The days are punctuated by the same rituals: a sunrise departure, stops to drink green tea and finding a place where they can make supper before sleeping under the stars as the camels graze. After two days, the caravan stops at Akrejitt, an archaeological site discovered in 1934 by Monod and partly restored by a French team at the end of the last century. The foundations of the old buildings are visible again. European tourists disembark from their 4x4s in a cloud of dust and briskly visit the old town, just last year removed from the "red zones" where the French foreign ministry advises against travel. Tillet looks for a drawing of a bull on a rock, located during a previous visit. "It is two metres (6.5 feet) long," he says. "My GPS point tells me it's in 22 metres." He scans and searches, passing repeatedly through the ruins, but finds nothing.

#### 'At great risk'

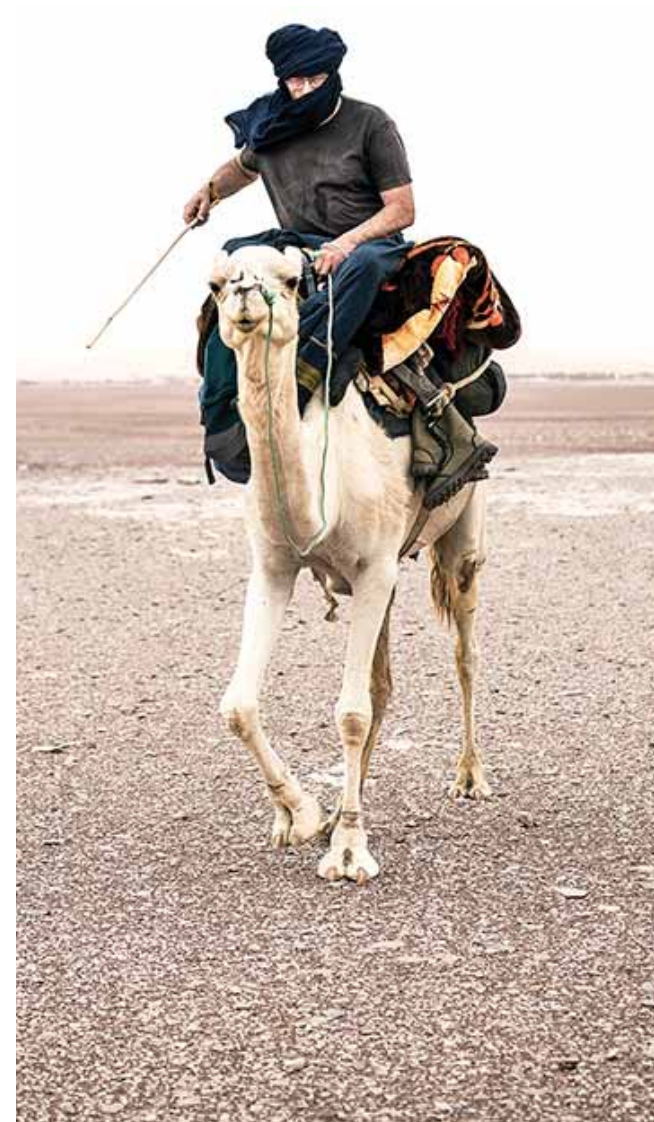
Concerned about kidnappings, the French authorities are not always happy about the caravan's off-the-radar trips. "These people are as worrying as they are fascinating, so we have to keep an eye out," a French diplomat in the sub-region later told AFP. Three-quarters of the caravan's route are in areas that travellers are officially advised by the French government to avoid. "Objectively, he sometimes puts himself at great risk," acknowledged Pierre Touya, president of the Association of Saharans which groups archaeologists, geographers and other enthusiasts.

Still, "he remains rational, does very good research and is supported by local knowledge," he said. On-the-ground information from locals is key to Tillet's preparations be-



Thierry Tillet is seen on his camel during an expedition between the towns of Tichitt and Aratane in South Eastern Mauritania.

to go and see it for himself, encouraging him to focus on the Sahara. On his first trip—in Algeria—it rained a lot. "For someone wanting to study the Sahara, it was a bad start!" he says, laughing. Tillet's wife occasionally used to accompany him on his explorations. But this time, his companions are Ahmadou,



Thierry Tillet, a Saharien Archeologist and explorer, rides his camel during an expedition between the towns of Tichitt and Aratane in South Eastern Mauritania—AFP photos



## Lifestyle | Travel

fore leaving. By email and phone, he finds out about nomadic tribes' movements or where there are wells for the animals to drink. For decades, the region has been buffeted by inter-communal clashes, separatist insurgencies and conflicts between religious groups—and Tillet has often found himself on the front row. In the 1990s, he met Iyad Ag Ghaly, then a rebel leader and now head of one of the main jihadist coalitions.



**Thierry Tillet (center), a Saharian Archeologist and explorer, talks with his friend Bauh-Ahmed (left) for the first time after five years, in a Ne-madi camp between Tichitt and Aratane in Mauritania.**

He also met French ethnologist Françoise Claustre in Chad before she was kidnapped in 1974 by Hissene Habre's rebels. And he has shared mechoui, a meal of slow-roasted lamb, with former Malian president and fellow archaeologist Alpha Oumar Konaré. "As long as I don't bump into the bastards, it's all right," he smiles, talking about the jihadists, who are an escalating threat in the Sahel region.

In 2009, he was forced to hide in the northern Malian town of Kidal. Alerted to the presence of "likely unfriendly" groups at a time when Tuareg independence rebellions and jihadist groups were emerging, he left at 4:00 am in a pick-up truck, his head down and face hidden. That same year, he and his camel team were woken in



**Thierry Tillet studies rock engravings inscribed onto the ancient rock formation, Makhrouga, in Mauritania.**

the night by the blinding light of a surveillance drone in the desert of Mali's Taoudenit region. The jihadist expansion in the Sahel-Saharan strip has reduced exploration possibilities. But, according to a source close to the authorities, interviewed in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott, a security grid set up a decade ago to counter the emerging jihadist influence is "once again allowing scientists and tourists to come".

#### 'So much to document'

It's day four and, after a cold night, he groans from the pain of an old foot injury as he climbs into the saddle. But, neither the discomfort nor deteriorating regional security will stop him. This desert is "the place where I feel the best, where you can't go wrong", he says. When he reaches Qualata near the Mali border after what will have been a two-week journey, Tillet plans to relax and

drink tea with an old acquaintance.

Even if he didn't find the elusive caravan depot this time, he's happy with the information gleaned. Previously the projects were funded by his former employer, the CNRS, but since retiring in 2012, he pays the several thousand euros needed for the trip himself. Monod got off his camel for the last time aged 93 and Tillet, a member of the French Society of Explorers, hopes to go on for a long while yet. "There's still so much to document," he says. For next year he is planning his longest route so far, at more than 1,000 km, back in the Sahara, with its many silences but, as he says, "where it's never boring".—AFP



**Thierry Tillet is seen with his camel caravan in the desert between Tichitt and Aratane in South Eastern Mauritania.**





## MAURITANIA'S FORMER DESERT JEWEL, forgotten and fading

**A** few centuries ago, Tichitt was a citadel of trade where Saharan merchants bearing gold, salt and cloth would stop to water their camels and haggle. Today, red-and-white signs in the sand dunes point to where this once great hub of commerce and centre of Islamic culture lies. But visitors to Tichitt, a UNESCO world heritage site, are few now, and the great outpost in arid central southern Mauritania is all but forgotten. "Sometimes a month will go by without a car coming," Cherif Mokhtar Mbaka, an English teacher in the town, says sadly.

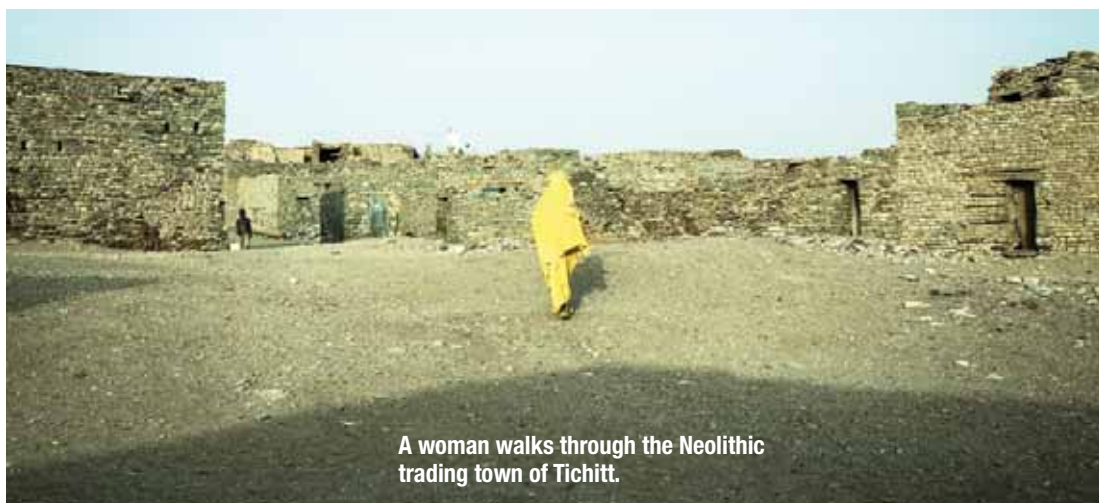
Grey-stone buildings dating from its golden age have survived but little else in the town of 2,470 residents, according to a 2016 census, points to its rich heritage. The trans-Saharan caravan route that flourished between the 11th and 19th cen-

tures brought a steady stream of traders to Tichitt, en route to Timbuktu and settlements in the Niger river basin. "The decline began when the trade began to prefer sea routes rather than land routes," Mbaka says. "Now it's over, and people are facing many problems." Today, the traders who come arrive on a monthly supply truck, bringing rice and pasta to the local shops—and leave again, with salt mined from a nearby saline plain, or sebkha.

