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# Joy, sacrifice as mosques reopen in 'model' areas

Panel seeks opinion over rent relief • Meetings to debate population imbalance



KUWAIT: The imam leads Dhuhr prayers at Bilal Mosque in Siddiq yesterday after some mosques reopened for the first time after three months of closure due to the coronavirus outbreak. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Mosques in so-called modern residential areas reopened their doors to worshippers for the first time following three months of unprecedented closure due to the coronavirus outbreak. To celebrate the occasion, Islamic charity organizations slaughtered 100 sheep and distributed the meat to the needy. Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Al-Afasi said mosques in commercial, market and heavily-populated areas will remain closed for the time being.

Mosques opened for Dhuhr (noon) prayers amid strict health precautionary measures. Worshippers must wear facemasks and social distancing between rows and worshippers must be strictly observed. Worshippers must bring their own mats so they do not come in contact with mosque carpets.

Mosques will open five minutes before prayer time and close 10 minutes after prayers. In the first phase, no Friday prayer will be held except at the Grand Mosque in Kuwait City. The ministry of Islamic Affairs asked the defense ministry to sanitize all mosques before they are reopened.

The National Assembly's legal and legislative committee yesterday sought the opinion of the justice ministry and

the Supreme Judicial Council about proposals on how to deal with payment of rent during the coronavirus crisis, head of the committee said. MP Khaled Al-Shatti said the committee discussed a number of proposals and found there are different opinions from the landlords and representatives of businesses affected by the virus.

Shatti said that the panel had previously settled the issue of residential rent by proposing a provision that prevents landlords from evicting tenants during the crisis if they fail to pay rent on time. The provision however does not propose any reduction in residential rent.

The landlords union meanwhile rejected any reduction in residential rent because tenants have been using the leased real estate, but offered a 50 percent cut to commercial shops for up to three months because tenants were prevented from using their shops due to shutdowns.

Residential tenants have been calling for some reduction in rent because many of them have either lost jobs or had their salaries reduced because of the coronavirus crisis, rendering them unable to pay rent. Some landlords have volunteered to cut rent by more than 30 percent.

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## News in brief

### Bahrain activist freed

**MANAMA:** Bahraini rights activist Nabeel Rajab, who played a key role in 2011 anti-government protests, was freed from jail Tuesday after serving time over tweets critical of the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen. "Nabeel has been released and he is on his way home now," his lawyer Mohammed Al-Jishi told AFP, adding that Rajab would serve the remaining three years of a five-year sentence in an "alternative" or non-custodial setting. — AFP

### UAE plane lands in Israel

**JERUSALEM:** UAE carrier Etihad Airways sent its second flight to Israel in less than a month Tuesday, carrying medical aid to help the Palestinians tackle the coronavirus pandemic, witnesses and officials said. Tuesday's aircraft bore for the first time the logo of the Arab carrier, a source with knowledge of the flight told AFP. But Palestinian premier Mohammed Shtayyeh said the Palestinians had not been informed about the flight. The Palestinians rejected a similar UAE shipment of medical supplies on May 19, saying it had not been coordinated with them. — AFP (See Page 8)

### Emirates lays off thousands

**DUBAI:** Emirates, one of the world's biggest long-haul airlines, laid off hundreds of pilots and thousands of cabin crew on Tuesday as it manages a cash crunch caused by the coronavirus pandemic, five company sources said. More redundancies were expected at Emirates this week including both Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 pilots, the sources said on the condition of anonymity. The workforce of 4,300 pilots and nearly 22,000 cabin crew could shrink by almost a third from its pre-coronavirus levels, three of the sources said. An airline spokeswoman told Reuters some employees had been laid off. — Reuters

## Tributes, calls for justice at Floyd funeral

**HOUSTON:** Houston said farewell to George Floyd in a rousing hometown funeral Tuesday, with poignant tributes and calls for justice for the 46-year-old African American whose death "touched the world" and ignited global protests against police brutality and racism. Politicians, civil rights activists and celebrities joined in sharing memories of the man they called a "gentle giant" after his golden casket was carried into the sanctuary by six

pallbearers in masks, as a row of police officers stood at attention and saluted.

Civil rights leader Al Sharpton delivered a fierce eulogy, punctuated by the deep chords of a church organ, in which he accused President Donald Trump of showing indifference over Floyd's death, and sending police a signal of impunity. "We are fighting wickedness in high places!" Sharpton thundered, uttering the phrase over and over as he accused Trump of "scheming on how you can spin the story rather than how you can achieve justice."

"You sit now trying to figure out how you're going to stop the protest, rather than how you're going to stop

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HOUSTON: People watch as a horse-drawn hearse containing the remains of George Floyd passes by during a funeral procession on Tuesday. — AFP

## Future of flying: Masks, checks, long check-ins

**SINGAPORE:** Cabin crew in protective suits, health certifications for passengers, mandatory face masks, and longer check-in times. This is the new reality of mass air travel. As people dream of taking to the skies once more, they face the prospect that changes to curb the spread of coronavirus will be even more challenging than those brought in after the 2001 terror attacks in the United States.

In addition to the strict security measures commonplace around the world since then, passengers will now encounter a barrage of checks for COVID-19. "Before the pandemic, we were told to arrive two hours before the flight. This time we had to be at the airport at least four hours before flying," said Indonesian Suyanto after taking a domestic route in late May. There were multiple queues and screenings before he could even check in at the airport, he added.

Passengers in the country must declare a reason for flying, provide documentation proving they are virus-free, undergo multiple screenings, and offer details of their movements on arrival. "It was more



WUHAN, China: This photo taken on May 29, 2020 shows a flight attendant wearing a facemask as she checks the body temperature of boarding passengers next to the door of the plane at Tianhe Airport. — AFP

tiring and expensive. With these kinds of strict rules, I think people will think twice before travelling," said the 40-year-old, who had to pay double the usual fare for his short flight as some seats were left empty for social distancing.

As the aviation industry attempts to find a way forward, experts warn the impact of the pandemic will be far-reaching. "9/11 created a new environment for the entire travel industry in terms of security," explained Shukor Yusof from Malaysia-based

Continued on Page 16

## Arab mission to Mars designed to inspire youth

**DUBAI:** The first Arab space mission to Mars, armed with probes to study the Red Planet's atmosphere, is designed to inspire the region's youth and pave the way for scientific breakthroughs, officials said Tuesday. The unmanned probe Al-Amal – Hope in Arabic – is to blast off from a Japanese space center on July 15, with preparations now in their final stages.

The project is the next giant step for the United Arab Emirates, whose colossal skyscrapers and mega-projects have put it on the world map. The UAE sent its first astronaut into space last year and is also planning to build a "Science City" to replicate conditions on Mars, where it hopes to build a human settlement by 2117.

Omran Sharaf, the mission's project manager, said that apart from the ambitious scientific goals, the mission was designed to hark back to the region's golden age of cultural and scientific achievements.

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## Local

# No work, no pay and no money for rent: Jobless expats plead for help

## Calls for reprieve for tenants similar to businesses

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The 10th of every month is the deadline for paying rent for many tenants. But many expatriates nowadays say they can no longer afford to pay the rent, as many workers have been out of work without pay during the past three months. "How can I pay? I was not working for the last three months. Then a few days ago, I received very depressing news from my company - I was fired from the job," said Marlon, 35, who works as a restaurant supervisor in Kuwait City.

"The flat owner is reminding me to pay, without any discount. Where will I get the money? Who will hire me now? We are still amid the pandemic and companies are closed. I am in a state of anxiety now and am praying to God that I will be able to overcome this," Marlon said.

### Exemption

There have been recent moves to exempt businesses affected by the coronavirus outbreak from paying rent throughout the crisis. But it stops short on requiring building owners to provide a reprieve of payments for tenants. The National Assembly's legal committee last week approved amendments to the rent law stipulating that landlords will not be able to evict their apartments if tenants fail to pay the rents during shutdowns. It only states in the amendment that a court will decide the way such tenants would pay the unpaid rent, mostly in installments.

"I hope the Kuwaiti government will be

able to help us with regards to rent, so we are able to overcome the effect of the global crisis. We are not asking them to make our stay free in Kuwait, but at least come up with a mechanism to support us in the next few months so we are able to survive," he added. "We are in very bad shape, and we need some support. Going back to our country is not really the choice now, because they too have troubles."

Marlon has two children in the Philippines with his wife. His company recently emailed him saying his service is no longer

including food delivery services, car mechanics, restaurants and others have reopened. But salons, malls, taxis and other businesses remain closed, and hundreds of thousands of expatriates are out of work and without a salary or income.

Vilma Dela Rosa, 57, who lives in Kuwait City, pays rent on time, but for the first time, her monthly payment is now overdue. "I normally pay my house rent between the first and fifth day of the month. Today is the 9th but I have no money to pay, so I told my flat owner I will not be able to pay. She told me OK for now. However, if the haris asks for it, we'll have to do something and pay," she said.

"So I've been thinking of borrowing from a loan shark. That is the only way, because my company said they have no money at all. I tried earlier to borrow from them, but they said they cannot spare anything," she said. Vilma said her company will probably open by the end of June. "We don't know yet. My last salary was in April - they gave it full even though we were no longer working at that time, but we were informed that for May and June, we will not get any salary at all," she said.

Safi, an Indian tenant in Mangaf in his mid-40s, said his building owner told them to pay the full rent for May and June. "I am a taxi driver and till now, there is no work for me. I explained to him we cannot pay the May and June rent because we have no work, but he insisted and told us if we do not pay, we will be evicted. We were informed last Friday, so we need to give the



money. Our deadline is mid-June for the May rent and the same deadline for next month. I am looking for money so I can pay," he told Kuwait Times.

### At half rent

Emie rents several apartments in Mahboula and then sublets them to fellow nationals. She is thankful to the building owner because most of the flats she's renting are at half rent for four months. "Since March we were told to pay only half of the rent," said Emie, a salon worker who rents seven flats. Many low-income expats share rental accommodations in order to lower the cost of living. Sub-renting flats without the owner's permission is illegal however.

"I am very thankful to the building owner because he knows the situation of many tenants. Many of them are trapped

without work or pay, so we cannot do anything. Thank God, my building owner, who is a Kuwaiti, told us to pay only half the rent. Some of my tenants are able to pay because they still get a salary, but the majority of my tenants could not pay anymore. I told my Kuwaiti flat owner to give us some time to pay, so he said pay when you have the money. So the pressure is less now," Emie said.

Subletting flats provides Emie additional income. "My income from subletting flats ranges from KD 60 to KD 100 per flat. But if you are the flat owner, you have to provide everything, from water filters to fridge to cooking range and washing machine. I do not want a flat, but the Kuwaiti owner insisted to take the flat and sublet it. Now I have extra income plus my salon job," she said.



## Tenants consider loan sharks as option

required, as they are planning to close the business. He has been given three months to look for a new job or his iqama will be cancelled. "if I am able to get a new offer during the next three months, I'll stay, or I will go back home," he said.

### Phased reopening

Kuwait has been under lockdown since March, with a full curfew for 20 days in May and most businesses shuttered for the last two months. It has now entered a phased reopening and some businesses

### In my view

## Let us return to basics

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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A few years back, I was very excited to hand my baby daughter her first laptop for being a grade A student in her school, and yes I do admit that I was pleased to her using it, not knowing that this blessing will turn into a curse down the road!

Day after day, the girl started to get attached to this device, and mind you her mobile did not leave her hand at all. Even when she went to bed and seemed sound asleep, when her mother attempted to remove the phone from her side on the bed, she used to wake scared as if someone had removed her life support line and scrambled to put her hands on the device.

We noticed the grades of this bright girl drop, and when we discussed why, we found out that she was paying less attention to academics and was involved in many activities and that took much of her time. I found myself blaming teachers who did not guide and advise her on how to manage her time and priorities.

I became somewhat sad for giving her that laptop, because she kept using it for her activities and many times I found her awake late at night working on it and I got very angry. All she did was beg me to let her complete her group activities for the week. My daughter was addicted to technology.

My concern was her education in the era of technological development, which is something that cannot be avoided. When it comes to education of our children, we often go the easy way. We place the computer in their hands believing that we provide them with comfort with these devices and programs to prepare them for the future. But simply, it will not do that because many of the current technological methods and means to teach mostly concentrate on training children to use the devices and are not suitable.

What children need instead is education that prepares them as citizens to help solve our urgent social and environmental problems. They need an education that helps them understand the fact that technical skills alone cannot solve these problems and that active social participation and ethical commitment of human beings who represent various cultures will always be necessary.

Our children face a wall of technological challenges that cause changes in the human and environmental biology of the world. They need a different type of technological horizon to get wise choices for their future. The screen with its various colors has invaded children's lives at all times and places, and they do not have enough time.

There is no evidence of good benefit in the long run - that children receive a good education; rather there are increasing harmful indicators about bad lifestyles and the poor quality of education some governments are strongly promoting.

Finally: It is time for citizens, institutions and decision makers to restore childhood to children.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 33,140 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Tuesday, in addition to 273 deaths. With the exception of 173 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 23,288 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,579 people receiving treatment and 23 quarantined.

### Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31, as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The first phase also includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, Hawally and Maidaan Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier.

Activities to resume in first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops. The second phase will see the curfew shortened to be between 9:00 pm and 6:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, malls opening for eight hours and according to special instructions, parks and pickups from restaurants.

The third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. It would see increase of workforce to less than 50 percent. Visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger, and mosques would be allowed to perform Friday prayers.

Phase four would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. All activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

Mosques in the so-called 'model residential areas' reopened their doors for worshippers on June 10 amid strict health precautionary measures. Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Al-Afasi said that mosques in commercial, markets and heavily-populated areas will remain closed for the time being. Worshippers must wear face masks, keep social distancing between queues and between worshippers must be strictly observed. Worshippers must bring their own mats so they do not get in contact with mosque carpets. Mosques will reopen five minutes before prayer time and close 10 minutes after prayer.