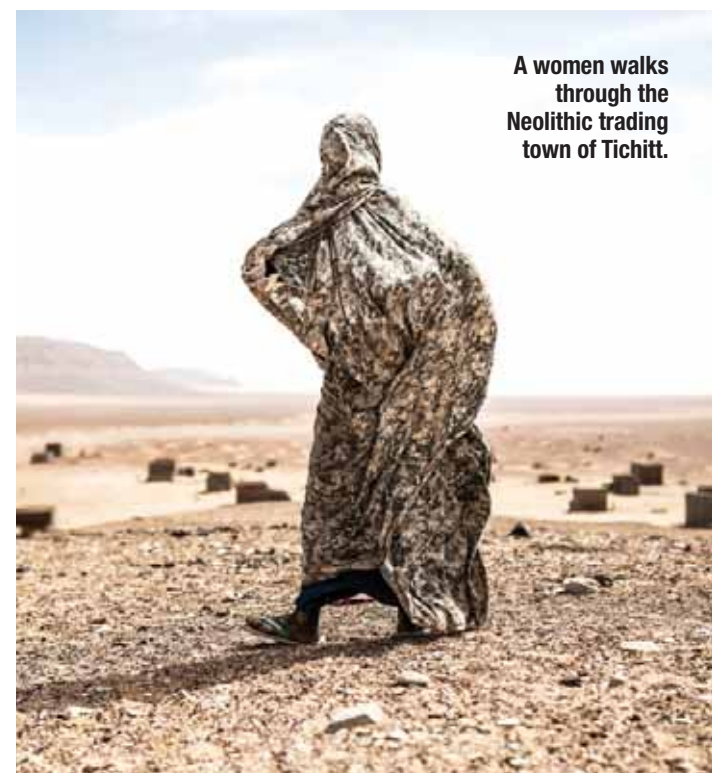
### Racing memories

Tichitt has lost another economic lifeline, too, in its more recent past. The renowned Paris-Dakar Rally used to pass through, bringing a caravan of race car drivers, journalists and tourists. "The old airstrip laid down by the French in the colonial era

was redeveloped for the rally," said local dignitary Mohamed Teya, recalling how dozens of planes used to touch down during the event. But, in 2009, organisers relocated the off-road race to South America due to security threats in the Sahara and the runway has since disappeared. Likewise, Tichitt's reputation as a jewel of Islamic culture has faded.



A woman walks through the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



A woman walks through the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



Friday, June 5, 2020



Men load a camel with large bags of salt, mined from a salt field on the outskirts of the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



A petrol station is seen in the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.

As well as the unique architecture from its heyday, carefully maintained by UNESCO and the Mauritanian government which stipulate that new buildings retain the style, reams of yellowing historic manuscripts have survived. The documents are stored haphazardly in people's homes. High school headmaster Mouhamedou Ahmadou set up a group to preserve them about 20 years ago and was allotted a house for the purpose.

the heart of the desert and it's hot," Ahmadou exclaims. As he pulls out works from the shelves written mostly during the 7th and 8th century Arab conquests, the dust clouds make everyone in the room cough.

#### 'Forgotten'

"Tichitt is forgotten," its mayor Hamadou Lah Medou, 38, says. Even within an already sparsely populated country of some four million, its isolation makes life difficult and expensive. There's a small clinic offering first aid—and an ambulance, one of the six cars in the town, jokes local official Mohamed Teya. For more serious treatment, people must go to the hospital in Tidjikja, the regional capital about 230 kilometres (143 miles) away. "We need a road," the mayor bemoans. Yet, the petrol station—two pumps and a sign in the sand—is often empty.

Many try to make a living elsewhere. "There's nothing to do here, no work, no opportunities," says Gildou Muhamedou Babui, 34, dressed in a sky-blue boubou. Some find jobs at the palm grove, he says. Others work at the salt field, paid a few ouguiyas for their heavy manual labour, cutting the salt and loading up the camels of passing traders impatient to be on their way.

Babui himself tried to find work in the capital Nouakchott and in the northwestern town of Atar but to no avail. He now keeps the accounts at the town hall. "At least it's stable," he says, of the work that earns him about 3,900 ouguiyas (\$103, 95 euros) a month. "What can we do?"—AFP

But he has few resources for the job and their future looks bleak. "These manuscripts are like old people and children: they are fragile," Ahmadou says. Towns like Timbuktu in Mali—renowned worldwide for historically important manuscripts—benefit from foreign funding, or even temperature-controlled rooms, he points out. "Look here! We're in



A person is seen inside the ancient rock formation of Makhrouga between Tichitt and Aratane in Mauritania.



Men are seen praying at the historic Chinguetti Mosque in the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



Two young men are seen resting at a camp along the road from Tidjikja to Tichitt in Mauritania.



People are seen in the market centre of the town of Tidjikja. —AFP photos



Ancient transcripts are seen stored in a library in the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



Mouhamedou Ahmadou, the Director of the library and transcript writer, brushes the dust off an ancient transcript in a library in the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt.



A general view of the outskirts of the Neolithic trading town of Tichitt is seen.





Works by Austrian artist Gustav Klimt are projected on June 3, 2020 in Bordeaux at the “Bassins de Lumieres” digital art center as part of one of the center’s opening exhibitions entitled “Gustav Klimt: gold and colour”. Located in Bordeaux’s former submarine base, the Bassins de Lumières will present monumental immersive digital exhibitions devoted to the major artists in the history of art and contemporary art.—AFP photos

## Don't forget us! - Europe's museums respond to virus

Online guided tours, podcasts and workshops—European museums closed because of coronavirus have been quick to reach out to audiences in imaginative ways during an almost continent-wide lockdown. Often free, these new digital contents also make it possible to “maintain a bond” with the regulars, according to the Wellcome Collection, so people do not “forget us”. The London museum hopes, like others, that internet users will become actual rather than virtual visitors when the lockdown is lifted.

### France: Versailles seen from the Sun King's bed

Since the start of outbreak, visits to the Paris Louvre’s website have exploded, going from 40,000 to 400,000 visits per day. There are filmed conferences, podcasts and guided tours carried out by a YouTuber. Elsewhere in the French capital, there is “an opportunity to discover” the Palace of Versailles “differently”, thanks to a virtual reality game which offers new viewing angles, such as from the stage of the Royal Opera or in the bed of the Sun King, Louis XIV.

### UK: Virtual walks in the woods

The Tate in London offers artistic activities to children confined indoors during the virus, including learning to weave like Anni Albers or bond with Matisse, via the “Tate Kids” website. Traffic to the website has increased by 137 percent in the weeks since Britain was placed on lockdown in March. In north London, the Wellcome collection has taken inspiration from the virus by highlighting collections devoted to the development of medicine. “People are interested in content that reflects our current concerns—articles on the Spanish Flu and toilet paper have been popular,” said Danny Birchall, digital content manager at Wellcome.

“It’s helping us maintain an engagement with our existing audiences,” he added. “Revenue isn’t an issue for our exhibitions (which are free), but our commercial activities (shop, cafe, event hire) which support those activities have obviously been

hit hard.” Conversely, the Serpentine Gallery offers escape far from the virus and confinement restrictions thanks to Danish artist Jakob Kudsk Steensen’s immersive experience “Catharsis”, a website offering a digital simulation of a walk in the woods. “Jakob’s project connects to the park and the trees, of course in times of self isolation the park is very important,” says Serpentine Galleries artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist.

### Germany: Instagram and the past

An exhibition dedicated to Lee Mingwei at the Berlin museum Gropius can now be visited online, the contemporary artist having even created two works especially for this digital version. The Koenig Galerie has turned to Instagram. Every morning its owner, Johann Koenig, questions a different artist directly about his work. And to commemorate the 75 years since the end of the Second World War, the association Kulturprojekte Berlin plans a virtual tour in key places of the capital such as the Reichstag, reconstructing key moments from the city’s rich past, thanks to an application using virtual reality. “In this way, history, encounters and exchanges are made easily



accessible even in times of corona crisis and social distancing,” said the museum.

### Italy: 500 years after his death, Raphael on YouTube

The Italian culture ministry has launched a website, “Culture never stops!”, which provides access to numerous digital initiatives organised by public cultural sites and the world of entertainment, music and history. Videos tell how the archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried by the eruption of Vesuvius, then restored. The Vatican offers no less than seven virtual tours, which allow people to “visit” the Sistine Chapel. The gigantic Rome exhibition marking 500 years since the death of the painter Raphael now offers a 13-minute guided tour on his YouTube channel.

### Austria: Klimt and Facebook

In Vienna, likewise, social media has offered the solution since museums closed on March 11. Most offer virtual guided tours and the Belvedere Museum, famous for “The Kiss” by Gustav Klimt, has been exhibiting on Facebook, where users can ask questions about the painting.

### Russia: Dancing with the Bolshoi

In Saint Petersburg, the world-famous Hermitage Museum has put virtual tours online of its collections, which have already been visited by more than 10 million people since the museum’s closure. The legendary Bolshoi dance troupe offers visitors the chance to see some of its most famous ballets and operas on its site, including “Boris Godounov” and “The Nutcracker”. Star dancers also give some basic lessons online. Moscow arts centre Flakon has launched a contest inspired by the coronavirus, where works have to show “the way the pandemic will change us, society and the world around us”. — AFP



Kids Page

Daily SuDoku

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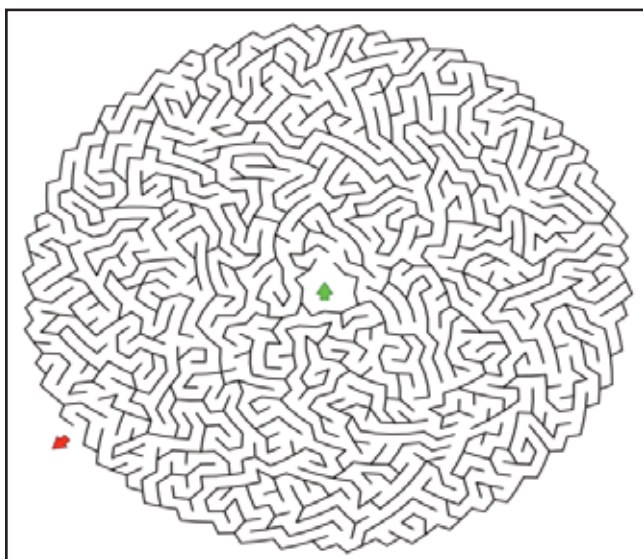
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Yesterday's Solution