Earlier, Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Before that, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm

until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

### Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Kuwait took all measures to test Kuwaitis repatriated from infected areas for potential infection. Kuwait had required all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28, with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

### Hotlines

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

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

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Cajal Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)

- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

### Medicine delivery

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

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

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

### Mental health assistance

The Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA) is providing consultation through the phone for people suffering from the psychological impacts of coronavirus. Different doctors are working on the hotline in different timings as follows:

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

Local

# Top Kuwait lawmaker urges backing for private sector

## Private sector workers should not be left out in the cold: Ghanem

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday it is essential to adopt legislation aiming at supporting the private sector amid efforts to curb the novel coronavirus. Ghanem made the call during a parliamentary committee meeting attended by owners of small, medium and large enterprises to look into the fallout of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. He underlined that it is unacceptable to leave enterprise owners in the lurch under these extraordinary circumstances, saying that some action should be taken in order to mitigate relevant negative reflections. The speaker called on ministers and members of parliament to live up to their due responsibilities by doing something to ease out the losses of the private sector. He also emphasized that the workers of private companies should not be left out in the cold amid the fight

against the global pandemic, voicing confidence that MPs are overwhelmingly interested in taking action to serve the interests of the private sector and its staff. The top lawmaker urged the government not to give in to pressure from anybody, but to take the right decision in this regard. Several ministers and MPs attended the parliamentary committee's meeting on efforts to alleviate the aftershocks of the COVID-19.

### Laws proposed to protect enterprises



**Protecting enterprises**  
Meanwhile, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan yesterday emphasized the necessity of enacting a package of legislations to tackle fallouts of the pandemic on the business sector in particular. The minister, addressing a session of the parliamentary financial committee, singled out the aspired "settlement protection law" that could protect small, medium and large

enterprises and workers in the private sector. The meeting was sponsored by Speaker Ghanem and attended by entrepreneurs and private sector personnel, discussing repercussions of the novel coronavirus. Minister Roudhan noted his keenness on listening to proposals by the entrepreneurs for sake of stimulating the economy and resolving their problems.

### No profit

In the meantime, the Kuwait Banking Association announced yesterday there would be no distribution of cash profits to banks' shareholders for 2020. The association said in a statement that the decision was taken to enable the banking sector play the financial brokerage role, ensure liquidity flow and operations in various economic sectors until current extraordinary circumstances created by the coronavirus pandemic cease to exist. The declaration was publicized on the heels of regular meetings that had been held with the Central Bank of Kuwait, following up on the sector condition in shadow of the pandemic and its fall-



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem

## Kuwait FM, UN envoy discuss Yemeni crisis



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a phone call from the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Yemen Martin Griffiths. During the phone call, the minister briefed Griffiths on the latest developments in the Yemeni crisis and Kuwait's contribution, politically and humanitarianly, to bring security and stability to the Yemen. — KUNA

outs. The announcement is in harmony with criterion of the Basel committee for overseeing banking sector, adopted by the CBK as part of the measures to cope with the coronavirus repercussions. Such an approach is intended to bolster rating of the sector and its credit status in tandem with identical measures adopted globally. — KUNA



Abdullah Al-Henayyan

## Kuwaiti movie nominated for int'l film festival

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti movie ALGA'AILA, for young Kuwaiti director Abdullah Al-Henayyan, was recently nominated to take part in the Around International Film Festival (ARFF) in Amsterdam, which is scheduled for September 2020. This is the film's second nomination for an international festival after being nominated for the European Short Film Festival due to be held in May 2021.

Expressing his joy with the nominations, Henayyan stressed that such achievement could not have been made without LOYAC's support for the youth and LAPA's cinema workshops. Henayyan added that his relation with the cinema started through LAPA workshops after which he started writing scripts and directing them. "We produced four films through the workshop and then my film won the award of the FAD festival organized by LAPA last December," he underlined, adding that he is currently working on a new short film written by a colleague who had also been trained in LOYAC. "I also plan to open my own production company," he concluded.

Meanwhile, LAPA's movie camp supervisor and media figure Nadia Ahmed expressed her joy with the movie, noting that ALGA'AILA is a valuable addition to the Kuwaiti film industry. "We have so far organ-



Nadia Ahmed

ized four editions of FAD festival and will keep supporting young film makers from Kuwait and the Arab world to develop their skills in writing, production, photography, direction and acting and encourage them to produce more short films, providing them with all the support they need," Ahmed added, noting that the success of ALGA'AILA is a motivation to develop the film camp activities and provide intensive training programs similar to those taught in the most



The nomination's invitation.

prestigious cinema colleges around the world. Notably, LOYAC Lebanon had recently organized the latest edition of the FAD festival where the workshops mainly focused on writing for cinema through a workshop given by Stephanie Khouri. Other workshops were made in direction and editing presented by Qnason and Dima Al-Ansari, Tareq Al-Askar and others.



The film's poster.

### News in brief

#### Co-op staff test positive

**KUWAIT:** Qurtoba Co-op Society announced that nine employees tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) after 31 workers and volunteers were tested, which raises the number of total infections amongst the co-op staff and volunteers to 43. Meanwhile, 29 employees tested positive for coronavirus at Jaber Al-Ali Co-op

#### Curfew violators

**KUWAIT:** Police arrested 20 curfew violators on Tuesday, including 13 Kuwaitis and seven expatriates, the Interior Ministry announced. The arrests took place as follows: One in the Capital Governorate, three in Hawally, five in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, seven in Al-Ahmadi, and four in the 'home quarantine' category.

#### 32 flights

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that 32 flights departed Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 6,180 passengers. They included 21 flights to Egypt, eight flights to India, two flights to Qatar, and one flight to Jordan.

#### Oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil fell by 2.19 to \$35.33 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, compared with \$37.52 a day earlier, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Globally, the price of Brent crude on Tuesday closed up by 38 cents or 0.9 percent to \$41.18 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate went up by 75 cents or two percent to \$38.94 pb.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed



Local



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributed 1,000 food packages to residents in the isolated area of Khaitan, which is under total lockdown as part of efforts to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The food distribution took place Tuesday in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality workers sterilized 2,448 trash containers of different sizes around the Capital Governorate on Tuesday, as part of government efforts to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the country.



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior tested its officers Tuesday for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as a precautionary measure, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

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Local

# Firemen battle Farwaniya building, Free Trade Zone fires

Man hurt after jumping from second floor



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Farwaniya and Jleeb firemen battled a blaze in an Arab-style house in Farwaniya Tuesday. The fire started in an electricity meter on the ground floor. A man was injured after he jumped from the second floor in an attempt to escape, and medics took him to hospital. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire. Meanwhile, firemen from four fire stations doused a blaze that caught the outer cover panels of a free zone building. No injuries were reported, as investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire.



## Pure cocaine in 3 golf balls

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Airport customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle 32 grams of pure cocaine, which were hidden in three golf balls that arrived in a shipment from Canada on Tuesday. Investigations are underway to identify and arrest the person who imported the drugs.



In My View

## Fast food love

By Nawara Fattahova

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People in Kuwait have a passion for fast food. Although the trend of healthy eating and diet food spread widely among the community in the past few years, people still love burgers from popular international franchises and fried chicken that can't be imitated.

Since the partial curfew was imposed on March 22, ordering from restaurants has been limited to only a few hours, and after the 20-day total curfew was imposed, all restaurants were closed. People were impatiently waiting to get their favorite meal delivered. They missed it very much, and some even went as far as posting photos of these meals on social media with poems expressing their longing and waiting.

From the first day of the lifting of the total curfew, long queues of cars were seen at all operational branches of cafes and fast food restaurants with drive thrus. Delivery schedules were packed and it was impossible to order. As most restaurants close at 4:00 pm, people rush to order, especially in the last two hours. Due to the high demand, many orders are canceled, delivered late or with wrong items.

I expected people to rush crazily to order meals on the first few days, so I waited for four days, thinking that the demand will drop and I can comfortably get my favorite burger. I drove all the way from Shuwaikh to Bidaa to get my meal, as the Shuwaikh branch is still closed. Their call center told me they are open till 4:30 pm. But when I arrived at 4:00 pm, they had already placed a barricade after the seventh car in the queue.

The security guard of the restaurant was standing beside this barricade to prevent more cars joining the queue. I asked him why they closed 30 minutes earlier - he explained that they had run out of raw material and all the burgers were over.

The scene of long queues at fast food restaurants continues to repeat every day, and one of the main reasons is the 12-hour curfew that forces restaurants to close early. As most of the world is relieving restrictions and measures - our neighboring countries have already done this - Kuwait should also end this curfew and get back to normal life.

Many people assumed that with the pandemic, people will be scared to order and eat from restaurants, and that it's safer to eat at home. But no - nothing can stop us lovers of fast food from eating our favorite meals no matter what virus is out there!



Freed Taliban prisoners eye return to battlefield

## Australia rejects China's racism warning

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HODEIDA: Children walk past tents at a displaced persons camp in the Khokha district of Yemen's western province of Hodeida. The world is facing an 'impending global food emergency' that could impact hundreds of millions of people as the coronavirus pandemic threatens already strained supply chains, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned yesterday. — AFP

# Virus' shocks to fuel unrest, hunger

## Some 'starving' in North Korea

LONDON: Economic shocks caused by the new coronavirus are set to fuel poverty, unrest and instability in heavily-indebted and politically fragile countries for years to come, found an international think-tank yesterday. The pandemic's impacts will undo years of socio-economic development for some countries, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) said in a briefing released alongside its annual index measuring peace levels around the world. "The worst is still to come," said Steve Killelea, head of the Australia-based IEP, which expects to see most of the peace indicators it measures fall for several years. "The countries which are going to suffer the most are those which are currently fragile because they are the ones which generally have higher levels of food insecurity, the governments are politically less stable and economies are less robust."

Lockdowns to prevent the spread of the virus have hit economies, with the International Labour Organization estimating some 200 million would lose their jobs and the World Bank predicting the global economy will shrink by 5% in 2020. Analysts predict it will take five years for world economies to recover back to their 2019 levels, said Killelea. Heavily-indebted countries may struggle to find cash to rebuild their economies after the coronavirus, increasing instability, riots and violence, IEP's analysis found. Many states are also likely to cut overseas aid which will further stress fragile and conflict-torn countries, such as Liberia, Afghanistan, Burundi and South Sudan, and risks worsening humanitarian crises, it said.

Climate change and natural disasters also pose a growing threat to peace, said the IEP, which found global peacefulness has deteriorated worldwide over

the past year. Global peacefulness has declined 2.5% since 2008, found the index, which gives countries a peace score of between 1 and 5, based on 23 indicators measuring levels of conflicts, societal safety and militarization. Vidya Diwakar, a researcher at the Overseas Development Institute think-tank, predicted the impact of the pandemic would be felt beyond fragile states, driving poverty and hunger, which



### Virus measures deepen food crisis

can trigger unrest, in many countries. "With such a crisis of this sort which affects so many dimensions ... there are likely to be long-term impacts," she said.

#### N Koreans 'starving'

Food insecurity in North Korea is deepening and some people are "starving" after it closed the border with China and took other steps against COVID-19, a UN rights expert said Tuesday. The hermetic totalitarian state, which has yet to confirm a single case of the novel coronavirus, introduced a range of other measures to try and prevent an outbreak. Tomas Ojea Quintana, the United Nations special rapporteur on

human rights in the country, called for urgent action from Pyongyang and the international community to relieve the suffering. "Lack of food had a devastating impact in the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) in the 1990s, and prospects of a further deepening of food shortages and widespread food insecurity are alarming," he said. Hundreds of thousands are believed to have died during a famine in the mid to late 1990s, a period known as the "Arduous March" in the North. Before the coronavirus crisis, more than 40 percent of people in North Korea were already considered food insecure, with many suffering malnutrition.

#### 'Irreversible damage'

One in five children under the age of five in the country are stunted, World Food Program spokeswoman Elisabeth Byrs told a virtual briefing on Tuesday. "Malnutrition on this scale means irreversible damage is being done to hundreds of thousands of children," she said. The decision five months ago to close the border with China, and putting thousands into isolation, are exacerbating the situation, said Quintana - an independent expert who does not speak on behalf of the UN but who reports his findings to it. North Korea's trade with China in March and April this year dropped by more than 90 percent, leaving many living in the border areas with no income, he said. "There have been reports of an increase of homeless people in large cities, including kotjebi (street children), and medicine prices have reportedly skyrocketed," his statement said. "An increasing number of families eat only twice a day, or eat only corn, and some are starving," it said.

#### Virus-related alerts

Meanwhile, a new version of Google's mapping service being rolled out will display pandemic-related transit alerts and let people know when buses or trains might be crowded. Updated versions of the free app for smartphones powered by Apple or Google-backed Android software will also let drivers know about COVID-19 checkpoints or restrictions on their routes. "We're introducing features to help you easily find important information if you need to venture out, whether it's by car or public transportation," Google Maps product management director Ramesh Nagarajan said in a blog post. Alerts about COVID-19 checkpoint notifications are to begin with crossings between the US and Canada or Mexico. When people use Maps for trips by public transit, Google will provide available information regarding whether schedules are limited; masks must be worn, or crowds are expected.

"Having this information before and during your trip is critical for both essential workers who need to safely navigate to work and will become more important for everyone as countries around the world begin to reopen," Nagarajan said. The transit alerts are rolling out in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Colombia, France, India, Mexico, Netherlands, Spain, Thailand, and the US where information from local transit agencies is available. People using Maps to navigate to medical facilities or COVID-19 testing centers will be shown reminders to verify eligibility and guidelines to avoid being turned away, according to Nagarajan. Alerts for those traveling to medical facilities will be available in Indonesia, Israel, the Philippines, South Korea, and the US starting this week. — Agencies

## Syrians fear hunger as devaluation sparks protests

BEIRUT: Umm Ahmed and her family have survived years of war, but now the mother of five is terrified uncontrolled devaluation of the Syrian pound will prevent her from feeding her children. "Since the war started, we've tasted all sorts of suffering," said the 39-year-old, displaced three times by fighting in the rebel stronghold of Idlib. "I think hunger will be among the next."

The value of the Syrian pound has plummeted with dizzying speed in recent days on the informal market, sending prices skyrocketing, shuttering shops, and sparking unprecedented protests. Umm Ahmed said she was so alarmed she was considering buying flour in bulk to start hoarding supplies. "If the pound continues to collapse like this, we are facing a huge famine," said Umm Ahmed, who is relying on dwindling savings as her husband struggles to help with odd jobs.

"We sold some land we inherited and we have been living off that but I don't think it will last long with these obscene price hikes," she said in the town of Binnish. In Idlib, the increase in the price of bread has sparked protests against Hayat Tahrir al-Sham jihadists in charge of the region of three million people—around half displaced by the conflict and many dependent on aid. Some shops have closed, an AFP correspondent reported. Syria's economy has been battered by nine years of war, compounded by a financial crisis in neighboring Lebanon, which had served as a conduit for dollars into government-held areas under international sanctions.

But in recent days the value of the Syrian pound on the black market has started to tumble even faster from one record to the next. From Sat-



BINNISH, Syria: A merchant displays Syrian pound notes at a shop in this town in Syria's north-western Idlib province on Tuesday. — AFP

urday to Monday alone, the exchange rate soared from 2,300 to more than 3,000 pounds to the dollar, more than four times the official rate of around 700. It hovered close to 3,000 yesterday. Before the conflict, it stood at 47.

Analysts say the recent spike is likely due to worries ahead of the introduction of new US sanctions from June 15, and the sudden fall from grace of tycoon and cousin of the president, Rami Makhlouf, which has set other top businessmen on edge. Prices have risen across the country, though the Turkish lira is used in some parts of the rebel-held north. The government has blamed the unofficial devaluation on US sanctions, and "manipulation" of the exchange rate.

But the rapid deterioration has sparked unprecedented criticism in government-held areas, including in the southern city of Sweida, where dozens have demonstrated for three days since Sunday, boldly chanting against the president. "Down with Bashar al-Assad," a video carried by a local news outlet showed them chanting. "Revolution, freedom, social justice," they shouted in

slogans reminiscent of the 2011 uprising whose repression sparked the civil war that has killed more than 380,000 people.

In the capital Damascus, one lawmaker said Sunday that part of the blame for the unofficial devaluation lay with the "wrong policies practised by the government". Another demanded action from the central bank, which increased the official exchange rate from 434 to 700 in March, but has since maintained that peg.

In Damascus, 52-year-old Lamees al-Sheikh said she had started buying only the cheapest vegetables. "Prices are through the roof. Every day... it's more expensive than the day before," the mother of five told AFP by phone. "I'm scared one day I'll... come back home empty handed." In a country where the vast majority lives in poverty, the World Food Program says food prices have risen by 133 percent since May 2019. "WFP estimates that 9.3 million Syrians are food insecure more than ever recorded," spokeswoman Jessica Lawson said. — AFP

## US dictionary to change definition of 'racism'

NEW YORK: The American reference dictionary Merriam-Webster will change its definition of the word racism at the suggestion of a young black woman, who wanted it to better reflect the oppression of people of color. Kennedy Mitchum, a recent graduate of Drake University in Iowa, contacted Merriam-Webster, which has published its dictionaries since 1847, to propose updating the term. "I basically told them that they need to include that there's a systematic oppression upon a group of people," she told the local CBS affiliate KMOV. "It's not just, 'Oh, I don't like someone.'" Merriam-Webster's editorial manager Peter Sokolowski confirmed to AFP that the definition would be modified after Mitchum's request.

The dictionary currently offers three definitions of racism, and Sokolowski said that the second definition touches on Mitchum's point — but that "we will make that even more clear in our next release". In the current version of the second definition, racism is "a doctrine or political program based on the assumption of racism and designed to execute its principles," and "a political or social system founded on racism." "This is the kind of continuous revision that is part of the work of keeping the dictionary up to date, based on rigorous criteria and research we employ in order to describe the language as it is actually used," Sokolowski said.

One of the dictionary's editors told Mitchum that the definitions of other words "related to racism or have racial connotations" would also be updated, without specifying which ones. "We apologize for the harm and offense we have caused in failing to address this issue sooner," the editor wrote, according to a message published by Drake University and retweeted by Mitchum. The Merriam-Webster site, where the definitions are available for free, had nearly 50 million unique visitors in May, according to the SimilarWeb site. Merriam-Webster's Twitter account has also become a viral hit in recent years, with Buzzfeed calling it "the sassiest dictionary on Twitter". — AFP

## International

# Britain confronts colonial past with statue protests

## Anti-racism protests prompt fresh look at Britain's past

**OXFORD:** Thousands of people called on Tuesday for a statue of 19th century British imperialist Cecil Rhodes to be removed from an Oxford University college, as debate raged over the removal of other monuments to the nation's colonial past. Protesters chanted "Take it down" and "Decolonize", and held placards urging "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Black Lives Matter" beneath the statue at Oriel College.

The "Rhodes Must Fall" movement, which began in South Africa, failed in a previous attempt to have the statue removed but has been revived by a wave of anti-racism protests. Protesters sat with raised fists for nearly nine minutes in tribute to unarmed black man George Floyd, whose death in US police custody triggered outrage and condemnation worldwide. Sylvanus Leigh, 44, said the limestone statue of the Victorian-era tycoon, who founded the De Beers diamond company in what is now Zimbabwe, represented "a colonial mindset".

The care worker told AFP he could think of more deserving candidates for a statue. "Better to have Mother Teresa or Desmond Tutu," he said. The leader of Oxford City Council, Susan Brown, said it would be a "good thing" if Oriel, which was founded in 1326, applied for permission to remove the statue. The college had to "find the right balance between the laws that protect our historic buildings and the moral obligation to reflect on the malign symbolism of this statue", she added. Local MP Layla Moran called

Rhodes a "white supremacist who does not represent the values of Oxford in 2020".

### 'Uncomfortable truth'

The protest comes after activists toppled a statue to Edward Colton, a 17th century merchant who helped build the city of Bristol and played a leading role in slavery. Years of local debate over what to do with the statue came to an end on Sunday when it was thrown in the harbor. Campaigners in Wales are now demanding the removal of memorials to Napoleonic war hero Thomas Picton, who was accused of cruelty while serving as a governor in Trinidad. In Scotland, activists have called for changes to the streets named after the 18th and 19th century tobacco and sugar traders who made their fortunes through slavery.

A central London statue of Winston Churchill was defaced, with protesters blaming his policies for the death of millions during famine in the Indian state of Bengal in 1943. Mayor Sadiq Khan launched a review of city landmarks and street names, saying many reflected "a bygone era", and could better reflect the capital's diversity. "It is an uncomfortable truth that our nation and city owes a large part of its wealth to its role in the slave trade," he said. Late on Tuesday, an east London council said it had removed a statue of Robert Milligan, whose family owned sugar plantations in Jamaica, from the Docklands district and



### Officials remove state of slave trader Robert Milligan

added it would "review" other monuments in the borough "to understand how we should represent the more troubling periods in our history".



**LONDON:** A video grab shows a statue of Scottish slaveholder Robert Milligan being removed from West India Quay, east London yesterday. — AFP

### 'Cold reality'

Despite widespread support, some warned of an attempt to erase the past. "If you change the street

names it's easier to forget but it's better to have signs underneath to talk about what these men did," said student Kieran Weatherill, 24, in Glasgow. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he understood the "depth of emotion" triggered by Floyd's death and the anger from black and ethnic minority groups about discrimination. — AFP

## Rising violence against women in Latin America

**MEXICO CITY:** Violence against women has soared in Latin America during the coronavirus pandemic, with a 50% increase in domestic abuse reports in Colombia alone, a top aid group said on Tuesday, confirming fears that lockdowns would put many women in danger. Femicide, the murder of women because of gender, rose 65% in Venezuela in April, and online searches for protection from gender-based violence increased 30-fold in El Salvador and Honduras, US-based nonprofit International Rescue Committee said in a report.

Concerns had been raised that violence against women would rise in Latin America, where almost 20 million women and girls suffer sexual and physical violence each year, during lockdowns implemented to help slow the spread of the coronavirus. Prosecutors, victim support groups, advocates and the United Nations all raised fears that women would be locked at home with their abusers and unable to leave to get help. "Women and adolescent girls... in confined spaces 24 hours of the day, some completely stuck with their perpetrators," said IRC Latin America director Meghan Lopez. Latin America is now a center of the global pandemic, with more than one million cases across different coun-



**TIJUANA:** Locals visit the graves of their relatives at the Municipal Cemetery #13 in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico amid the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

tries and many yet to reach the peak.

"I would say right now the epidemic in Central and South America is the most complex of all of the situations we face globally," said Michael Ryan, top emergencies expert at the World Health Organization, on Monday. In Mexico, emergency calls reporting attacks on women in Mexico jumped more than 50% in the first four months of the year compared with the

same period last year, government data showed. The country's president has denied the rising violence. The Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace reported a 70% increase in complaints of violence against women in Central America between mid-March and late-May. But the numbers may be an undercount, as women find it harder to seek help or report abuse with lockdowns in place. — Reuters

## Outgoing Burundi leader Nkurunziza dies at 55

**NAIROBI:** President Pierre Nkurunziza, a fitness enthusiast who increasingly relied on religion and repression to rule the impoverished and unstable central African nation of Burundi for 15 years, has died, the government announced on Tuesday. He leaves behind a nation dotted with the unmarked graves of his political opponents, an economy in tatters and a question mark over whether infighting over his succession could divide the country's powerful generals and security chiefs.

Burundi is largely cut off by international donors after the United Nations documented the widespread rape, torture and murder of political opponents by ruling party activists and the state security forces. Independent journalists are largely in exile or in jail. Nkurunziza, who was 55, was due to stand down in August, when retired general Evariste Ndayishimiye, who successfully stood for the ruling party in last month's elections, was due to take over. The opposition said the elections were marred by rigging and violence, charges rejected by the constitutional court last week. Nkurunziza, backed by several generals, would have preferred his ally Pascal Nyabenda to succeed him, said Nelleke van de Walle, a Great Lakes analyst with the International Crisis Group think tank.

Nyabenda is a civilian who became the president of the national assembly. Nkurunziza planned to remain active in politics as "Supreme Guide of Patriotism", a

title that came with a 1 billion Burundi franc (\$535,000) pension and retirement villa. But other generals successfully lobbied for Ndayishimiye to stand in May's elections. Like Nkurunziza, he is a former militia leader from the Hutu ethnic group. Burundi's constitution says Nyabenda is now supposed to take over until his former rival Ndayishimiye starts his seven-year term at the end of August. "Despite the clarity of the constitutional path, there is a risk of infighting within the CNDD-FDD (ruling party) because different generals supported different candidates during the ruling party primaries in January," said van de Walle.

### Human rights

Burundi became diplomatically isolated after 2015, when Nkurun-



**In this file photo, Burundi's incumbent president Pierre Nkurunziza raises his fist as he reacts to supporters during the last campaign rally in Bujumbura. — AFP**

ziza's decision to run for a third term - a move his opponents said violated the peace deal that ended the civil war - sparked protests met with extreme violence by the youth wing of the ruling party, known as the Imbonerakure, and the security forces. Hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled into exile.

Burundi withdrew from the International Criminal Court in 2017, shut down the United Nations office on human rights last year, and expelled the representative of the World Health Organisation last month amid criticism of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. It has carried out very few tests and held large rallies during the election period. "As I learn of the passing of Pierre Nkurunziza, I think of the thousands of lives that his regime cut short. The families that won't see justice," tweeted Thierry Uwamahoro, a democracy activist and prominent government critic who lives in exile. Journalists and human rights workers are routinely targeted. — Reuters

## Darfur's militia leader Kushayb in ICC custody

**BANGUI:** Darfur militia leader Ali Kushayb is in the detention centre of the International Criminal Court to face allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity after surrendering in the Central African Republic, the court said on Tuesday. Kushayb is the first Sudanese suspect taken into ICC custody in The Hague. The court issued an arrest warrant for him in 2007, accusing him of persecution, murder and rape in the western Sudanese region of Darfur between 2003 and 2004. ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda hailed Kushayb's transfer - almost 20 years after his alleged crimes - as a long overdue milestone.

"The victims in the Darfur situation deserve to finally have their day in court," she said in a statement. Prosecutors say Kushayb was a top commander of pro-government Janjaweed militias that led attacks on towns and villages and is implicated in at least 199 murders and the forcing of 40,000 mainly Fur civilians from their homes. There was no immediate public comment by Kushayb on the accusations against him. The conflict in Darfur killed an estimated 200,000 people and drove 2.5 million from their homes. The United States said killings there amounted to a genocide. The ICC has not accused Kushayb of that crime.

A government source in Central African Republic said Kushayb had been arrested in the northern town of Birao and sent by plane to The Hague on Tuesday morning. Former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir is also wanted by the ICC. He faces charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for atrocities committed by pro-government forces in Darfur. The ICC has no police force and relies on its 123 member states to carry out arrest warrants. The UN Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC, the world's first permanent war crimes court, in 2002. Five other arrest warrants related to Darfur are still outstanding including that of Bashir. The ICC did not say when Kushayb would first appear before the court. — Reuters

## Jihadist attack leaves 59 dead in NE Nigeria

**KANO:** Fighters from an IS-linked jihadist group on Tuesday killed 59 people in a raid on a herding village in northeast (NE) Nigeria's Borno state, local militia members and residents told AFP. Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) drove into remote Felo village in Gubio district in the early afternoon, shooting fleeing residents and running them over with their vehicles. "Fifty-nine bodies were recovered from the raid on the village," anti-jihadist militia leader Babakura Kolo said. "Some of them were shot and others were crushed under the wheels," he added.