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very hard

Kids Mazes

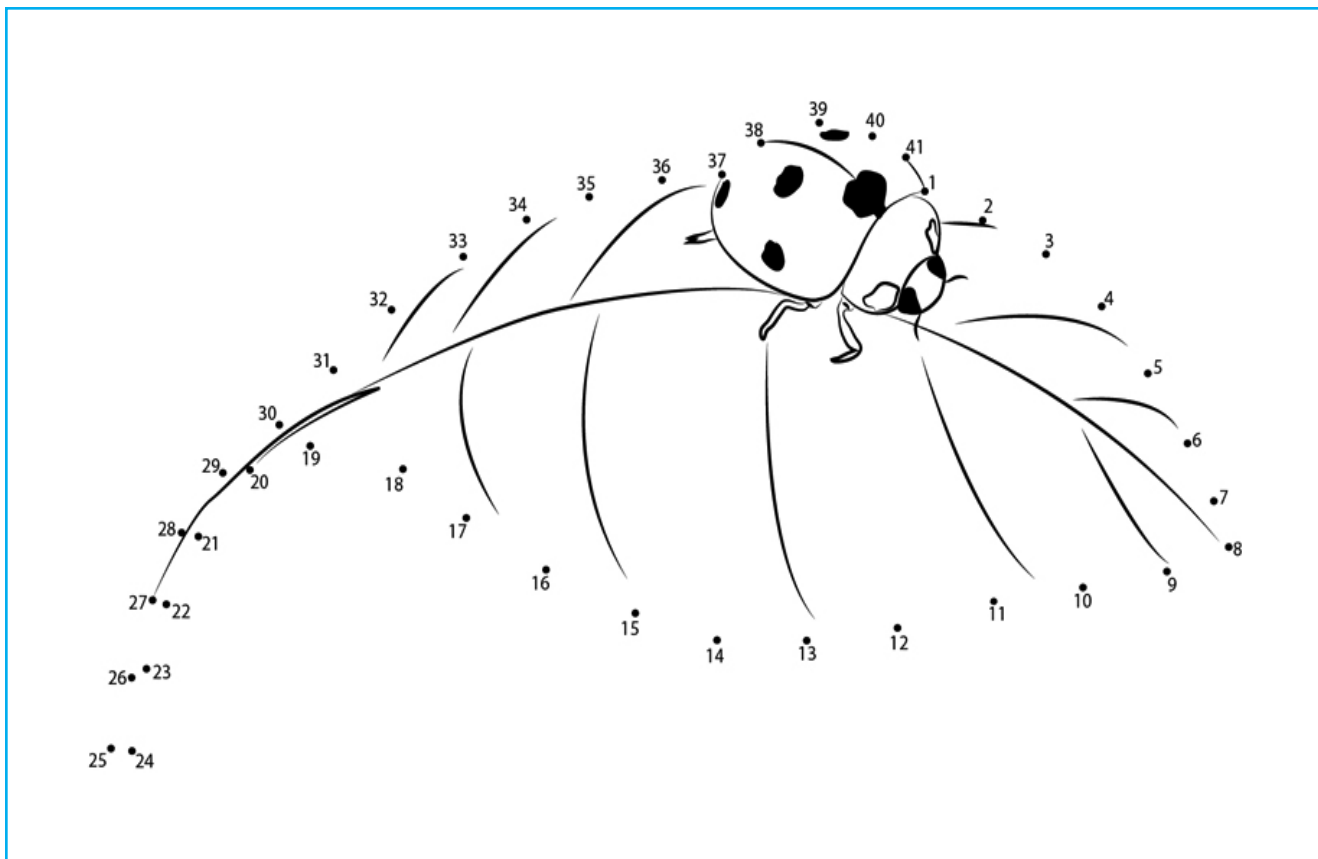


Color It






### Join the dots



### Word Search

**Elvis**  
Word Search



K	B	U	R	R	K	P	Z	Y	Y	G	R	D	N	G	J	W	L	W
E	T	A	R	Y	G	T	P	M	O	S	A	G	E	V	S	A	L	O
G	V	O	G	Y	A	W	R	D	K	H	W	V	N	D	T	W	Y	B
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X	A	J	K	J	U	D	L	A	U	R	G	G	L	I	V	G	L	
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E	E	C	T	L	U	S	A	B	Y	J	U	C	B	A	M	E	O	E
G	S	L	A	W	N	M	X	A	D	U	L	T	A	R	A	B	G	M
O	U	B	S	B	X	V	I	K	D	M	Y	S	I	G	S	E	K	E
L	N	P	D	E	E	A	O	C	E	P	A	M	O	V	I	E	S	T
D	R	L	H	N	R	M	P	O	T	S	M	G	M	A	L	W	I	E
R	E	R	W	X	D	P	O	R	J	U	Q	E	E	R	D	P	V	N
E	C	E	U	I	X	Q	J	C	M	I	V	Q	M	A	K	Y	L	D
C	O	L	D	L	J	D	Y	B	N	T	A	Y	J	P	P	S	E	E
O	R	J	A	I	L	H	O	U	S	E	R	O	C	K	H	Y	R	R
R	D	G	D	Q	I	P	A	L	L	I	C	S	I	R	P	I	W	S
D	S	V	N	A	V	I	L	L	U	S	D	E	N	R	N	G	S	L

Army	Hysteria	Presley
Comeback	Jailhouse Rock	Priscilla
Ed Sullivan	Jumpcut	RCA
Elvis	Las Vegas	Rockabilly
Gold Record	Lisa Marie	Sun Records
Graceland	Love Me Tender	Teddy Bear
Gyrate	Memphis	The King
Hound Dog	Mo'Nique	Tupelo

### Find the way

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Kuwait Times

248 33 199

Friday, June 5, 2020

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- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
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- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo – Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

**Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine**  
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## Stars

## STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**

The desire to acquire more knowledge is front and center today, Aries. A virtual lecture or workshop might lead to plans for a future outing of some kind with friends or other members of a group you're affiliated with. Family members might also show an interest. You could all review the possibilities together and jot ideas. The energy and enthusiasm of everyone around you is high, so make the most of their ideas.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

Enthusiasm for your own ideas as well as for those of others could catapult you into the spotlight today, Taurus. You might become an expert perhaps on scientific or occult subjects. You're on an emotional high and looking forward to the future. You've got a lot of plans that are not only exciting but also workable. Make the most of them, and don't be afraid to share them with others.

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**

New circumstances could put you in touch with some interesting and exciting people from distant places. You might discuss business, but not boring shoptalk. Rather, you may have some intriguing yet workable ideas for future projects that could make a difference to you and others. If you've been thinking about forming a new partnership, Gemini, this is an auspicious day for serious discussion.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**

Today you're likely to be more focused than usual on whatever it is you have to do, Cancer, whether chores around the house and yard or important projects of your own. Your mind is especially sharp and in tune with your feelings. Dreams and imaginings might prove to be valuable sources of inspiration. At some point, your mind might turn to travel, the acquisition of new knowledge, or both. Enjoy your day.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**

Romance is center stage today as unexpected circumstances put you in touch with interesting people of both sexes, Leo. If you're already involved, expect to grow closer to your partner. If you aren't, don't be surprised if someone new comes into your life. Stimulating discussions about various subjects set your imagination going and increase your desire to learn more. Enjoy your day.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

The possibility of the arrival of visitors, perhaps in relation to a group activity or social event you hope to host in the future, could put you in cleanup mode and perhaps encourage you to even do a little redecorating. More than one person is likely to try to contact you, Virgo, and all who reach you are likely to have interesting news and useful information. By day's end your energy and enthusiasm should be much higher than they were in the morning.

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**

Romance intensifies as communication is enhanced by the energy, enthusiasm, and focus of you and your partner, Libra. If you aren't already involved, you might find out about someone new and exciting who shares your interests, and perhaps doesn't live all that far away. Expect to make a lot of short trips in your neighborhood, perhaps to check out new things you've heard about. If you've been thinking of moving, you might do a little house hunting.

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**

An opportunity to do some extra work might come your way today, Scorpio. Don't turn it down - it might do you a lot of good. You'll probably enjoy being at home, whether you're working or relaxing, as happiness seems to reign in the home at this time. Members of your household all seem to be content with their lives, and thus are great company. Enjoy.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**

Communicating with others in your neighborhood brings good news your way, Sagittarius. Phone calls, emails, or time spent in the car could result in some kind of financial advancement. You feel especially focused right now, and your intellect and emotions are in accord with what you need to do to accomplish your goals. Your physical energy and enthusiasm are strong, as is your determination. Go for the gold.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**

Capricorn, today you might hear of opportunities coming from an unusual source and consider taking advantage of them. Values take a more spiritual turn as your material goals are reached. You might make plans to participate more in activities like yoga, meditation or other activities with a metaphysical focus, and you're looking forward to it. Someone close to you might recommend some interesting books.

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**

Communicating with loved ones might prove especially intellectually and emotionally gratifying at this time, Aquarius. Relationships with old friends grow stronger, and new friends may also come onto the scene. Among them might be people in your profession. Through them you might learn of new opportunities to advance your career. Expect an inspiring story of some kind to move you to tears. Don't fight it.

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**

Friends in creative fields might join forces with you today to start a new project that makes a difference to all of you, Pisces. This could be planning something as mundane as a garden in a park or as exciting as a new rock band. If you've been thinking of moving in an artistic direction, this is the day to make plans. You're determined and focused and your inspiration and enthusiasm are high.

## Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Iran	0098
Albania	00355	Iraq	00964
Algeria	00213	Ireland	00353
Andorra	00376	Italy	0039
Angola	00244	Ivory Coast	00225
Anguilla	001264	Jamaica	001876
Antigua	001268	Japan	0081
Argentina	0054	Jordan	00962
Armenia	00374	Kazakhstan	007
Australia	0061	Kenya	00254
Austria	0043	Kiribati	00686
Bahamas	001242	Kuwait	00965
Bahrain	00973	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Bangladesh	00880	Laos	00856
Barbados	001246	Latvia	00371
Belarus	00375	Lebanon	00961
Belgium	0032	Liberia	00231
Belize	00501	Libya	00218
Benin	00229	Lithuania	00370
Bermuda	001441	Luxembourg	00352
Bhutan	00975	Macau	00853
Bolivia	00591	Macedonia	00389
Bosnia	00387	Madagascar	00261
Botswana	00267	Majorca	0034
Brazil	0055	Malawi	00265
Brunei	00673	Malaysia	0060
Bulgaria	00359	Maldives	00960
Burkina Faso	00226	Mali	00223
Burundi	00257	Malta	00356
Cambodia	00855	Marshall Islands	00692
Cameroon	00237	Martinique	00596
Canada	001	Mauritania	00222
Cape Verde	00238	Mauritius	00230
Cayman Islands	001345	Mayotte	00269
Central African Republic	00236	Mexico	0052
Chad	00235	Micronesia	00691
Chile	0056	Moldova	00373
China	0086	Monaco	00377
Colombia	0057	Mongolia	00976
Comoros	00269	Montserrat	001664
Congo	00242	Morocco	00212
Cook Islands	00682	Mozambique	00258
Costa Rica	00506	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Croatia	00385	Namibia	00264
Cuba	0053	Nepal	00977
Cyprus	00357	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Czech Republic	00420	New Caledonia	00687
Denmark	0045	New Zealand	0064
Diego Garcia	00246	Nicaragua	00505
Djibouti	00253	Niger	00227
Dominica	001767	Nigeria	00234
Dominican Republic	001809	Niue	00683
Ecuador	00593	Norfolk Island	00672
Egypt	0020	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
El Salvador	00503	North Korea	00850
England (UK)	0044	Norway	0047
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Oman	00968
Eritrea	00291	Pakistan	0092
Estonia	00372	Palau	00680
Ethiopia	00251	Panama	00507
Falkland Islands	00500	Papua New Guinea	00675
Faroe Islands	00298	Paraguay	00595
Fiji	00679	Peru	0051
Finland	00358	Philippines	0063
France	0033	Poland	0048
French Guiana	00594	Portugal	00351
French Polynesia	00689	Puerto Rico	001787
Gabon	00241	Qatar	00974
Gambia	00220	Romania	0040
Georgia	00995	Russian Federation	007
Germany	0049	Rwanda	00250
Ghana	00233	Saint Helena	00290
Gibraltar	00350	Saint Kitts	001869
Greece	0030	Saint Lucia	001758
Greenland	00299	Saint Pierre	00508
Grenada	001473	Saint Vincent	001784
Guadeloupe	00590	Samoa US	00684
Guam	001671	Samoa West	00685
Guatemala	00502	San Marino	00378
Guinea	00224	Sao Tome	00239
Guyana	00592	Saudi Arabia	00966
Haiti	00509	Scotland (UK)	0044
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Senegal	00221
Honduras	00504	Seychelles	00284
Hong Kong	00852	Sierra Leone	00232
Hungary	0036	Singapore	0065
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Slovakia	00421
Iceland	00354	Slovenia	00386
India	0091	Solomon Islands	00677
Indian Ocean	00873	Somalia	00252
Indonesia	0062	South Africa	0027



## Business

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2020

**34** Kamco Invest shareholders approve distribution of 5 fils dividend**35** European business slump eased in May, long road to recovery**36** US services, private employment data shows early recovery signs

**CARACAS:** Drivers queue to refuel the tanks of their cars near a gas station, in Caracas on Wednesday. Falling fossil fuel demand coupled with mounting risk for investors could slash the value of oil, gas and coal reserves by two thirds, energy analysts warned yesterday. — AFP

# Demand for oil, gas faces terminal fall

## Energy analysts warn of mounting risk for investors

**PARIS:** Falling fossil fuel demand coupled with mounting risk for investors could slash the value of oil, gas and coal reserves by two thirds, sending shock waves through the global economy, energy analysts warned yesterday.

The value of projected profits for the sector could also fall by two thirds, according to a report from Carbon Tracker, a non-profit financial think tank focused on aligning capital markets with climate policy. Competition from clean technologies along with government policies to achieve climate targets and energy security are pushing the fossil fuel industry toward “terminal decline”, the study concluded.

“Terminal decline starts when demand peaks,” lead author Kingsmill Bond, Carbon Tracker’s new energy strategist, told AFP.

“Global coal demand, for example, peaked in 2013 and has never recovered to that level.”

Before the coronavirus outbreak, many ana-

lysts predicted global demand for oil and gas would peak in the mid-2020s, while the International Energy Agency (IEA) forecast a plateau towards the end of the decade for oil. But the economic meltdown triggered by pandemic lockdowns across the world starting in March could accelerate that process.

“We may now have seen peak fossil fuel demand as a whole,” said Bond, who worked for 25 years in equity research. “When a cyclical shock hits a sector already facing structural decline, it brings forward the peak in demand.” The IEA foresees an eight percent drop in fossil fuel demand in 2020 due to the pandemic.

“Nobody knows how much the recovery will be in 2021,” said Bond. “But if the recovery is half, and if the fossil fuel industry returns to a growth rate of one percent, it will take until 2025 to get back to 2019 levels.” “By then, renewable energy technologies will be large enough to

supply all the growth in energy demand.”

In 2019, renewable power—mainly solar and wind—already accounted for 72 percent of all expansion in the electricity sector, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) reported last month. When a challenger technology takes all the growth, the incumbent—by definition—enters into terminal decline, experience in other sectors has shown. That threshold is typically crossed when the challenger has five percent of market share.

### Collapse of future profits

Renewables already account for about a quarter of electricity generation, but—not counting hydro, which has less potential for expansion—only about four percent of global primary energy consumption.

“Now is the time to plan an orderly wind-down of fossil fuel assets and manage the impact

of the global economy rather than try to sustain the unsustainable,” Bond said. Shell’s first dividend cut since World War II, Repsol’s write-off of nearly five billion euros (\$5.6 billion) last year, and a wave of bankruptcies in the US shale oil sector all point to possible structural change.

And yet oil and gas companies are forecasting growth in demand for their products. Indeed, the fossil fuel system as a whole has been investing about \$5 trillion annually on new supply and demand infrastructure for several years running. The size of the fossil fuel economy—about \$10 trillion in supply infrastructure, and \$22 trillion in demand infrastructure—means its rapid decline could pose a threat to financial stability, the report concluded.

“Companies across the fossil fuel system are worth \$18 trillion in listed equity, making up a quarter of the total value of global equity markets,” it said. — AFP



## Business

# Kamco Invest shareholders approve distribution of 5 fils dividend

## AGM elects Board of Directors for next three years

**KUWAIT:** Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, held its Annual General Meeting for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2019 where shareholders approved all agenda items and elected the Board of Directors for the next three years.

Shareholders approved the Board of Director's recommendation to distribute 5 percent cash dividend (5 fils per share), equivalent to KD1.7 million, which represents 56 percent of the net profits. Shareholders also elected the Board of Directors for the next three years, including Sheikh Abdullah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (representing United Gulf Bank B.S.C), Entisar Abdul Raheem Al-Suwaidi (Independent Member), Masaud Mahmoud Jawhar Hayat (representing Al-Zad Real Estate Company), Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (representing Al-Dhiyafa United Real Estate Company), and Tariq Mohammad Abdulsalam (representing First North Africa Real Estate).

The AGM was chaired by the company's Vice Chairman, Entisar Abdul Raheem Al-Suwaidi, who discussed the Board of Director's report highlighting key milestones achieved during 2019. Of these milestones was the successful completion of the merger process with Global Investment House ("Global") following Kamco Invest's vision to become one of the largest and most players in the regional investment sector, specifically in the areas of asset management, investment banking and brokerage, through the Company's brokerage arm, First Securities Brokerage Company ("Oula Wasata"). The Company successfully concluded the legal merger and share swap by the 12th of December 2019 and announced its new identify "Kamco Invest" by year end. Kamco Invest also adopted a new organizational structure aiming to support the core fee-based income generating businesses and further enhancing customer service.

### Revenues

Al-Suwaidi said, "Total revenue during the year stood at KD 26.9 million (2018: KD 18.4 million), while fee income reached KD19.1 million (2018: KD 10.2 million) representing 71.1 percent of total revenues (2018: 55.7 percent). The Company achieved a net profit of KD 3.0 million (12.47 fils per share) compared to KD 2.6 million (10.77 fils per share) in the year 2018."

She added, "The Company enjoys a strong financial position with KD 56.4 million in shareholders' equity as of 31 December 2019 (2018: KD 35.7 million) and a "BBB" long-term credit rating and "A3" short-term rating with stable outlook by Capital Intelligence."

Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, Chief Executive Officer, provided a detailed explanation of the operational performance for the year, which witnessed numerous milestones and achievements across various fields. During 2019, wealth managers worked closely with various business sectors, leveraging their diversified in-house expertise to provide clients with customized solutions and advice. This resulted in attracting new clients, strengthening relationships with existing clients and raising funds for new and existing products.

Sarkhou said, "With assets under management amounting to \$13.5 billion in funds and portfolios com-

prising various asset classes, strategies and jurisdictions, Kamco Invest was ranked the fifth largest asset manager in the GCC region in Moody's asset management report issued September 2019."

During the year, the Equities and Fixed Income team was recognized for the performance of its managed equity funds. Three equity funds managed by the Company were ranked amongst the top performing equity funds in the Kuwaiti market.

On the other hand, the Private Equity team focused on executing the planned exits of portfolio companies. The team exited portfolio companies from four existing funds, which led to the successful distribution of \$116 million to investors in these funds.

The Real Estate Investments team successfully acquired two properties in the US for a total amount of \$262.3 million and completed a successful exit in the United Kingdom generating an IRR for clients of 10.53 percent. At the end of 2019, Kamco Invest's real estate portfolio composed of 11 properties with an aggregate acquisition value of \$890 million, covering a total area of 4.2 million square feet.

Additionally, the Special Situations Asset Management team successfully executed the portfolios' strategies and resulted in generating cash inflows of \$739 million since its inception in 2013 with \$273 million in 2019. During the year, the team successfully unwound a \$40 million portfolio, awarded in June 2015, as per the agreed targeted asset values with the client.