The attack is believed to be a reprisal for the killing of jihadist fighters by local vigilantes protecting the villagers' herd from theft by the militants, a local leader in the village said. "We have lost 59 kinsmen in such a short time," said the local leader who asked not to be named for his personal safety. The jihadists have been stealing livestock from the village, prompting residents to form a militia force to end the theft, said another militiaman Ibrahim Liman, who gave the same toll. The vigilantes have been "hunting for the insurgents" in the bushes, killing some of them in gunfights, Liman said. Gubio, 80 kilometers from the regional capital Maiduguri, has been repeatedly targeted by the jihadists.

The incessant attacks prompted the authorities to send more than 100 vigilantes and local hunters to protect the town and nearby areas against incursions from ISWAP. ISWAP is a splinter faction that broke away from Boko Haram in 2016. It has intensified attacks against the military in the last two years, repeatedly carrying out deadly strikes against soldiers. In recent months there has been an increase in attacks on civilians blamed on the group. The decade-long conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in the northeast. The violence has spread to neighboring Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting a regional military coalition to fight the insurgents.

### Abuses rampant

Soldiers in three West African countries unlawfully killed or caused the disappearance of at least 199 people between February and April during stepped-up operations against jihadist insurgents, Amnesty International said yesterday.

Security forces in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger launched fresh offensives this year against militants linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State, who are threatening to overrun vast swathes of the Sahel region south of the Sahara Desert.

Those offensives have led to repeated accusations by human rights groups that security forces have committed atrocities, including executing displaced civilians - charges the authorities have alternately denied or promised to investigate. Amnesty researcher Ousmane Diallo said it was not clear if the rights abuses, documented in a new report published on Wednesday, were occurring more frequently than in years past but said they took place amid a flurry of activity by national armies after suffering significant losses in militant attacks. — Agencies

## International

# Palestinian PM 'not informed' of new UAE's aid flight via Israel

## Plane from UAE lands in Israel with supplies for Palestinians

**RAMALLAH:** Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said on Tuesday he was unaware that a plane from the United Arab Emirates was to fly to Israel carrying medical aid for the Palestinians. His remarks, after the flight was announced by Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways, cast doubt over whether the Palestinians - at odds with Israel over occupied land they seek for a state - would accept the supplies. The Palestinian Authority is sensitive about attempts to direct aid or assistance to areas under its limited self-rule in the

occupied West Bank without its knowledge and coordination. The Palestinians, who have no airports and typically receive aid via Jordan, Egypt or Israel, rejected a similar shipment of medical supplies to combat the coronavirus on May 19, saying it had not been coordinated with them.

"If any country, whether Arab or European or international country wants to help us, we welcome that. We don't say no - as long as it is not conditional and as long as it is fully coordinated with us," Shtayyeh told reporters in the West Bank city of

Ramallah. The aid was coordinated through the United Nations, which was handling the logistics, the UAE foreign ministry said. "The UAE's only concern is to support the Palestinian people through this challenging period, in line with its historic support," it said. State-owned Etihad also operated the May 19 flight, the first known flight by a UAE airline to Israel.

Etihad said on Tuesday it would operate a second flight to Israel carrying medical aid on a cargo-only service from Abu Dhabi. Israel's foreign ministry said the Etihad flight landed at Tel Aviv on

Tuesday evening. Aid would be transferred to Gaza and the West Bank by the UN and a unit of Israel's defense ministry, it said. Israel has no diplomatic relations with the Gulf Arab countries and there are no commercial flights between them. But shared concerns over Iran's regional influence have led to a discreet thaw in ties. The Palestinians have warned against Arab normalisation with Israel, which has pledged to annex the West Bank's Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley. Israel captured the West Bank in a 1967 war. —Reuters

## Philippine's Ressa scared but strong ahead of verdict

**MANILA:** High-profile Philippine journalist Maria Ressa says the libel charge that could see her jailed next week is a government ploy to intimidate all critical voices, but she refuses to be silenced and still holds out hope of winning. In an exclusive video interview with AFP ahead of Monday's verdict that could see her sentenced for up to 12 years, Ressa admitted being scared but also continued to speak defiantly.

"I've been the cautionary tale: be quiet or you're next... that's part of the reason why I have been targeted," said Ressa, 56, the co-founder of news site Rappler and a former CNN journalist. "It's a chilling effect... not just to me and to Rappler, but to journalists and to anyone who asks critical questions." Monday's verdict will decide a case that stems from a businessman's complaint in 2017 over a Rappler story five years earlier about his alleged ties to a then-judge on the nation's top court. Government investigators initially dismissed the businessman's allegation. But state prosecutors later revived the case using a controversial cyber crime statute aimed at online offences ranging from stalking to child pornography.

Authorities say they have not targeted Ressa for her work and are simply enforcing the law. But press and media watchdogs say the case against Ressa is in retaliation for Rappler's independent reporting on President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration. The website's journalists have cast a harsh light on Duterte's anti-drugs crackdown, which has killed thousands and drawn international censure despite being backed by many Filipinos. Another one of the most prominent critics of Duterte's narco war, Senator Leila de Lima, has been in jail for three years over drug allegations that she says are trumped up. Ressa's libel case is among a string of criminal charges that have hit her and Rappler since last year, many of which stem from allegations over how the site raised investment money.

### 'Embracing my fear'

The multiple moves against Rappler have drawn international concern and made Ressa a cause celebre globally for people standing up against authoritarian governments. Time magazine named Ressa a Person of the Year in 2018. Rights watchdogs say the Duterte government has in recent weeks stepped up its campaign to silence dissent in other ways, with the nation's top broadcaster - ABS-CBN - shutdown. Lawmakers also this month passed the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, which allows warrantless arrests, weeks of detention without charge and other measures that critics fear could be used to crack down on peaceful government opponents. Ressa said Duterte had cemented himself as the most powerful Filipino leader since dictator Ferdinand Marcos, whose two decades in power ended in a famous "people power" uprising in 1986. "We could even say more powerful than Marcos because he (Duterte) was able to declare martial law without even declaring martial law," Ressa said, referring to the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Ressa, who served as CNN's bureau chief in Manila and Jakarta during a nearly 35-year career, said waiting for Monday's verdict was proving an emotional challenge. "I am going to embrace my fear. I have to be ready and that starts in my head. That starts with my ability to be okay with the worst-case scenario," she said from her Manila home. "I don't want to be surprised." The independence of the judicial system in the Philippines, which has long had a reputation for corruption, has been further eroded during Duterte's four years in power, according to rights groups. But Ressa said individual people who make up the court system and their desire "to be guided by the spirit of the law" still give her reason for optimism. Regardless of the pressure from the highest levels of power to convict, it is up to the judge to make the final decision. "I'm hoping. All I can do is hope," Ressa said. —AFP

## Australia rejects China's racism warning

**SYDNEY:** Australian officials and leading universities yesterday rejected China's claims students should be "cautious" in choosing to study Down Under because of concerns over racist incidents during the coronavirus pandemic. China's ministry of education warned students on Tuesday there had been "multiple discriminatory incidents against Asians in Australia" during the pandemic, ramping up diplomatic tensions between the two countries. The advisory was the latest in an escalating dispute between Beijing and Canberra that was deepened by Australia's call for an independent inquiry into the origin and handling of the coronavirus in central China last year.

Beijing reacted furiously to the demand, targeting Canberra on several fronts, including tourism, trade and now Chinese students, the largest overseas group in Australian universities. Australian Education Minister Dan Tehan hit back yesterday, saying the country was a multicultural society that welcomed international visitors. "Our success at flattening the curve means we are one of the safest countries in the

world for international students to be based in right now," he said in a statement. "We reject China's assertion that Australia is an unsafe destination for international students." Racism toward Asians has reportedly increased during the pandemic, with the New South Wales anti-discrimination commission saying instances included people being bullied for wearing a face mask, spat at and harassed in public, and racist language written across cars and private property. Vicki Thomson, chief executive of Australia's prestigious Group of Eight universities, told AFP they would "be very concerned" if Beijing's warning deterred students from coming to Australia. "We've had no evidence provided to us that there are issues of racial discrimination occurring on our campuses, and I think it's worth noting that we don't have a lot of students on our campuses at the moment," she said. Thomson lamented that the sector had been "caught in the middle" of geopolitical tensions. Australian universities are already facing massive losses as an indefinite coronavirus border closure locks out the foreign students who pump billions of dollars a year into the sector. Beijing's travel advice was largely symbolic but could interfere with a proposal to create a "secure corridor" for overseas students to return to Australia.

Education is Australia's fourth-largest export - behind iron ore, coal



**SYDNEY:** Demonstrators attend a Black Lives Matter protest to express solidarity with US protesters in Sydney and demand an end to frequent Aboriginal deaths in custody in Australia. —AFP

and natural gas - with more than 500,000 international students enrolled last year, bringing about Aus\$37 billion into the economy. China's statement came a day after a foreign ministry spokeswoman warned of "a lot of discrimination" against Chinese people in Australia - and days after Beijing told citizens not to travel there at all. As China has pursued a more combative foreign policy and sought to assert itself on the world stage, tensions with many

democracies have risen. In response to Australia backing the call for an independent virus inquiry, China's ambassador in Canberra threatened a widespread consumer boycott of Australian products - a warning followed up by a ban on four major Australian beef exporters. That was followed in May by an 80-percent tariff on Australian barley over dumping allegations, a move grain growers say will cost at least Aus\$500 million (US\$350 million) a year. —AFP

## Freed Taliban prisoners eye return to battlefield

**KABUL:** Afghan authorities are opening prison doors for thousands of Taliban inmates in a high-risk gambit to ensure the insurgent group begin peace talks with Kabul. Security concerns are mounting as many of the newly liberated fighters say they are ready to resume their holy war. "If the Americans do not pull out, we will continue our jihad, because they have killed many Afghans in their operations," said Mohamed Daud, who was freed from Bagram jail north of Kabul last month.

"We do not want foreign forces in our country anymore," he told AFP, dressed in a traditional shalwar kameez, before taking a taxi back to his village with a cash handout from authorities worth \$65. US forces arrested Daud, 28, in the northwest province of Faryab nine years ago. Afghan authorities accelerated the planned release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners, including Daud, as a "goodwill gesture" after the insurgents called a three-day ceasefire to mark the Eid holiday. Those released include members training to be suicide bombers, suicide

vest makers, kidnappers and even foreign fighters, a security official said. The move is part of a larger prisoner swap agreed as a precursor to peace talks starting.

Before their release, inmates were required to sign a pledge that they would not pick up arms again. It is increasingly clear such commitments mean little. A Taliban commander in Pakistan told AFP there should be "no ambiguity" that the released men will eventually be deployed to Afghanistan's front lines. "It's an ongoing jihad, and will continue until and unless we reach some sort of agreement with the Kabul government," he said. Several other freed insurgents say they remain angry at US troops, but under a US-Taliban deal signed in February the insurgents committed to stop attacking American and foreign forces as they withdraw from the country by next year. The immediate enemy is instead the struggling Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), with whom no such pledge has been made.

### 'Additional leaders, fighters'

A key concession Washington extracted from the Taliban during negotiations was the requirement to begin peace talks with Kabul. In return, the Afghan government must release



**BAGRAM:** In this file photo, Taliban prisoners wait to be released from the Bagram prison, next to the US military base in Bagram. —AFP

5,000 insurgent inmates while the Taliban pledged to free 1,000 security force prisoners. Since the swap started, Afghan authorities have freed 3,000 Taliban inmates while the insurgents have released more than 750 government prisoners, officials said. It could represent a boost of up to 10 percent for the Taliban's fighting force, with estimates on the number of insurgents

ranging between 50,000 and 100,000. Afghan security officials said the US did not consult them as Washington and the Taliban finalized the prisoner swap. More than the fighters, "those that worry us are the brains", a senior security official said, adding that one of the freed Taliban inmates had already joined the insurgents' military squad while another had committed a murder. —AFP

## Pakistan battles locusts; turns them into feed

**LAHORE:** Chickens in Pakistan have been feasting on captured locusts under an initiative to combat swarms of the insects that are threatening food supplies in the impoverished country. Prime Minister Imran Khan has endorsed plans to expand a pilot project in the breadbasket province of Punjab, where villagers earned cash to gather locusts that were then dried out, shredded and added into poultry feed. Farmers are struggling as the worst locust plague in 25 years wipes out entire harvests in Pakistan's agricultural heartlands, leaving people scrambling for income.

Muhammad Khurshid from Pakistan's food ministry and biotechnologist Johar Ali set up the program, drawing on efforts in war-ravaged Yemen, where authorities have encouraged people to eat the protein-rich locusts amid famine. The pair chose Punjab's Okara district, where farmers had not used any pesticides that would make locusts unsuitable

for consumption. "We first had to learn, and then teach the locals how to catch the locusts. Nets are useless against them," Khurshid told AFP. At night the creatures cluster on trees and plants, making them easy to scoop up as they lie motionless in the cooler temperatures until the sun begins to rise.

For a reward of 20 rupees (12 cents) per kilogram of locusts, locals worked all night to collect them. One farmer who lost all her crops to the insects said she and her son earned 1,600 rupees (\$10) during a single locust-gathering outing, helping to offset the financial damage. Organizers struggled at first to convince farmers to join the hunt, but by the third night word had spread and hundreds joined in - turning up with their own bags to stuff full. With 20 tons of captured locusts, authorities ran out of money to pay the collectors and the program was paused. The ministry, which recently announced the results of February's pilot, is now preparing to expand the project to other locations.

### Multiplying in monsoon

The harvested locusts went to Hi-Tech Feeds - Pakistan's largest animal-feed producer - which substituted 10 percent of the soybean in its chicken food with the insects. "There was no



**PUNJAB:** Dead locusts are seen on the ground at a farm in Pipli Pahar in Pakistan's central Punjab province. —AFP

issue with the feed, the locusts have a good potential for use in poultry feed," general manager Muhammad Athar said, after trying the modified product on 500 broiler hens. While the project is not a solution to the devastation caused to crops, it can provide hard-hit farmers with a fresh revenue stream and relieve

pressure on authorities struggling to distribute locust-beating pesticides. Locust swarms have gnawed their way through crops across East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and parts of India this year, and experts fear their numbers will explode as monsoon rains arrive this month. —AFP



## Business

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**10** Singapore's migrant workers fear financial ruin after virus ordeal**10** Pakistan's budget to target 2.3% growth**11** Bourse Kuwait AGM approves cash dividend of over KD 5m for 2019

SHENYANG: A customer looks at a pumpkin at a market in Shenyang in China's northeastern Liaoning province yesterday. China's consumer price index (CPI) rose 2.4 percent in May, just below the 2.6 percent expected and easing from 3.3 percent a month earlier, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics yesterday.—AFP

# China factory gate deflation deepens

## COVID-19 pandemic continues to weigh on global demand

BEIJING: China's producer prices fell by the sharpest rate in more than four years, underscoring pressure on the manufacturing sector as the COVID-19 pandemic reduces trade flows and global demand.

The coronavirus crisis has disrupted trade to China's key export markets including the United States and Europe, heaping further pressure on the outlook for manufacturing investment and jobs in the world's second-largest economy.

The producer price index (PPI) in May fell 3.7 percent from a year earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said in a statement yesterday, the sharpest decline since March 2016. That compared with a 3.3 percent drop tipped by a poll of analysts and a 3.1 percent fall in April. "Negative reading for PPI is likely to be a new normal in the foreseeable future," said Tommy Xie, China economist at OCBC Bank in Singapore.

The drop in producer prices was led by a 57.6 percent slide in prices in the oil and natural gas industry and a 24.4 percent drop in the oil, coal and other fuels processing sector, the statistics bureau said.

On a monthly basis, however, producer prices showed some signs of steadying. May producer prices fell 0.4 percent from the previous month, easing from April's 1.3



**More room  
for policy  
easing seen**

percent fall, the bureau said. Exports contracted in May as global coronavirus lockdowns continued to devastate demand while a deeper fall in imports pointed to mounting pressure on the key manufacturing sector.

Official and private factory surveys also indicated deep contractions in export orders. Beijing has in recent

months rolled out fiscal and monetary stimulus to prop up the economy, which contracted for the first time on record in the January-March period.

China's decision not to set a growth target for 2020 signaled Beijing's continued wariness about overly aggressive stimulus. But weak economic readings could pressure policymakers to roll out additional support measures to meet job creation and unemployment rate targets for the year.

### More policy support needed

Analysts see easing consumer inflation giving Beijing more policy space to reduce the economic toll from the pandemic. "We believe falling CPI inflation and continued PPI deflation will provide Beijing with more space to implement policy stimulus to offset the impact of COVID-19 on the economy," Nomura analysts said in a research note.

Pan Gongsheng, vice governor of the People's Bank of China, said last week that the economic hit from the coronavirus pandemic was bigger than first expected and that

more monetary and credit policy support was needed. The consumer price index rose 2.4 percent from a year earlier - the weakest reading since March 2019 - compared with a 3.3 percent increase in April, as food prices continued to ease. Analysts had projected a 2.7 percent rise.

That was largely due to slowing food prices, which rose 10.6 percent in May from a year earlier, versus a 14.8 percent rise in April. Food price increases in May were led by an 81.7 percent rise in meat prices, compared with a 96.9 percent jump previously, the data showed.

Non-food prices in May rose 0.4 percent. Core inflation - which excludes food and energy costs - remained benign last month at 1.1 percent unchanged from April's rise.

Martin Rasmussen, China economist at Capital Economics, said an acceleration in infrastructure construction looks set to drive a rebound in producer prices. China's economy shrank 6.8 percent in the first quarter from a year earlier, the first contraction since quarterly records began. — Reuters

## Local banks may have to raise capital: CBK

KUWAIT: Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Mohamed Al-Hashel said that the results of severe stress tests conducted by banks in the recent past are reassuring, with varying degrees from one bank to another. The results also suggest that the local banks may be required to increase their capital, sources told the Al-Rai newspaper.



Dr. Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel

Al-Hashel added, during a meeting with banks' CEOs, that the Central Bank will be flexible with the shocks that each bank may encounter, and these shocks will be addressed gradually, according to the financial position and conditions of each bank.

The sources also reported that Al-Hashel highlighted the necessity for banks to take precautionary measures to face coronavirus repercussions, and not to exhaust liquidity, in order to boost their ability to face the credit risk that may arise in 2021, by not distributing cash dividends to their shareholders for 2020.

## Fed looks to long-term as focus shifts

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve completed its latest policy meeting yesterday with attention turning from its massive response to the coronavirus pandemic and toward its still-developing plans to strengthen and lengthen a nascent economic recovery.

An employment report showing 2.5 million jobs were created in May surprised economists with the speed at which firms started rehiring workers laid off en masse as virus-containment efforts forced businesses to close and consumers to stay home.

While a source for some optimism, Fed officials have been uniform in saying economic statistics for now are less important than progress in the health crisis. The economy is officially in a recession that began in February, and policymakers agree risks will remain high until it is clear a second wave of infections won't force people back indoors.

But amid the gloom of around 20 million jobs lost since February, an economy probably shrinking at a Depression-era pace, and nearly 111,000 Americans dead, stock markets are back near pre-crisis highs and bond markets stabilized by Fed actions are funding struggling firms like department store Macy's. The depth of the job losses and the historic nature of the risks still ahead are likely to keep the Fed emphasizing its promise of loose monetary policy for perhaps

years to come, and to eventually put more concrete policy commitments behind it, analysts agree.

"The economic outlook should remain cautious despite an encouraging turn in high-frequency data and initial signs of rehiring," wrote Kathy Bostjancic, chief US financial economist for Oxford Economics. The unemployment rate is expected to remain high and inflation below the Fed's 2% inflation goal through at least next year "even with a robust rebound ... and there is still the risk of a second wave."

The Fed's perceptions about the future will be provided in policymakers' economic projections updated for the first time since December, before the pandemic torpedoed a decade-long expansion.

The projections and the Fed's policy statement will be released at 2 pm (1800 GMT), followed by a press conference with Fed Chair Jerome Powell.

### Promise of support

The statement and Powell are likely to repeat a non-standard promise since the early days of the crisis to keep interest rates set near zero and provide whatever support is needed until the economy is "on track" to meet the Fed's full employment and inflation goals. That has already prompted the Fed to offer trillions of dollars in broad support to financial markets, just as it did in the 2007 to 2009 financial crisis and recession. But it has gone much further this time, collaborating with the US Treasury on programs to buy corporate and municipal bonds, and offer loans to small and medium-sized firms in the "real" economy as well.

Those programs are meant as a kind of failsafe for local governments and companies to help weather the sudden loss of tax revenue and income the pandemic

provoked. But ideally they should be short-term stop-gaps. For the longer run the Fed will face a series of choices about how to guide the economy to where it was in 2019, with record-low unemployment, rising wage gains for lower-income workers and steady growth. It could take years, and at some point the Fed is expected to make a more explicit commitment about how long rates may need to stay near zero, or the level of bondbuying it feels is appropriate to provide additional support along the way.

It is also likely to consider new sorts of promises, such as pledging to keep longer-term interest rates at a specific level, a strategy known as yield curve control. That may not happen at this meeting. But Powell will likely make clear the Fed is already looking to the long term and what will be needed for the economy to claw back to where it was.—Reuters



US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell speaks at a press briefing. — AFP

## Business

# Singapore's migrant workers fear financial ruin after virus ordeal

## Jobs main concern of migrant workers as economy reopens

**SINGAPORE:** As Sharif Uddin contemplates leaving the cramped Singapore dormitory where he has spent weeks under coronavirus quarantine, fears about his future creep in. The 42-year-old Bangladeshi construction supervisor is one of thousands of low-income migrant workers trapped in packed bunk rooms that have been ravaged by the coronavirus, accounting for more than 90% of Singapore's 38,000 infections.

As Singapore began easing its lockdown measures this month, migrants like Uddin started to think about returning to the outside world, and whether a job would be available for him to help pay off his debts as Singapore braces for its deepest ever recession.

"The fear of losing jobs is worrying everyone at the moment," said Uddin, who sends the bulk of his wages to his family in Bangladesh and is still repaying loans taken to pay off his recruitment agent, like many of the South Asian migrant workers in Singapore.

For Singapore, the system of cheap, imported labor to do jobs in the construction, shipping, manufacturing and service industries works effectively. When times are good, it means jobs that locals usually shun can be filled, but when the economy is weak, it is easy to cut back on foreign workers. That leaves migrant workers like Uddin vulnerable and at real risk of being forced to return to their home country where employment opportunities are scarce. In interviews with more than a dozen workers in Singapore, many said while they were still being paid, they feared they would lose their jobs when the quarantine is lifted.

Uddin said Singapore was his "dream city" when he first arrived in 2008, but like many migrants he found most of his toil went towards paying family expenses and creditors, meaning he

saved very little.

He has worked on building Singapore's subway, says he writes poetry and hopes to one day open a bookshop back in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka. But already on his fourth job, he is still many years away from saving the money he needs. "The dreams of migrants ... don't get fulfilled very soon. It takes really long to chase them," Uddin said.

"As years pass — one year, two years, those initial big dreams and aspirations slowly start fading away."

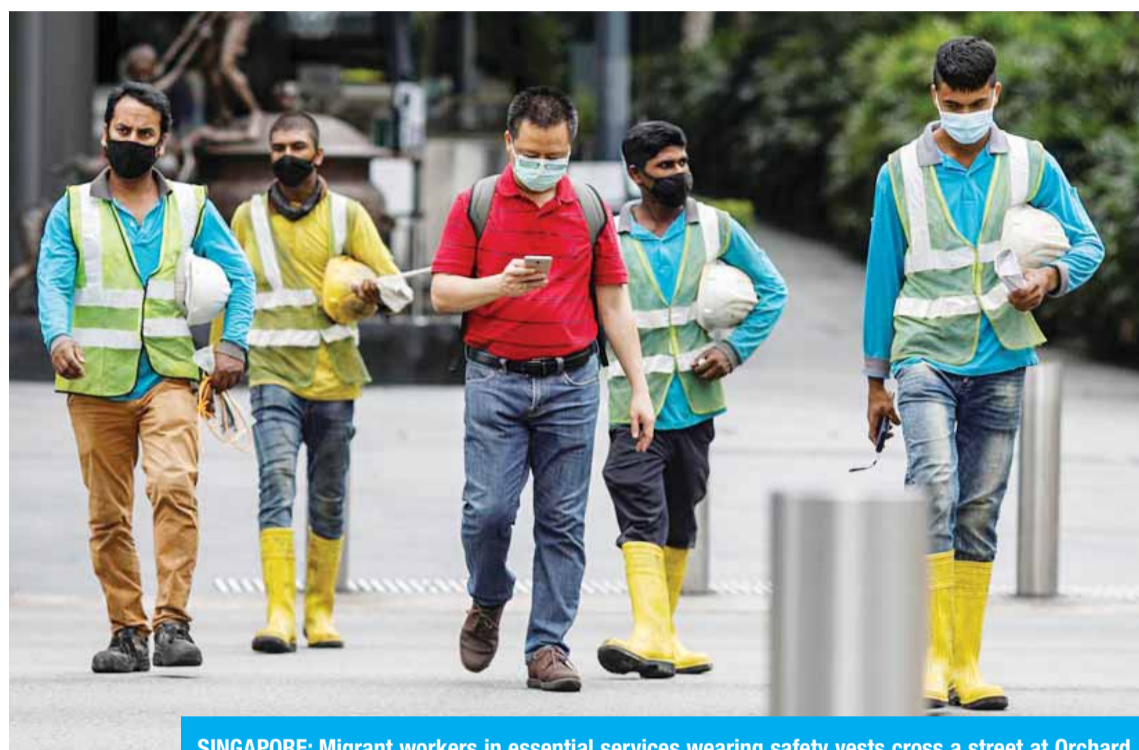
The Singapore government has waived foreign worker levies for companies to try and ensure migrants get paid while under quarantine and introduced measures to help laid off workers find new positions without having to first travel back to their home country, a core complaint of many laborers.

### Debt traps

Lawrence Wong, the co-head of Singapore's virus taskforce, told Reuters the government's waiving of levies and other steps have helped alleviate "major concerns" of workers around job security, but added that layoffs were possible given the grim economic outlook.

"The contractor may have a project today, but down the road will they still have projects? That depends on the economy. So many uncertain factors when it comes to job security," said Wong, who is also the minister for national development. He added that some workers may remain quarantined in their dormitories until August, or possibly beyond, as the government completes mass testing.

The pandemic has drawn attention to the stark inequalities in the modern city-state where more than 300,000 laborers from Bangladesh, India and China often live in rooms for 12 to 20 men, working jobs that pay as little as \$20 (\$14.30) a day.



**SINGAPORE:** Migrant workers in essential services wearing safety vests cross a street at Orchard Road in Singapore. —Reuters

That is higher than they would make at home. But the median salary for Singaporean employees in 2019 was \$4,563 per month, according to the manpower ministry. The bigger worry for many migrants like Uddin is the debts they have racked up securing jobs in Singapore.