As for Investment Banking, the team completed ten investment banking mandates amounting to \$1.6 billion (KD 483 million), raising the total successful mandates to \$22.3 billion since inception (1998). The transactions included two equity capital markets (ECM) transactions worth KD 105 million, three debt capital markets (DCM) transactions valued at KD 247 million and five M&A transactions amounting to KD 130 million. Also during the year, the Company took a leading role as an advisor in the bidding process organized by the Capital Markets Authority ("CMA") of Kuwait for the privatization of a strategic 50 percent equity stake in Boursa Kuwait Securities Company ("Boursa Kuwait"). The effective management of this landmark transaction led to attracting several international and local investors bidding the maximum equity allocation authorized by the CMA for investors and finally closing the transaction with a 73 percent premium to the minimum set price. The team was also the lead manager for the successful IPO for the remaining 50 percent share in Boursa Kuwait offered between the 1st of October and 1st of December 2019, the second phase of Boursa Kuwait's privatization process. The shares were offered to Kuwaiti nationals and generated strong investor interest with 83,000 subscribers and an oversubscription of 8.5 times. In light of the outstanding performances, the Investment Banking team was awarded the "Best Debt Bank in the Middle East - 2019" from Global Finance.

### Multi-market solution

Oula Wasata, the brokerage arm of Kamco Invest, continued executing a market-targeted and process-centered strategy with focus on institutional clients, which resulted in increasing its market share in 2019.



Kamco Invest Annual General Meeting for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2019.

The team effectively launched a multi-market solution in Kuwait and Jordan, which is a multi-feature state-of-the-art platform accessible through a single account that facilitates clients' access to multiple markets under one umbrella. The team continued to implement various phases of market developments in accordance with the regulatory requirements, whilst ensuring the highest compliance culture.

As one of the region's recognized thought leaders, placing great emphasis on the importance of relying on data-driven investment decisions, Kamco Invest aims to enhance the financial and investment knowledge and awareness of the public to garner informed investment communities. As a result, the Company's timely insightful valuations, latest market trends, financial analyses and outlook reports play a key role in facilitating investment decisions. In 2019, the Research team achieved unmatched success maintaining its high reputation and further strengthening Kamco Invest's thoughts leadership position. The team collaborated with external agencies to support studies focused on economic growth in the country and region, publishing the highest number of research reports in the country quoted by regional and international media and financial information dissemination platforms.

### Strategy amid coronavirus pandemic

Following the AGM, the Company held its 2020 Shafafiyah Investors Forum during which the CEO discussed the measures taken by the Company in response to the unprecedented global crisis triggered by the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). The impact of the Coronavirus disrupted government entities, the private sector and economy since March 2020 (Kuwait since 11th March 2020), which led to a sharp decline in oil prices with the price per barrel dropping to below \$10, as well as capital markets around the world suffering from deep declines with some markets losing more than 30 percent.

Kamco Invest's Executive Management team devised a strategy consisting of four pillars:

- Ensuring the health and safety of all employees who are the Company's greatest assets
- Maintaining the interests of all stakeholders to overcome this period with minimal losses
- Prepare for a strong comeback after the pandemic subsides
- Commit to social responsibility and provide support through available channels

Sarkhou said, "Since the beginning of the pandemic, we studied a number of scenarios and measures to be taken in accordance with government regulation and the impact of these decisions on busi-

ness continuity. Considering these guidelines, we formulated a strategy that has proven to be effective in managing our operations during the partial curfew period or the total lockdown. We also enforced a number of measures to rationalize operating expenses to cope with the current market conditions and the Company's strategy."

Despite these challenges, the operational plan emanating from the four pillars strategy and the dedication of the teams resulted in interruption-free services to clients, while achieving several accomplishments during this period. The Company successfully attracted investments from clients amounting to over \$60 million and continued to achieve an outstanding level of performance in equity funds and managed portfolios, exceeding benchmarks. Kamco Invest also acquired an income-generating property in the USA, raising the managed real estate value to over \$1.1 billion. Simultaneously, the company exited from a USA property generating a 22.8 percent return in favor of clients. The Special Situations Asset Management team continued exit negotiations with several parties on behalf of clients and initiated discussions with local parties for the possibility of signing a new investment portfolio management mandate.

The Investment Banking team launched a strategic initiative to support companies in battling the ongoing crisis. This initiative was shared with a number of clients, which resulted in securing new consulting mandates.

First Securities Brokerage Company, Kamco Invest's brokerage arm, continued to provide its services to clients without interruption while increasing market share and attracting new clients through the online trading platform. The Research team published periodic reports, provided key information and data to media agencies, released specific reports on economic matters related to the pandemic.

Concerning the future roadmap, Sarkhou stated that Kamco Invest will continue to consistently monitor ongoing developments related to legal proceedings, logistics, public health, business matters, or other developments regarding additional measures that can be newly added or applied to current continuity plans. Implementing new strategies and methods derived from the current crisis will serve as a learning curve to improve the performance and productivity of the Company in the future. Sarkhou added that the Company will continue to maintain clear communication with stakeholders, and closely monitor new trends and behavioral changes that will inevitably lead to the formulation of new standards and investment opportunities after overcoming the current crisis.



## Business

# European business slump eased in May, long road to recovery

## ECB to ramp up its bond-buying as virus threat persists

**LONDON:** Eurozone businesses suffered another devastating contraction in activity in May and while there are signs the worst is over, it could be months before there is a return to growth, a survey showed on Wednesday.

Governments across the 19 countries that use the euro have gradually started to lift tough lockdown measures imposed to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus which has infected nearly 6.4 million people and killed over 379,000.

But with citizens—many of whom are facing threats to their incomes as well as their health—encouraged to stay at home, and swathes of businesses still shuttered, IHS Markit's May Final Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) painted a gloomy picture. Although the headline index jumped to 31.9 from April's 13.6 — by far the lowest reading since the survey began in mid-1998 — it was a long way from the 50 mark separating growth from contraction. The flash estimate was 30.5.

"The final Composite PMIs add to the evidence that economic activity picked up in May, but it remains well below normal," said Jack Allen-Reynolds at Capital Economics. World shares nevertheless hit new three-month highs on Wednesday and the dollar fell for the sixth day running as hopes for more monetary stimulus and easing of lockdowns gave the market confidence, despite the civil unrest in the United States and the continuing impact of the pandemic.

The European Central Bank will ramp up its

bond-buying again through its Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program today, a Reuters poll predicted last month.

"Our central case is that the ECB will announce a 500 billion euro increase in the size of its PEPP to 1.25 trillion euros, with the risks skewed toward a larger increase to 1.5 trillion euros," said Luigi Speranza at BNP Paribas. Last month's Reuters poll predicted the bloc's economy would contract 11.3 percent this quarter and unemployment would be around 10 percent each quarter for the rest of this year.

An index in the PMI covering employment showed firms were cutting jobs at a near-record pace, registering 37.8 compared to April's survey low of 33.4.

Even though restaurants, hotels, fitness studios and some entertainment venues have been allowed to reopen under restrictions in Germany, economists say a return to pre-crisis levels of business will be slow and job losses are mounting. Germany's unemployment rate jumped to 6.3 percent last month and the labor market remains under immense pressure due to the coronavirus pandemic, official data showed.

Activity in the German services sector declined at a slower pace after a record contraction the previous month as restrictions to contain the coronavirus in Europe's largest economy were lifted, earlier data showed. It was a similar story in France, where service sector activity improved more than initially thought as the country began emerg-



**PARIS:** Union members gather at the plant of French carmaker Renault in Choisy-le-Roi, near Paris, on Wednesday to protest against the company's cost-cutting plan at its core French operations. —AFP

ing from its lockdown, although it remained at depressed levels.

Britain, outside the currency union, remained in a severe economic downturn although the pace of the slump moderated from April's crash as some companies benefited from the easing of lockdowns around the world. A headline PMI for the euro zone's dominant service industry

recovered to 30.5 from April's record low of 12.0 but held firmly below the breakeven mark. The flash reading was 28.7.

Demand fell again, and backlogs of work were run down rapidly, yet services firms were far less pessimistic about the outlook for the next 12 months. Their business expectations index jumped to 47.6 from 34.3. —Reuters

## Global smartphone shipments to fall 12%: IDC

**WASHINGTON, DC:** Global smartphone shipments will fall nearly 12 percent to 1.2 billion units in 2020, market research firm IDC said on Wednesday, citing lower consumer spending due to the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only disrupted business supply chains, with major smartphone makers such as Apple Inc and Samsung Electronics Co Ltd flagging financial hits, but also squeezed consumer spending worldwide.

"Nationwide lockdowns and rising unemployment have reduced consumer confidence and reprioritized spending towards essential goods, directly impacting the uptake of smartphones in the short term", said Sangeetika Srivastava, senior research analyst with IDC. —Reuters

## Virus will reset state role in UK economy: Investor

**LONDON:** The coronavirus pandemic will reset the balance between private companies and the state in Britain and could in time produce a more productive economy, according to the man leading a 15 billion pound (\$19 billion) drive to support smaller firms.

Stephen Welton, head of Business Growth Fund (BGF), the most active investor in fast-growing British companies, is talking to the government, insurance companies, pension schemes and other investors to recapitalize businesses and prevent more permanent scarring.

Central to any recovery, he believes, is the need to identify which companies can still grow in a post-COVID world. Unsustainable debt built up during this period then needs to be restructured and possibly turned into equity, before capital can be invested to drive future growth, according to Welton.

Such an intervention across every sector and region of the British isles also provides the opportunity to direct support at the most productive companies, those with a greener footprint, those in the life sciences sector and those led by women, to address

some faultlines in the UK.

"We don't want to end up with a series of businesses that are effectively just trading and living from month to month on a zombie-like basis," he told Reuters, adding that the right combination of public-private partnerships were now needed. "I don't think (the economy) is fundamentally going to turn in a different direction but is the balance going to change? Yes I think it will," he added in a telephone interview.

With COVID-19 upending the economy, the British government has paid the salaries of more than 10 million people, offered tax breaks worth 20 billion pounds and provided more than 30 billion pounds' worth of state guarantees for loans and grants.

Any recapitalization will need to be launched before those schemes end, Welton said. BGF was established in the wake of the 2008 financial crash by major banks and has invested around 2.3 billion pounds as a long-term partner into restaurant chains, engineers, software and digital groups, generally outside London.

With financial backing from Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, RBS and Standard Chartered, it made operating profit of 133 million pounds in 2019. Its support could in time double and Welton is now working to "crowd in" funds from private investors.