Migrants will usually be charged \$7,000-10,000 in fees by a recruitment agent in their home country, equivalent to more than a year of their basic salary, according to rights groups. If they lose their job, this debt could haunt their families for years. "If there were no recruitment fees, that would solve almost all of these problems," said Deborah Fordyce, president of Singapore

NGO Transient Workers Count Too.

"Recruitment costs are what keep them in debt."

### Dreams sour

Wong, the minister, said the government will continue to work to improve migrants' lives in Singapore, but tackling issues like fees is difficult because many agents operate in the workers' home countries outside the city-state's jurisdiction. Singapore's government has pledged to improve living conditions for migrant workers in the short-term and build new, higher-spec dormitories over the coming years. —Reuters



### Many workers saddled with hefty debts

## Top international companies launch 'restarting together'

**MADRID:** Airbus BizLab, BASF, Boston Consulting Group, CEMEX, Citi, Endeavor, IDB Lab, IE, IESE Business School, Microsoft for Startups, South Summit and Telefonica announced the launch of Restarting Together, a global challenge that seeks to boost innovative projects after the impact of COVID-19. The initiative aims to promote projects developed by entrepreneurs and SMEs that will contribute both to speed up economic recovery after the effects of the pandemic, and create a more resilient society, with more effective and sustainable capabilities against future similar crises.

Through this joint initiative, this diverse group of industry leaders want to promote community engagement to build a better society.

The overall goal of Restarting Together is to find innovative projects that seek to expedite the return to normality after the confinement period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative also looks to identify projects to boost economic recovery in a sustainable way, aimed specially at improving employment, revitalizing the ecosystem of small businesses, and creating networks and financial aid mechanisms for crisis situations. Likewise, the challenge encourages entrants to propose solutions that bolster cities' response for any type of crisis in the future, whether it be sanitary, economic or driven by environmental or climate change issues.

Interested participants can present their proposals from June 2 through June 30, 2020 by entering

[www.restartingtogether.com](http://www.restartingtogether.com). Proposals will be evaluated based on their projects' social and economic impact, feasibility, rapid implementation time, and degree of sustainability and innovation.

The nine most promising projects would be scheduled to participate in a digital Pitchday on September 9, 2020, where they would present their solution directly to the organizing companies' representatives, who would select three winners to share their vision with global leaders from the supporting companies. The three winners would enjoy the possibility of receiving access to corporate resources from the organizing companies, including potential acceleration or investment. Additionally, all proposals should be available for development, promotion, and implementation by all, or some, of the companies organizing Restarting Together.

## Pakistan's budget to target 2.3% economic growth

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan will target growth of 2.3 percent in fiscal year 2020-21, according to government officials and documents seen by Reuters that said the economic landscape would depend mainly on the country's ability to control the

## NBK digital solutions for fast services

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait continues to provide its customers with the latest digital banking solutions to serve their needs anytime and anywhere through NBK Mobile Banking App, especially during the current circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic affecting the country and the world, while imposing strict precautionary and preventive measures.

The NBK Mobile Banking App has recently become the service of choice for customers, providing them with an easy and convenient way to make their transactions from home.

Given the precautionary measures and exceptional circumstances, NBK Mobile Banking App allows users to send and receive money and pay their bills in an easy and quick way through NBK Quick Pay and e-Payments. And due to the high demand for these two services, NBK has increased the maximum limit for transfers and bill payments through the two services to help customers conduct their banking transactions easily from the comfort of their homes.

## ECB prepares 'bad bank' plan for toxic debt

**LONDON/FRANKFURT:** European Central Bank officials are drawing up a scheme to cope with potentially hundreds of billions of euros of unpaid loans in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters. The project, which comes as Europe mobilizes trillions of euros to bolster the region's economy, is aimed at shielding commercial banks from any second fallout from the crisis, if rising unemployment chokes off the income needed to repay loans. One of the people familiar with the plan said the ECB had set up a task force to look at the idea of a "bad bank" to warehouse unpaid euro debt and that work on the scheme had accelerated in recent weeks.

The ECB declined to comment on whether it was working on a bad bank

scheme. The amount of debt in the euro zone that is considered unlikely to ever be fully repaid already stands at more than half a trillion euros, including credit cards, car loans and mortgages, according to official statistics. That is set to rise as the COVID-19 outbreak squeezes borrowers and could even double to one trillion euros, weighing on already fragile banks and hindering new lending, the people familiar with the ECB plans said.

While the idea for a euro zone bad bank was discussed and shelved over two years ago, the ECB, under its new President Christine Lagarde, has consulted banks and EU officials about a scheme in recent weeks, one of the people said. As the euro zone's most powerful institution, ECB backing for the project is critical but it would also require the blessing of Germany, the bloc's biggest economy. Berlin has long opposed schemes that accept shared responsibility for debts in other countries although it recently had an unexpected change of heart, agreeing to pool EU borrowing for a coronavirus recovery fund.

One blueprint under discussion would

Commenting on this, Hala Al-Shoabi, Head of Digital Service Quality Management, National Bank of Kuwait said: "Enabling our customers to make their money transfers and pay for their bills through digital banking solutions has become increasingly important in the exceptional circumstances we are living in today. We, therefore, have ensured to develop services that meet the needs of our customers with the NBK Quick Pay and e-Payments, both available on NBK Mobile Banking App."

Al-Shoabi noted: "To provide the best service to our customers under the current circumstances and due to the high demand for NBK Quick Pay, being a quick and easy way for sending and receiving money, NBK has increased the maximum transfer limit through NBK Quick Pay to KD 5,000 per day, with a total of 10 transactions, and KD 10,000 per month. The bank has also increased e-Payments transactions daily limit from KD 250 to KD 500 with a total of 10 transactions, and the monthly limit from KD 500 to KD 1,000."

"Through NBK Mobile Banking App, our customers can also conduct various transactions with ease and convenience, including: money transfer (locally and internationally), adding beneficiaries, increasing monthly transfer limit, viewing account statements, and paying credit card dues, as well as buying and selling currencies, where customers can control all these transactions by themselves quickly and easily," she added.

Al-Shoabi affirmed that NBK is ready to offer all types of support to customers and to provide services that enable them to make banking transactions from the comfort of their homes, thanks to NBK's leading digital banking services and the success of its digital transformation strategy.

"We aim to provide an integrated banking experience to our customers while keeping their safety in mind under the current conditions, and we promise to provide them with the most advanced and safest digital banking services solutions," she concluded. NBK Quick Pay enables customers to send a request to receive money from any bank account at NBK or any other local accounts in a fast and convenient way. Customers can now send a payment link through the payer's WhatsApp, email or mobile number (SMS), to securely receive transfers 24/7.

Besides, e-Payments available on NBK Mobile Banking App is an easy and quick way to benefit from an array of advanced services that enable customers to shop and pay online at any time, such as making payments for telecom bills, iTunes, Google Play, Amazon, Apple Music, Skype and Spotify.



Hala Al-Shoabi



**KARACHI:** A woman rides on a motor bike as she wears a protective face mask amid the rush of people outside a market as the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, in Karachi. —Reuters

involve the European Stability Mechanism, an EU institution which can provide financial assistance to euro zone countries or lenders, standing in as guarantor for the bad bank, the people said.

The bad bank would then issue bonds which commercial banks would buy in exchange for portfolios of unpaid loans, neutralizing the virus shock for Europe's lenders. —AFP

coronavirus pandemic.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's government is set to present its 2020-21 budget on Friday, in a parliamentary session that only 25 percent of lawmakers will attend due to pandemic restrictions. "The GDP growth for 2020-21 is targeted at 2.3 percent with contributions from agriculture (2.9 percent), industry (0.1 percent) and services (2.8 percent)," a planning commission working paper seen by Reuters said.

That forecast is much rosier than the 0.2 percent contraction in 2020-21 projected by the World Bank earlier in June. The multilateral lender sees growth

of -2.6 percent this fiscal year, ending June 30, while the government expects a 0.4 percent contraction. A recent surge in COVID-19 cases has made economists skeptical about a quick recovery in the South Asian nation. Khan said on Monday that the outbreak was not expected to hit its peak until July or August.

The planning commission paper projects an average inflation rate of 6.5 percent in 2020-21, a trade deficit of 7.1 percent of GDP and a current account deficit of 1.6 percent of GDP. Exports and imports are projected to grow at 1.5 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively.

Inflation hit a decade-high of 14.56 percent in January.

A budget strategy paper in March, just before the pandemic hit, had projected growth of 3 percent in 2020-21. The paper, seen by Reuters, foresaw spending of 7.6 trillion Pakistani rupees (\$46.76 billion) and a fiscal deficit of 6.9 percent of GDP—much lower than a current finance ministry projection of over 9 percent for 2019-20.

Of that, 3.235 trillion Pakistani rupees (\$19.90 billion) was earmarked for debt servicing and 1.402 trillion Pakistani rupees (\$8.63 billion) for defense—a rise of over 12 percent from last year. —Reuters

## Business

# Boursa Kuwait AGM approves cash dividend of over KD 5m for 2019

## Net profit increased by 307.58% to reach KD 9,591,752

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait Securities Company (BKSC) held its E-Annual General Assembly (AGM) meeting for the year ended 31 December 2019 on Tuesday, June 9, 2020. During the meeting, which was held virtually as part of the company's commitment to ensuring the safety of its shareholders and in line with the preventive measures introduced by the Kuwaiti government to curb the spread of COVID-19, the Board of Directors' (BoD) recommendation to distribute 25 percent of the paid-up capital, equivalent to 25 fils per share, as cash dividends was approved, with a total value of about KD 5.02 million (Five million, nineteen thousand, three hundred and ninety three Kuwaiti dinars and seven hundred and fifty fils).



### Company holds E-annual general assembly

The Board of Directors' report, the Auditor's report and the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2019 were all approved, as were the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee reports and the remunerations and benefits report for BoD members and Executive Management.

The AGM was chaired by Vice Chairman, Ahmed Hamad Al-Thunayan, who read the reports issued by the Kuwait Clearing Company's electronic system regarding the quorum of attendance, the results of participation and voting included in the agenda, as well as a report of the shareholders' notes.

#### Share sale

Shareholders agreed to grant the Board of Directors authorization to buy or sell the company's shares, provided they do not exceed 10 percent, in accordance with the provisions of Law No 7 of 2010 and its executive regulations and amendments. Shareholders also discussed and approved the Related Parties' Transaction Report for 2019 and the related parties' transactions, which are proposed to be conducted during the upcoming 2020 financial year.

Finally, the appointment of Badr Adel Salem Al-Abduljader from Ernst & Young (Al-Aiban, Al-Osaimi & Partners) as the auditor for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2020 was also approved.

Al-Thunayan said: "Boursa Kuwait recorded several achievements that contributed to its path of development and progress during 2019. Among the most prominent of these accomplishments was the completion of the stages of privatization of the company to become the first privatization project for a vital government facility, and thus becoming the first stock exchange owned by the private sector in the Middle East, with private investors owning 94 percent of the issued and paid-up capital of the company, thanks in no small part to its cooperation with the Capital Markets Authority."

Al-Thunayan also highlighted the exceptional and unprecedented performance achieved by Boursa Kuwait and hailed the commitment of the Board of Directors to support the company's strategy, given its many achievements despite the challenges facing the market last year.

Al-Thunayan added: "Boursa Kuwait's strategy aims to develop a strong financial market that enjoys high liquidity and credibility through the implementation of a host of developmental, structural and technical projects. The company has made great progress in its path to be a leading and prominent stock exchange in the Middle East, and a market ranked by the most prominent global indicators."

"Boursa Kuwait has fulfilled the promise it made to itself to continue to grow at an upward pace and to upgrade the country's financial market system. As a result, the company recorded a significant jump in operating profits, while net profit increased by more than 307 percent."

Summary of Boursa Kuwait's financial performance during the past three years: Mohamed Saud Al-Osaimi, CEO of Boursa Kuwait, provided a detailed presentation on the company's financial results and the performance of the stock exchange. He noted that operating income recorded an increase of 58.4 percent over the previous year, soaring to KD 15.1 million from KD 9.53 million. The change in the subscription fee structure from a capital-based basis to the average daily trading volume, the surge in trading volume due to the rise in foreign ownership in Kuwaiti banks, the annual review of Kuwaiti companies in the FTSE Russell



Emerging Markets Index and the inclusion of Kuwaiti companies in the S&P index DJI for emerging markets were all major factors in this jump. In addition, the increase in trading commissions from KD 4.1 billion to KD 7.9 billion as a result of improved confidence of individual and institutional traders in the market also supported the upturn in operating income. Meanwhile, the net traded value of foreign investors reached KD 565,442,571.

Al-Osaimi added, "Executive Management has taken firm initiatives to control costs, which have led to positive results. Core operating expenses decreased by 10.5 percent from KD 7.93 million in 2018 to KD 7.1 million in 2019. Staff costs accounted for 59.5 percent of expenditures, with a marginal decrease of 4.4 percent over the previous year. The remaining major expenditures included IT maintenance, building expenditures, depreciation, and amortization, in addition to general and administrative expenses.

Al-Osaimi also indicated that the operating profit increased by 399.86 percent to KD 8,000,655 and the operating profit margin increased from 16.79 percent to 52.98 percent. Net profit witnessed an increase of 307.58 percent, to rise to KD 9,591,752

and net profit margin increased from 24.69 percent to 63.52 percent.

The auditor's report on financial results indicated that Boursa Kuwait recorded a positive financial performance supported by the company's progress in implementing various initiatives within the framework of its Market Development plan and strict cost controls. Basic earnings per share reached 48.5 fils from the 2018 value of 14.5 fils, while the book value per share went up to 162 fils from 139 fils in 2018.

Mohamed Saud Al-Osaimi, Boursa Kuwait CEO, thanked the Board of Directors for their continuous support of the company's strategy and operations, as well as to the members of the executive team and all the employees of Boursa Kuwait for their great efforts. He also thanked the Capital Markets Authority and the Kuwait Clearing Company for their support and continuous cooperation in developing the market.

He also reiterated the company's commitment towards growth and progress and the development of its infrastructure and work environment to international, best-in-class standards, and its effort to gain the confidence of investors, both locally and abroad by providing attractive investment opportunities.

## Veritas: 40% of consumers hold CEO responsible for ransomware

DUBAI: Two-fifths (40 percent) of consumers hold business leaders personally responsible for ransomware attacks the business suffers, according to global research from Veritas Technologies, a global leader in data protection and availability. Furthermore, the research shows that the public often wants restitution from businesses that fall foul of ransomware, with 65 percent of respondents wanting compensation and 9 percent even wanting to send the CEO to prison.

Simon Jelley, VP product management at Veritas Technologies, said: "As consumers, we are increasingly well-educated about ransomware, so we're unforgiving of businesses that don't take it as seriously as we do ourselves. The two most essential things that businesses should have in place, according to their customers, are protection software (79 percent) and backup copies of their data (62 percent). Now, it seems, if businesses don't get these basics right, consumers are ready to punish their leadership."

The research, covering six countries and 12,000 consumers, also appears to show a paradox when it comes to paying ransoms. The clear majority of people (71 percent) want companies to stand up to cyber-



Simon Jelley

bullies and refuse to pay ransoms in order to get their data back. However, when the issue becomes more personal, with a direct threat to their own data, many people change their minds and want the businesses they buy from to negotiate. When it comes to their financial data, 55 percent of respondents want suppliers to pay the ransom to facilitate the return of

their records.

Jelley said: "It may seem that businesses are in an impossible situation with consumers telling them both to pay – and not to pay – ransoms. However, what we, as customers, are really saying is that we want businesses to escape the dilemma by avoiding the situation in the first place. Consumers expect businesses to have the technology in place to restore their data without negotiating. That's the win-win solution and, considering the likely brand damage and loss of customers that come with failing to put this into practice, the risk is simply too big for companies not to have this aspect of their systems in place." In fact, the study shows how some consumers quickly lose patience with companies that risk their data through ransomware attacks. Almost half of respondents (44 percent) would stop buying from a company that had been the victim of such a crime.

The research, covering consumers in China, France, Germany, Japan, the UK and the USA, uncovered some

interesting patterns that emerge from country to country:

- In China, people have the highest tendency to change their minds on negotiating with cybercriminals, when it's their own critical information. While 80 percent of respondents believe that businesses shouldn't negotiate in general, when it becomes a personal issue of recovering their own data, that number drops sharply to just 16 percent.
- Brits have the strongest feelings about standing up to cyber-bullying demands, with 81 percent believing that businesses should not negotiate with the criminals.
- The French seem to be the most forgiving respondents from our surveyed countries, with less than a quarter (24 percent) wanting to blame company heads, just over half (55 percent) believing that no one other than criminals can be blamed for ransomware attacks, and only a third (36 percent) considering dropping a company's services after an attack.
- Inversely, the Japanese and Chinese are the least forgiving, with 49 percent and 51 percent dropping company services after an attack, and China in particular looking to blame business heads directly (66 percent).
- Germans are most vociferous about harsh punishment for leaders following an attack, with 29 percent of those who blame the leaders also looking for a prison sentence.
- In contrast, in the USA the most common attitude for those blaming leaders is to look for fines as punishment (41 percent).



Faisal M Sarkhou

## CI reaffirms corporate rating for Kamco Invest

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced yesterday that Capital Intelligence Ratings has reaffirmed the Long- and Short-Term Corporate Ratings of Kamco Invest at 'BBB' and 'A3', respectively. Despite the impacts on the Kuwait economy from the sharp drop in oil prices and Covid-19, the Outlook on the ratings remains Stable.

In its rating report, Capital Intelligence considered Covid-19 to represent a temporary but severe shock to most economies and expected that the pandemic to peak during Q2 2020 with restrictions on movement and air travel to be gradually unwound beginning in early Q3 2020. This in turn should allow economic activity and financial conditions to begin to return to normal by Q4 2020. The short- and longer-term impacts on individual economies and on individual companies within these economies will vary considerably. In general terms however wealthier countries will have greater resilience in terms of the ability to provide financial support to both companies and citizens. They consider Kuwait strongly placed in this regard and the supportive measures taken to date to be comprehensive.

The main credit strength for Kamco Invest's rating is its business model with substantial assets under management (AUM) giving a large and stable revenue stream, and the growing investment banking business. Further important credit strengths include strong management team and being a part of the KIPCO Group which provides access to liquidity, new businesses and widening the distribution channels.

Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, Chief Executive Officer, commented, "We are pleased with the rating and the stable outlook which reflect the strength of the company's financial position, business model and management capabilities. Despite the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) and its unprecedented impact, the company's credit rating remained intact."

It is worth noting that the Company enjoys a strong financial position and a healthy capital structure with KD 56.4 million in shareholders' equity and debt to equity ratio of 0.85x as of 31 December 2019. The company's annual general assembly held on 3 June 2020 approved 5 percent cash dividends for the year 2019 (5 fils per share) for a total amount of KD 1.7 million.

Sarkhou concluded, "We reaffirm our commitment towards our stakeholders and are wasting no efforts to overcome this crisis and its unprecedented effect with minimal damages. Our insistence to move forward with the cash dividends without modification despite the unprecedented conditions the world is going through as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic is a testimony of our commitment to our shareholders and the strength of the financial position and the high liquidity the company enjoys

## France pledges \$16.9bn for aviation firms

PARIS: The French government on Tuesday pledged 15 billion euros (\$16.9 billion) for the country's aviation industry, where thousands of jobs are on the line as the coronavirus crisis hammers the travel industry. "We are declaring a state of emergency to save our aeronautics industry so that it can be more competitive," Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told a press conference in Paris.

"If we hadn't intervened right away, a third of the jobs in the sector would have disappeared... that's around 100,000 of the 300,000 direct and indirect jobs," he added. The southwestern French city of Toulouse hosts the headquarters of pan-European aircraft maker Airbus, which for decades has supported hundreds of suppliers and service providers in the region.

But orders are being cancelled or put on hold indefinitely as airlines worldwide ground planes amid the travel restrictions, with many fearing it could take years to recover in case of strict new hygiene rules—such as requiring middle seats to remain empty. Airlines have parked up to 90 percent of their aircraft, some 4.5 million flights have been cancelled so far, and an estimated \$314 billion in revenues will be lost this year, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

International airlines are in line to make a combined net loss of more than \$84 billion this year, it added Tuesday. The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN specialized agency, estimates the pandemic will reduce the number of airline passengers by 1.5 billion by the end of the year. The French government has already announced that Air France-KLM, which posted a 1.8-billion-euro loss in the first quarter, will get seven billion euros in loans either directly from the state, or backed by it.



In this file photo, an employee walks past aircraft engines displayed in the section dedicated to the Airbus A320 NEO at the industrial and technological engine manufacturer French Safran plant, in Colomiers, southwestern France. — AFP

That money will allow it to go through with a purchase of 60 Airbus A220 airliners and 38 long-haul A350 jets. Both planes offer fuel efficiencies and fewer carbon emissions, a growing concern among environmentally-conscious flyers. But Greenpeace France reacted coolly, saying the government will still be turning a blind eye to the priority of reducing air traffic to bring down carbon emissions. "The aircraft that pollutes the least is the one that does not fly," said Sarah Fayolle of Greenpeace France.

#### 'Not the village idiots'

The French state and Airbus, as well as Dassault Aviation, Thales and Safran, will contribute 200 million euros each to a fund for small and midsize firms, in particular to help them invest in carbon-reduction technologies.

The plan also includes 1.5 billion euros to spur research on a future "carbon neutral plane" over the next three years, with a goal of having the plane in operation by 2035. Le Maire said. Defense Minister Florence Parly said 600 million euros of planned military orders would be accelerated, including the purchase of three Airbus A330s that will be converted to refuelling planes, and eight Caracal troop transport helicopters.

Le Maire brushed off concerns that the United States or other countries would protest the state aid as unfair help, amid a long-running feud at the World Trade Organization over subsidies to Airbus and its American rival Boeing.

"We're not going to be the village idiots who let hundreds of thousands of jobs be destroyed, and the skills they represent... by saying 'sorry, those are the rules, we have no choice'," he said.—AFP

# Climate change brings fires, floods and moths to Siberia

**MOSCOW:** Best known as a vast, cold tundra, Russia's sprawling Siberia region is being transformed by climate change that has brought with it warmer temperatures, forest fires and growing swarms of hungry moth larvae.

Spanning millions of square kilometers east of the Urals to the Pacific Ocean, the area has been particularly hard hit this year by extreme weather, which scientists say is the result of global warming. Photographs of wild flower fields in local media last month were a rare site so early in the year in the normally chilly region—and ice cream sales were up 30 percent.

"This winter was the hottest in Siberia since records began 130 years ago," said Marina Makarova, the chief meteorologist at Russia's Rosgidromet weather service. "Average temperatures were up to six degrees centigrade higher than the seasonal norms."

Then spring came, and with it much warmer temperatures. Makarova says April saw some days reach 30 C or higher. The warmer temperatures didn't just bring wild flowers and boosted ice cream sales.

Rainfall was up by a third in eastern Siberia, sparking devastating floods that forced thousands to be evacuated, particularly in the town of Tulun and the surrounding area.

Swarms of the Siberian silk moth, whose larvae eat away at conifer trees in the region's forests, have grown rapidly amid the rising temperatures. The moths are usually inactive during winter and eat in spring, summer and autumn periods which are now lengthening.

"In all my long career as a specialist, I've never seen moths so huge and growing so quickly," said Vladimir Soldatov, a moth expert, who warns of "tragic consequences" for forests. The larvae, which are taking over larger areas of forest, strip trees of



**MOSCOW:** Russia's sprawling Siberia region is being transformed by climate change that has brought with it warmer temperatures, forest fires and growing swarms of hungry moth larvae.

their needles and make them more susceptible to forest fires. The moth "has moved 150 kilometers north compared to its usual territory and that's because of global warming," Soldatov said.

In the Krasnoyarsk region of eastern Siberia, more than 120,000 trees have had to be treated to kill the larvae, according to the regional forest protection center. Another insect pest, the bark beetle that bores into tree trunks, has also recently colonized the region. It has flourished since 2003 as the climate became milder.

With snow melting earlier in the year in northern Siberia, exposed dry vegetation and soil means fires can spread easily, said Alexei Yaroshenko, who heads the forest section at Greenpeace Russia.

From January to mid-May, fires devastated 4.8 million hectares in Siberia, among them 1.1 million hectares of high-latitude boreal forest, according to a Greenpeace report published Tuesday. This year's fires follow on from exceptionally severe blazes last summer.

Climate change has led the number of forest fires to "double in 10 years," said Vyacheslav Kharuk, the head of the forest monitoring laboratory at the Forest Institute in the city of Krasnoyarsk. The fires risk cutting the capacity of far-northern boreal forests to retain carbon dioxide and methane, which will lead to higher emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. According to research by Kharuk's laboratory, between 2000 and

2009, around three million hectares of forest caught fire every year. Between 2010 and 2019, the average was six million hectares. In years to come "the area of the fires will increase to double or four times the size," he predicted.

The news is not all bad: the changing nature of Siberia's landscape will attract new species of birds and animals, Kharuk added. "Our steppes are getting greener. Our lakes are warming up. Siberia is becoming a more appealing region for animals and for us, too."

But, he says, the number of extreme weather events means he is already starting to "miss our winters with temperatures of minus 40 degrees centigrade". — AFP

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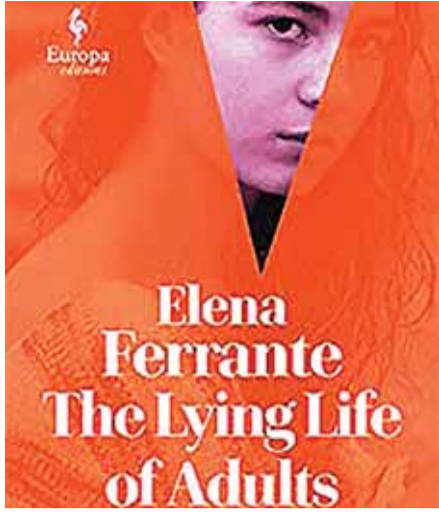
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## Lifestyle | Features



The cover book of "The Lying Life of Adults".

New **Elena Ferrante** book sparks fan fever in France

Queues formed outside French bookshops Tuesday as legions of Elena Ferrante fans rushed to get a copy of her acclaimed new book, "The Lying Life of Adults". English language readers will have to wait till September to dive into her first novel since her massively successful quartet of "Neapolitan Novels" ended with "The Story of the Lost Child" in 2014. Her new saga is also set in the southern Italian city. But this time the heroine Giovanna hails from the upper echelons of Naples' society rather than from its working-class fringes, with the novel opening in the wealthy hilltop district of Vomero in the early 1990s.

Both her parents are seemingly enlightened intellectuals, and she is brought up to feel "proud to have been born female". But that does not mean Giovanna is not put

through the wringer, with the opening paragraph teased by Ferrante's publishers revealing how marked she was by overhearing her father tell her mother that she was very ugly. While some Italian critics look down their nose at Ferrante-mania, it has been generally warmly received. Italian fans queued up at midnight in November to buy the first copies of the book and then read it together in all-night vigils.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic—which also delayed the book's publication in English from June to September—it has become a runaway bestseller. French critics were also generally wowed by the emotional roller-coaster of its teenage rebellion and the treasonous twists and turns of the plot. Olivia de Lamberterie told French radio that "Ferrante does not set out to seduce the reader.

She has a way of laying out her characters in all their complexity... Friendships are often awful and treasonous."