"(This is) unprecedented, which is why we're going to have to come up with solutions that are unprecedented," he said. "If we wait for the government to come up with solutions in every single sector, I just think that is from a practical standpoint unrealistic and from a time standpoint too slow." —AFP



## Business

# US services, private employment data shows early recovery signs

## Labor market stabilizing as layoffs abate

**WASHINGTON:** Private companies shed another 2.76 million jobs in May and the dominant services industry contracted for the second straight month, but signs of recovery from the coronavirus lockdowns have emerged.

The US economy has been battered by the pandemic as businesses closed to stop the virus's spread, with more than 40 million people losing their jobs at least temporarily, and the unemployment rate surging from near-historic lows to 14.7 percent in April.

The private employment data released by payrolls firm ADP on Wednesday adds to the nearly 20 million jobs lost in April, and indicates the official unemployment rate is set to continue upward on Friday when the latest government jobs report is released. "The impact of the COVID-19 crisis continues to weigh on businesses of all sizes," Ahu Yildirmaz, co-head of the ADP Research Institute, said in a statement.

"While the labor market is still reeling from the effects of the pandemic, job loss likely peaked in April, as many states have begun a phased reopening of businesses." The losses were widespread throughout all sectors and sizes of business, though education posted a rare, modest increase in employment, according to the data.

The losses were, however, well below the nine million expected by economists, who have been predicting a rebound in employment thanks to states' moves to reopen and a mas-

sive government rescue package that has allowed some companies to retain or rehire workers. The report "suggests that the re-hiring of people in states beginning to reopen was very substantial," said Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics.

### Services shrinks, but slows

The dominant US services sector alone lost just under two million jobs in May, while manufacturing lost 719,000, according to the ADP report. A separate survey from the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) showed the services sector contracting for the second month but at a slower rate than in April, rising to 45.4 percent from 41.8 percent, with a 15-point jump in the production index to 41.0 percent.

Anything below 50 percent indicates activity is slowing, meaning the lockdowns ended nearly 10 years of uninterrupted growth in the services industry, and the survey's employment index for May was a paltry 31.8 percent, just above the month prior. Until last week, "it looked like we were bottoming out and hopefully were recovering a little bit," ISM survey chair Anthony Nieves told reporters.

But the at-times violent protests unfolding in cities and towns nationwide over the death of George Floyd, the latest in a string of black people to be killed by police, add a dash of uncertainty, he said. Curfews have been imposed in dozens of cities to quell the unrest at a time when states were just allowing more and more

guidelines and had operations in place to help disburse the funds as swiftly as possible.

Scrutiny of the use of private companies to run the relief scheme comes as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's support rate has slid, partly due to his handling of the pandemic which critics have called clumsy.

Japan is emerging from government restrictions on movement and business aimed at curbing the spread of the new coronavirus, having recorded 17,000 cases of COVID-19 - the respiratory illness caused by the virus - and over 900 deaths.

Like the SMEs targeted by the relief fund, Dentsu has also been impacted by the lockdown measures. Particularly painful for the firm was the virus-induced delay in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, in which it has a central part. Dentsu plays an outsized role in Japan beyond its dominance of the advertising industry, including providing services to the government.

It established Service Design Engineering Council in 2016 with staffing firm Pasona Group Inc and IT firm Transcosmos Inc. Dentsu is subcontracting some work from the latest contract to Pasona and Transcosmos, the government document showed.

Pasona and Transcosmos did not immediately respond to requests for comment. —Reuters



**WASHINGTON, DC:** In this file photo a mannequin is seen in the front of a closed store in the normally busy shopping district of Georgetown in Washington, DC. Private companies shed another 2.76 million jobs in May following nearly 20 million job losses in April due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to data released on Wednesday. —AFP

businesses to reopen, while President Donald Trump has threatened to deploy the military.

"It will remain to be seen, with what's going on with the combination of the pandemic and civil unrest and social injustice and everything else that's happening right now" how the services sector fares, Nieves said.

Friday's Department of Labor jobs report is set to raise the worst unemployment rate since

the Great Depression 90 years ago even higher. But while the ADP data isn't infallible, Shepherdson said it indicated that it is probably safe to "assume that Friday's official payroll numbers will be much less bad than the current consensus."

He predicted another decline of eight million jobs, and "June payrolls likely will increase substantially." —AFP

## Canada central bank holds rates

**OTTAWA:** The Bank of Canada on Wednesday held its key lending rate at a record low 0.25 percent, saying the COVID-19 pandemic's devastation on the global economy appears to have peaked.

It said it was scaling back unprecedented measures to keep financial markets functioning, as a result, but warned that the recovery will be uncertain. "Incoming data confirm the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy. This impact appears to have peaked, although uncertainty about how the recovery will unfold remains high," the central bank said in a statement.

"Financial conditions have improved, and commodity prices have risen in recent weeks after falling sharply earlier this year," it added. Because countries have planned the lifting of virus containment measures at different times, it said "the global recovery likely will be protracted and uneven."

Canada has recorded historic output and job losses, but avoided the worse-case scenario, the

bank said, updating its projected second quarter growth to decline between 10 and 20 percent—down from 15 to 30 percent forecast last month. The economy would still likely resume growth in the third quarter, it added.

In the first three months of the year, the economy contracted 8.2 percent due to the pandemic—its most pronounced drop since the global financial crisis in 2009. Unemployment, meanwhile, soared in April to 13 percent.

The rate announcement marked the first day on the job for new bank governor Tiff Macklem, who replaces outgoing boss Stephen Poloz. Macklem observed deliberations of the bank's governing council over the past few days and backed Wednesday's rate decision, according to a statement.

The Bank of Canada this year has bought a significant amount of government bonds and corporate debt as part of its first-ever foray into quantitative easing.

Its monetary expansion remains below levels in the United States, Japan and the EU, but has been bigger as a share of its economy than in most other countries. "As market function improves and containment restrictions ease, the Bank's focus will shift to supporting the resumption of growth in output and employment," the bank concluded. —AFP

## Japan's Dentsu gets \$700m govt windfall

**TOKYO:** Japanese advertising giant Dentsu Group Inc has received almost \$700 million via a government contract to provide back-office services for a scheme to help virus-hit firms, under a framework opposition lawmakers called "opaque". Dentsu received 97 percent of the 76.9 billion yen (\$707 million) awarded via a tender to a company it co-founded to support the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's relief fund for small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs), showed a government document seen by Reuters.

Opposition politicians have questioned whether the contract with Service Design Engineering Council - and its arrangement with Dentsu and its multitude of subcontractors - is a waste of taxpayers' money and could slow the process of channeling funds to eligible recipients. Dentsu, echoing a statement from Service Design Engineering Council, told Reuters it was performing duties in line with government



## Sports

# All Black legend Dan Carter in shock Super Rugby comeback

## A chance to mentor some young players

**WELLINGTON:** Two-time All Blacks World Cup winner Dan Carter announced a shock Super Rugby comeback with Auckland Blues yesterday at the age of 38, saying he realized during coronavirus lockdown how much he missed the game. Carter, a three-time world player of the year, has been a free agent since returning to New Zealand in March from Japan, where a virus-enforced shutdown ended his lucrative stint with Kobe Steelers. "Two things from the lockdown that I realized was that I really enjoyed spending more time with my family and that I miss rugby," Carter said. "For me it is a chance to mentor some young players and to give back to New Zealand rugby," he added. The signing comes as New Zealand's Super Rugby teams prepare to start a domestic tournament next week, after COVID-19 halted the southern hemisphere championship in March.

Carter has not played in his homeland since his international retirement in 2015, when he helped the All Blacks seal back-to-back World Cup titles at Twickenham. Blues head coach Leon MacDonald said Carter signed a short-term deal as cover for injured fullback Stephen Perofeta. He joins a squad already containing Beauden Barrett, his successor as All Blacks playmaker. As a replacement player, Carter will reportedly be on a minimum contract worth NZ\$1,800 (US\$1,155) a week, a huge cut from the millions he earned playing club rugby in France and Japan.

"It definitely not about money, he's not getting

rich doing it," MacDonald said. As the Blues already have Barrett - himself a two-time world player of the year - Carter may fill the role of super-sub off the bench. "I have not played for several months so it will take me a little bit of time to get game-ready," he said. Former All Blacks coach Graham Henry had no doubt Carter still had the ability to play at the top level, despite his age. "It's marvelous, he'll add a huge amount of experience but he's also been playing very well in Japan," Henry told Radio New Zealand. All Blacks halfback and former teammate Aaron Smith tweeted: "The goat (greatest of all time) is back in Super rugby!"

MacDonald indicated Carter would be behind Barrett and rising star Otago Black in the pecking order. "If he gets back into playing form that warrants selection, then he could help us as a utility back in midfield or fullback," he said. Carter played the first of his 112 Tests for the All Blacks in 2003, scored a record 1,598 points during his international career and was the world player of the year in 2005, 2012 and 2015.

He played for French club Racing 92 after retiring from Test rugby following the 2015 World Cup, before signing a two-year deal with Kobe Steelers in 2018. The South Island native already has three Super Rugby titles from his 13-year stint with the Canterbury Crusaders and remains the competition's top points-scorer with 1,708. Often described as the best fly-half to play the game, Carter revealed in his autobiography that

a neutral venue had arisen from a determination to resume competition as soon as possible.

"The uncertainty forced us to come up with a plan that at least allows us to get us back in front of our fans," Garber said. "Clearly given our absence from the sports scene, it was crucial for us to get back." The players union statement meanwhile referenced the wave of protests against police brutality and racism which have erupted across the United States following the death of an unarmed African-American man in police custody in Minneapolis last week. "We recognize that we are all moving forward - as players, as fans, as societies, as a world - into a future that looks much different than the one we envisioned a few months ago," the MLSPA added.

### 'Semblance of normalcy'

"There are problems we face collectively that are both more urgent, and more important, than competing on the field. "We are grieving, we are fed up, we expect change, and we expect action. This change won't come on the field, but it will come partly through the force and determination of all who seek justice and equality. "We hope our return to the field will allow fans a momentary release and a semblance of normalcy."—AFP



New Zealand's fly half Dan Carter

he turned down an approach from the Blues in 2009 after his Crusaders-supporting grandmother Pam Carter opposed the move.

However, Nanna Carter said yesterday that she had no problems with the latest deal and would support the Blues over the Crusaders when her grandson was playing for the Aucklanders. "I don't care where he plays as long as he

plays," she told stuff.co.nz. "I miss him playing. I'm thrilled. I heard it on the news this morning and I thought 'Good on you Dan'." The Blues claimed the last of their three Super Rugby titles in 2003 and have not made the playoffs since 2011. Once regarded as a regional powerhouse, they have been the worst performing New Zealand Super Rugby team since 2014.— AFP

## MLS players union agrees new deal

**LOS ANGELES:** Major League Soccer and the league's players union reached agreement on a labor deal on Wednesday, clearing the way for a return to play next month following the coronavirus shutdown. The MLS Players Association said the body had ratified a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that would run through the 2025 season. "Today's vote also finalizes a plan to resume the 2020 season and provides players with certainty for the months ahead," the MLSPA said.

The agreement means Major League Soccer will return next month at a tournament which will be staged at a single location at Disney World in Orlando, Florida. MLS Commissioner Don Garber said on a video-conference call with reporters that the league was expected to suffer a \$1 billion revenue hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the league's decision to restart at

## Lakers sweep Celtics, end NBA 2K skid

**NEW YORK:** After losing each of their first eight matches of the NBA 2K League season, Lakers Gaming finally found a team they could beat. The Lakers topped Celtics Crossover Gaming 2-0 in a best-of-three series on Wednesday, dropping the Celtics to 0-4 on the year. In the night's other Week 5 matches, NetsGC swept Heat Check Gaming 2-0, Cavs Legion GC defeated Pistons GT 2-0, and Kings Guard Gaming edged Blazer5 Gaming 2-1.

The league's top four teams - Raptors Uprising GC (6-0), Warriors Gaming Squad (5-0), T-Wolves Gaming (5-1) and Wizards District Gaming (5-1) - were all idle Wednesday. Originally due to begin its season March 24, the NBA 2K League postponed play because of the coronavirus pandemic. On April 27, the league announced an initial six-week, online-only schedule, with all 23 teams playing eight total

matches from their home markets. Action finally began May 5. Each match is a best-of-three, with the outcome of each three-game series counting as one win or one loss in the standings. The Lakers opened their Wednesday series with an 80-48 win over the Celtics thanks to 44 points and 10 assists from Sten "SAV" Valge-Saar. The Celtics' Albano "oFAB" Thomallari scored 20 points.

SAV put up 26 points and 14 assists as the Lakers closed out the sweep with a 75-67 victory. Antonio "Dweq" Valladares added 22 points and 16 rebounds for the Lakers. oFAB paced the Celtics with 36 points and seven assists, and teammate David "TooxCool" Urena contributed 18 points and 15 boards. Josh "Choc" Humphries racked up 27 points and nine assists for the Nets in a 75-65 triumph over the Heat in Game 1. Kory "Chess" Taylor added 21 points for the Nets, and Aziz "Shuttles" Salem amassed 11 points, 19 rebounds and nine assists. The Heat got 31 points from Glenn "GlennRatty" Wilkerson and 19 rebounds from Juan "Hotshot" Gonzalez. The Nets closed out the series with a 68-65 victory. Choc had 22 points and 15 assists, and Shuttles finished with 20 points and 15 rebounds. GlennRatty poured in 26 points for the Heat. —Reuters



## Sports

# Fury as Brees criticizes NFL 'kneeling protests'

## Wave of demonstrations sweeps across US

**LOS ANGELES:** New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees sparked a furious backlash as he refused to support renewed NFL kneeling protests on Wednesday, saying to do so would be "disrespecting" the United States flag. As a wave of demonstrations against police brutality and racism sweeps across the US, many athletes have voiced support for former NFL star Colin Kaepernick, who ignited controversy in 2016 by kneeling during the US national anthem.

Former San Francisco 49ers star Kaepernick, who said he was trying to draw attention to racial injustice, was later frozen out of the league and has been unemployed since being released in 2017. President Donald Trump would later describe Kaepernick and other players who knelt during the anthem as "sons of bitches" who should be fired. Although the kneeling controversy has largely subsided in recent NFL seasons, the issue of player activism has returned following the US protests triggered by the death in police custody last week of an unarmed African-American man in Minneapolis. It has led to speculation that more players may opt to "take a knee" during the upcoming NFL season.

Brees however told Yahoo on Wednesday that he remained firmly opposed to the protests. "I will never agree with anybody disrespecting the flag of the United States of America or our country," Brees said when asked about the possibility of protests. "When I look at the flag of the United States, I envision my two grandfathers, who fought for this country during World War II, one in the Army and one in the Marine Corp. 'Is everything right with our country right now? No, it is not. We still have a long way to go. 'But I think what you do by standing there

and showing respect to the flag with your hand over your heart, is it shows unity."

### 'Hurtful and insensitive'

Brees's remarks drew an angry response from fellow athletes, both inside and outside the NFL, with many accusing him of misunderstanding the nature of Kaepernick's protest. NBA superstar LeBron James led the criticism, writing on Twitter: "WOW MAN!! You literally still don't understand why Kap was kneeling on one knee?? Has absolute nothing to do with the disrespect of the (flag)\_and our soldiers."

The New England Patriots' Super Bowl-winning twins Devin and Jason McCourty branded Brees's comments "a disgrace." "To speak about your grandfathers as if there weren't black men fighting next to them," the McCourtys wrote on Twitter. "Those men later returned to a country that hated them. Don't avoid the issue and try to make it about a flag or the military." Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers didn't mention Brees by name, but stated bluntly in a post on Instagram: "It has NEVER been about an anthem or a flag. Not then. Not now." "Listen with an open heart, let's educate ourselves, and then turn word and thought into action."

The criticism also included barbs from two of Brees's team-mates. "He don't know no better," Saints wide receiver Michael Thomas wrote on Twitter. "We don't care if you don't agree and whoever else how about that." Saints safety Malcolm Jenkins, who has been called the new face of the NFL protests, described Brees as "self-centred" in an emotional rebuke posted on social media. "Drew Brees if you don't understand how hurtful and insensitive

with Woods at one point fearing he may never play again. His feat was hailed as inspirational by a who's who of the sporting world and the following month he became the fourth golfer to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He capped a remarkable 2019 by equaling Sam Snead's all-time record of 82 US PGA Tour wins at the Zozo Championship in Japan in October.

### Michael Jordan

Considered the greatest basketball player of all time, Jordan famously signed for the Chicago White Sox baseball team after unexpectedly retiring from the NBA during his prime in 1993, and was given a minor league contract. But his baseball career never took off and he triumphantly returned to the hoops barely a year later, leading the Chicago Bulls to three more championships in 1996, 1997, and 1998. The American claimed he had lost the desire to play basketball after his father's death and wanted to do something different. He retired again in 1998, before returning for a less memorable stint with the Washington Wizards in 2001.

### Tiger Woods

The US superstar returned to the summit of golf in April last year at the age of 43 when he ended an 11-year major drought by winning an emotional fifth US Masters at Augusta, 14 years after his last Green Jacket. It followed multiple surgeries and a string of off-course problems since his 14th major win at the 2008 US Open,



Quarterback Drew Brees of the New Orleans Saints

your comments are then you are part of the problem... I am disappointed, I am hurt. Even though we are teammates, I can't let this slide," said Jenkins, who signed with the Saints two months ago.

Brees's remarks came as Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll heaped praise on the role played by Kaepernick. Carroll said society "owes a tremendous amount" to Kaepernick for taking a stand against police brutality and racial

injustice. "I think that there was a moment in time that a young man captured," Carroll told The Ringer's "Flying Coach" podcast. "He stood up for something he believed in - and what an extraordinary moment it was that he was willing to take," Carroll said. "We're not protecting our people. We're not looking after one another. We're not making the right choices," he said. "So I think it was a big sacrifice... and we owe a tremendous amount to him for sure." — AFP

### Niki Lauda

Austrian driver Lauda appeared to be cruising to a second Formula One World Championship in 1976 when disaster struck at the German Grand Prix in Nuerburgring. Lauda's Ferrari swerved off the course and struck an embankment, before exploding in flames. Lauda was trapped in the wreckage and suffered severe burns before being pulled to safety. He made an incredible return to racing 43 days later at the Italian Grand Prix but was pipped to that year's drivers' crown by James Hunt. He went on to win two more world championships in 1997 and 1984. He died in May last year aged 70.

### Monica Seles

Monica Seles looked poised to rule women's tennis in the early 1990s, becoming the youngest woman to reach the world number one ranking in 1991 before winning three out of four Grand Slams in 1992 with victories at the Australian, French and US Opens. In 1993 she again looked set to dominate, opening the year by winning the Australian Open with a defeat of German great

Steffi Graf. In April, however, Seles was stabbed by a deranged spectator while playing at a tournament in Hamburg. Although she soon recovered from her physical injuries, the emotional scars meant Seles did not return until 1995 and the following year she won her 10th and last Grand Slam at the Australian Open.

### Michael Phelps

The greatest medal winner in Olympics history, a burned-out Phelps called it quits after his fourth Games at London 2012 with 18 golds to his name. He spent 20 months on the sidelines, gaining weight, playing golf and being treated for alcohol problems before deciding the water was where he wanted to be, returning for the 2016 Rio Olympics. The American crowned his glittering career with five more golds to extend his all-time Olympic record to 23 gold, three silver and two bronze medals at the age of 31, well beyond the typical peak age for a male swimmer. He has subsequently spoken of a battle with depression since retiring for a second time.—AFP

## Golden years: 5 great sporting comebacks

**SYDNEY:** All Blacks legend Dan Carter announced his return to Super Rugby at the age of 38 on Thursday, extending the career of the double Rugby World Cup winner and three times world player of the year. AFP Sport looks at five other athletes who made famous comebacks:



## Sports

# FIFA 'mafia' depicted in new Amazon Prime satire

## Amazon to make Premier League matches free-to-air

**LOS ANGELES:** Fans yearning for the return of professional soccer have spent months rewatching classic matches, obsessing over "contact training" schedules and adopting teams from far-flung leagues that play in empty stadiums. Amazon Prime's new series "El Presidente," out Friday, provides a much-needed football fix - but its witheringly satirical take on the 2015 "Fifagate" corruption scandal may leave supporters questioning whether the return of the beautiful game is a good thing after all.

"It was crazy what was going on, no?" said series creator and writer Armando Bo. "Not just FIFA... the corruption scandal was so huge, the FBI wanted to show they were the good guys... Everyone wanted to be part of it. So many hands on this super huge business." The \$150 million bribery scandal that rocked the football world with the arrests of dozens of soccer executives - many of them Latin American - culminated in the downfall of FIFA boss Sepp Blatter.

"El Presidente" tells the story through the eyes of Sergio Jadue, a young Chilean who improbably rose from the front office of a humble local club to the vice presidency of CONMEBOL, South American football's governing body. Filmed mainly in Spanish with subtitles, its depiction of a naive but ambitious character getting swept up in an international criminal world of bribery, fraud and even violence is reminiscent of Netflix's hit drama "Narcos." "I guess it's different, football and drugs - for me, the big challenge was there's not so much blood," joked Bo, who won an Oscar for co-writing 2014's black comedy "Birdman." "This kind of mafia is more difficult. In 'Narcos,' you can just kill everyone and that's it. It's real. Here, people didn't die - not too many."

Amazon will hope "El Presidente" - co-produced by Gaumont, the same French firm behind "Narcos" - enjoys the same global appeal as that show. Hopping between countries and following a US undercover agent who tracked Jadue and his co-conspirators, the series is "really local but also really meaningful in every country," said Bo. "And it's an era when subtitles are allowed, no?" added the Argentine. "We are seeing international content in the American market, after 'Narcos,' after 'Parasite,' even 'Roma.' "We are seeing that stories need to be told in the language that is more natural, more real, more credible."

### Behind the curtain

A soccer fan who adores Lionel Messi, Bo admits it can be painful to look behind the curtain at the greed and corruption rampant in the world's most popular sport. The show is narrated from beyond the grave by Julio Grondona, the real-life veteran Argentine soccer boss. Grondona's character highlights the vast contrast between fans' unadulterated passion for "the World Cup people see" and the true "business World Cup" - an unrivalled cash machine for those pulling the strings.

Glamorous events like the Brazil 2014 World Cup and Chile's historic Copa America victory on home soil the following year take a back seat to grubby TV rights deals. But at a time when the world is locked down, the success of shows like Michael Jordan documentary "The Last Dance" demonstrates a pent-up appetite for the stories behind famous past sporting dramas, Bo said. "We are experiencing now so many things that we need to question about ourselves as a society," he added. "But I'm a big sports fan, and when it's back, I will be there watching for sure." — AFP

## Porto suffer shock defeat as Primeira Liga returns

**PORTO:** Leaders Porto suffered a shock 2-1 defeat at Famalicao as Portugal's Primeira Liga became the latest league to return to action following the coronavirus stoppage on Wednesday. An embarrassing mistake by Porto goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin three minutes after halftime gifted Famalicao the lead. The Argentine sent an attempted clearance straight to Fabio Martins who rolled the ball into an empty net from the edge of the penalty area.

Jesus Corona fired Porto level in the 74th minute but the hosts regained the lead four minutes later when Pedro Goncalves left fly from 25 metres and his shot found a gap between Marchesin and the near post. Porto also had a lucky escape in the first half when Pepe appeared to trip an opponent in the penalty area but then also fell over and the referee waved play on. All matches are being played behind closed doors but videos posted on media websites showed an estimated 200 Porto fans gathering behind barriers outside the stadium, singing and waving flags. Most were wearing masks but they did not appear to be respecting social distancing guidelines.

Porto top the table with 60 points but could lose the lead when arch-rivals Benfica, who are one point behind, host Tondela on Thursday. Earlier, a spectacular, swerving 30-metre shot from Lucas Fernandes gave Portimonense a 1-0 win over Gil Vicente in the match which got the competition under way. "Football without the



**VILA NOVA DE FAMILICAO:** FC Porto's Colombian forward Luis Diaz jumps for the ball during the Portuguese league football match FC Famalicao against FC Porto at the Municipal Stadium in Vila Nova de Famalicao yesterday. — AFP

public in the stands is very strange, it seemed like a pre-season game," said Portimonense coach Paulo Sergio. His opposite number, Vitor Oliveira, agreed. "We need the fans," he said. "Looking at what is happening elsewhere, where things are opening up, I think that football can have some fans, maybe 20% or 30% of the stadium capacity. Football without the public is not football." — Reuters

## What next for Premier League's 'Project Restart'?

**LONDON:** The Premier League's return is just two weeks away but there are plenty of details for the 20 clubs in the English top-flight to work out before competitive action resumes on June 17. AFP Sport looks at what is on the agenda at the latest in a series of meetings between the clubs yesterday.

### What happens?

There have been squabbles over how final league standings should be decided if the season cannot be completed but clubs need a contingency arrangement if a spike in coronavirus cases wrecks their plans. Most of the teams in the bottom half of the table are reportedly pushing for relegation to be scrapped if the season is not completed on the field. That still seems highly unlikely, with the English Football Association and English Football League both insisting on promotion and relegation throughout the pyramid. A points-per-game formula is the most likely option and is part of the reason why the restart will begin with two matches on June 17, to ensure every side has played the same number of games.

### Fixture list

Once the two outstanding games - Manchester City v Arsenal and Aston Villa v Sheffield United - have been played, all 20 sides will have nine games remaining. No dates for other matches have yet been released, but fixtures are expected to continue from where they left off in

March and be crammed into just five weeks ahead of the FA Cup final on August 1.

### Substitutes and squad sizes

A long lay-off, little time together in contact training and a grueling schedule mean players' bodies will be pushed to the limits. In an attempt to minimize injuries and fatigue, world governing body FIFA has allowed leagues to temporarily change their rules to allow five substitutes. Chelsea have also reportedly proposed increasing the number of substitutes available from seven to nine. However, critics have suggested those changes will simply play into the hands of the bigger clubs with deeper squads.

### Neutral venues

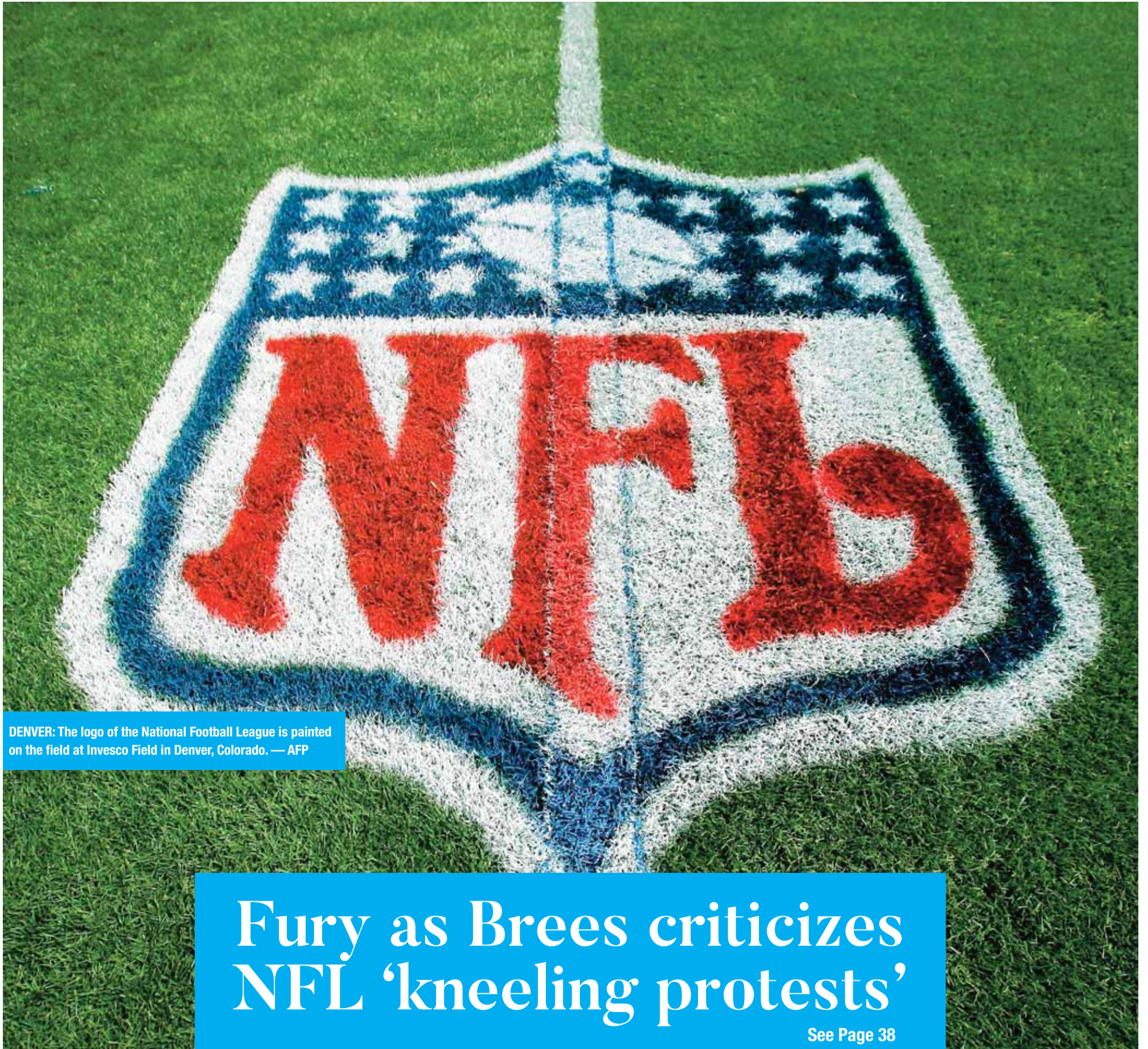
Premier League clubs appear to have won their battle to have games played in their own grounds rather than on neutral sites. However, the UK's national lead for football policing confirmed last week that a "small number" of fixtures will take place at neutral venues. That is likely to include any match that could see Liverpool crowned champions for the first time in 30 years, to try and avoid crowds gathering at Anfield. Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is unconcerned by playing at neutral venues, with results from four rounds of Germany's Bundesliga showing no advantage for home sides in a closed-doors environment. — AFP



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DENVER: The logo of the National Football League is painted on the field at Invesco Field in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

## Fury as Brees criticizes NFL 'kneeling protests'

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