The ending has also left many asking if this could be the beginning of a new Ferrante series, but her Italian publisher claims that even they do not know. Netflix announced last month that they will also bring "The Lying Life of Adults" to the screen. Ferrante became a household name with the first of her Naples books, "My Brilliant Friend". That is also the title of a hit HBO television series drawn from the books. The quartet of novels, which follows the enduring friendship of two sensitive young girls, has sold more than 10 million copies worldwide.—AFP

## Salzburg Festival saves 100th edition with slimmed down event

The Salzburg Festival of music and drama will go ahead in August, organisers said Tuesday—but with special measures in place to meet the threat of the coronavirus. And while the event has escaped the global wave of cancellations caused by the pandemic, the 100th edition has been radically stripped down. All 80,000 tickets on sale—down from the usual 230,000—will be personalised to enable contact tracing in case of an infection. Organisers will also operate a system for seating the audience similar to that used for boarding planes, with one group after another called to embark rather than all at once. Spectators will have to wear masks until they are seated and there will be no intermissions or catering. "We know we are walking on thin ice... But the longing for performances is just so big," said artistic director Markus Hinterhauser, explaining the safety precautions taken by the festival.

The programme has been slashed by almost half from the 200 performances originally planned to 110 performances. And measures are also in place to protect the remaining performers who did make it. Artists unable to keep a distance of at least one metre (three feet) from their colleagues, such as those in an orchestra, will have to undergo weekly coronavirus test and keep a diary monitoring their health. The festival, which will run throughout August, will include two operas and a play based on the writing of Nobel Prize winner Peter Handke, which is being staged for the first time.

The festival's two operas are "Elektra" by Richard Strauss, staged by Poland's Krzysztof Warlikowski; and a production of Mozart's "Così fan tutte" by German director Christof Loy. Austria, an Alpine nation of nearly nine million people, has so far escaped the brunt of the pandemic, recording some 16,900 new coronavirus cases and fewer than 700 deaths.—AFP



An usher waits for guests prior to a concert at Vienna's State Opera in Vienna, Austria on June 8, 2020. —AFP photos



Vienna's State Opera director Dominique Meyer poses for a picture prior to a concert at a stairway of the State Opera in Vienna, Austria.

## Mask-clad music lovers trickle in as Vienna concert houses reopen

After months of lying silent because of the coronavirus pandemic, Vienna's illustrious classical music venues are throwing open their doors—but their vast halls can now play host to only 100 audience members at a time. Those eager concert-goers have snapped up the few available tickets for the first shows to be put on since Austria's concert houses shut their doors in March under a strict lockdown to stem the spread of the new coronavirus. As the increase in infections has abated and the country eases its restrictions, venues such as Vienna's State Opera are now allowed to reopen after hundreds of shows were cancelled.

"I watched live streams, from Paris, New York, Vienna, but it's something else when you sit in the concert hall and so I'm so happy that it's starting again now," said Evelynne Strobel. The 64-year-old teacher was among the lucky ones who trickled into the imposing foyer of the 1,709-seat State Opera on Monday, wearing a mask matching her pastel-coloured outfit, to watch its first post-shutdown show. Another audience member, 57-year-old Ulrike Grunenwald, drove 16 hours from France's northeastern Alsace region to Vienna to attend the recital by Austrian operatic bass Guenther Groissboeck with her daughter.

She said she was armed with a negative coronavirus test in case of any border controls. State Opera Director Dominique



Guests leave after a concert at the 'Wiener Konzerthaus' in Vienna, Austria.

Meyer told AFP that while it was "frustrating" to have to cap audience numbers—and of course not economically viable in the long term—the resumption of concerts was a "symbol". "It's important for the soul, for people's mental health and the well-being of society," he said, adding that tickets priced at 100 euros (\$110) or less for the opera's 14 shows in June were all snapped up within half an hour when they went on sale last week.

### 'Important moment'

Meyer said he "could not hold back a little tear" when attending one of the very first classical concerts since the shutdown on Friday, a performance of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the world-famous Daniel Barenboim at the

city's Musikverein. "It was extremely beautiful... and Daniel Barenboim, who conducted and played Mozart's 27th concerto, told me that he had played this concerto a hundred times but had never heard it played so well, and I never heard a sound so beautiful," he said. Barenboim told reporters last week ahead of his performances that it was "a very important moment when the music starts again". "For us it's just important that we can play," said an emotional Daniel Froschauer, first violinist and section leader of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

All orchestra members tested negative for the new coronavirus last week and so played without masks. Spectators too are allowed to take off their masks once they reach their seats in the new chequerboard-like layout devised to observe social dis-

tancing rules. But the smaller audiences affect the sound, commentators noted. "There is a difference because each body absorbs sound, so when the room is empty, there is less absorption and therefore a little more echo," Meyer said.

### 'Very unusual'

Gerlinde Kraft, who attended a concert at the Austrian capital's famous Konzerthaus on Saturday, told AFP that being among so few spectators "doesn't bother me but it is very unusual". Nonetheless, concert houses are looking to the future with trepidation, especially the prospect of a new wave of coronavirus infections. "For us it's pure joy to hear the music again in the places where it belongs," Konzerthaus director Matthias Nasse told AFP.

He added, however, that audience limitations were "absurd" from an economic point of view. From July 1, up to 250 spectators are to be allowed, and the limit will be raised again in August. A return to full concert halls—and larger-scale productions—is expected from September. The opera and other concert venues have asked the government for special support for musicians—many of whom lost their income entirely when concert halls shut down.—AFP



A camel waits at an overlook by the (left to right) Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops), Pyramid of Khafre (Chephren), and Pyramid of Menkaure (Menkheres) at the Giza pyramids necropolis on the southwestern outskirts of the Egyptian capital.—AFP



In this file photo taken on March 25, 2020 Egyptian municipality workers disinfect the Giza pyramids necropolis on the southwestern outskirts of the Egyptian capital Cairo, as protective a measure against the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. —AFP photos



The Giza pyramids necropolis on the southwestern outskirts of the Egyptian capital Cairo is pictured empty after the site closed to the general public as a protective a measure against the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19.

Hotels have ramped up hygiene, archaeological sites have been sanitised and beaches cleaned up—Egypt is gearing up to welcome back tourists kept away by the coronavirus pandemic. "We are laying the groundwork for tourists from around the world to find this destination ... in exemplary sanitary conditions," Egypt's antiquities and tourism minister, Khaled al-Anani, told AFP. Egypt has since March halted air traffic and shuttered archaeological sites, museums and hotels to stem the spread of COVID-19.

The North African country, like elsewhere, has in recent weeks started loosening confinement measures as it looks to slowly open up to tourists in the summer season. "We are waiting for our curve (of contaminations) to stabilise," the minister said. Conditions for international tourism will be announced in the "coming days", he said, adding that the government was

"not rushing" it. "All we want is to make sure that tourists face no problems when we open up." Egypt's health ministry has so far registered around 35,000 COVID-19 cases, including more than 1,200 fatalities.

The minister said Red Sea resorts including in South Sinai will be the first to open along with Mediterranean beaches west of the coastal city of Alexandria. Top tourist attractions such as the Giza pyramids and Aswan's Karnak temple will also reopen to tourists but with controls. Luxor's star attraction, the tomb of Tutankhamun, for example, will grant entry to a maximum of 10 people at a time, Anani said. Other tourist magnets in the densely populated capital, Cairo, will open at a later stage, he said. Egypt had high hopes for tourism in 2020 before the health crisis hit. The government expected 15 million tourists to visit this year, up from 13 million in 2019. The tourism industry, a key pillar of Egypt's economy, had started to show signs of recov-

ery after years of political turmoil since the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak.

### Financial aid

All plans came to a halt with the suspension of international flights and closure of tourist destinations. Now, hotels are to be allowed to operate with up to 50 percent capacity, according to the minister. The facilities are required to provide masks and sanitisers to all guests, while common areas must be regularly disinfected and the use of elevators limited to 50 percent capacity, he added. Anani said the ministry has green-lighted only 73 out of 178 hotels that requested to reopen, adding that he "could not take the risk" of opening any deemed unfit. "I'd much rather support these hotels than open them."

Official figures showed that the tourism sector generated \$13 billion in revenues last year. There have been

no official figures on tourism losses this year, but Planning Minister Hala al-Saeed said in April that they could amount to \$5 billion. The central bank has earmarked up to 50 billion Egyptian pounds (\$3 billion) in loans to support the sector at reduced interest rates of five percent, said Anani.

The funds were allocated to paying salaries and revamping hotels, buses, cruise ships and travel agencies, according to the minister. Egypt has secured an urgent aid package of \$2.8 billion from the International Monetary Fund to offset the economic downturn. It also agreed with the IMF on another \$5.2 billion stand-by arrangement "to maintain macroeconomic stability amid the COVID-19 shock". In 2021, authorities are counting on the inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum at the Giza plateau to spur tourism.—AFP



A man walks as pigeons are seen in the courtyard of Hazrat-e-Ali shrine or Blue Mosque, in Mazar-i-Sharif on June 9, 2020. — AFP photos



A man feeds pigeons in the courtyard of Hazrat-e-Ali shrine or Blue Mosque, in Mazar-i-Sharif.



Pigeons are seen in the courtyard of Hazrat-e-Ali shrine or Blue Mosque, in Mazar-i-Sharif.

## Doves starve at famed Afghan mosque shuttered due to virus

More than 1,000 doves have died of starvation at Afghanistan's famed blue-tiled mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif after it closed to curb the spread of the coronavirus, caretakers said Tuesday. Before the mosque complex shut amid a nationwide lockdown, flocks of the snow-white birds would gather at the popular tourist attraction, where visitors would feed them. But without any visitors to the 12th century wonder in Balkh province in northern Afghanistan,

the doves have had little to eat, caretakers said. "Every day, about 30 doves die. We bury them outside the shrine," said Qayum Ansari, head of cultural affairs at the mosque, adding that more than 1,000 birds have starved to death in recent weeks.

The doves have been a fixture for decades, with some visitors even considering them sacred. "The birds were fed by visitors but since the lockdown, nobody has come," said Ahmed Naweed, a caretaker at the mosque.

Local officials said authorities were ready to feed the birds if mosque managers allow it. "We will buy them bird food," said Munir Farhad, spokesman to the governor of Balkh province. The mosque, which is adorned with intricate hand-painted tiles, was destroyed by Genghis Khan and his army in the 13th century, but was rebuilt and has emerged as a major pilgrimage centre for Muslims.

Afghanistan's coronavirus crisis is worsening by the

day, with authorities reporting 21,459 confirmed cases so far, though the real number is thought to be much higher. Experts say the country has one of the highest rates of tests coming back positive—about 40 percent, indicating high levels of undetected infections. Officials have warned the country faces a "disaster," with hospitals running short of beds as suspected cases surge.—AFP



In this file photo taken on November 15, 2019 pastry chef of the Ritz Paris hotel, Francois Perret, poses during a photo session at the Ritz hotel in Paris.—AFP

## Gimme s'more: How a French chef cracked America's sweet tooth

It sounds like a kind of cruel joke. Taking the world's best pastry chef, who usually cooks for the creme de la creme at the Ritz in Paris, and seeing if could satisfy the sweet tooth of hardscrabble Americans who eat from fast food trucks. But despite his almost non-existent English, and his equally rudimentary understanding of the down home American palate, Francois Perret was game for the experiment, which was shot for the new Netflix series, "Chef in a Truck". So much so, that the man who was pronounced the best restaurant pastry chef on the planet last year by the august World's Great Tables even created two US-inspired desserts for the Ritz.

For two weeks, Perret travelled around California trying out local treats and traybakes and then tried to come up with ways to refine them and still please the average American. The 39-year-old Frenchman told AFP that he loves watching people eat his creations because their expressions "do not lie"—a chance he rarely gets at the Ritz. "It was great to take part in an adventure like this, to be in direct contact with the people who are eating your food," he said.

### Culture shock

Even so, the culture shock between the sophisticated palates of the jetset, the pressed linen tableclothes and scurrying waiters of the Ritz and the lunchtime truck stops of workaday Los Angeles could not be more stark. Technically too it was also a challenge for a chef used to the best equipped kitchens in the world, with his brigade of 30 highly-trained cooks, to be reduced to cooking in a truck with only two helpers. But the pay-off for being forced out of his "comfort zone" was worth it for Perret, whose new creations normally have to be tasted and signed off by the Ritz's strict kitchen hierarchy. "There was no service, you had to do everything yourself," he said. "You are there in front of your customers and you see their reactions. When someone eats (in front of you), they cannot lie. You see straight away from their face whether it works and they like it or not," he said.

While Perret occasionally goes out into the dining room to present his desserts at the Ritz, usually he has to peep out through the kitchen door or ask waiters for feedback. However, his big challenge in the land of sugar and syrup-drenched cookies and cakes was to make goodies that were nowhere near as sweet but just as morish. To do that, Perret latched onto the American habit of eating savoury dishes with sweet ketchups and sauces, coming up with pear and honey tacos.

Perret also took that American picnic and camping institution, the s'more—fire-roasted marshmallows sandwiched between biscuits with chocolate—and gave them a haute cuisine twist. "The base of my s'mores is puff pastry, and there is nothing more French than that. Stuffed with chocolate ice cream, we then dipped them in molten marshmallow. It is a pastry which looks very American but the conception is very French," he added. Perret scorched every one with a blowtorch as a little nod to the camp fire and the treat's scouting heritage.—AFP

## Street art star unveils Paris mural to George Floyd, Adama Traore

A huge mural by French street art star JR was unveiled in Paris on Tuesday paying tribute to George Floyd and Adama Traore, a young black man who died in police custody in France. Traore's death four years ago has become the focus of renewed protests across France over claims of police racism and brutality following the anger unleashed in the US after Floyd was killed in similar circumstances in Minneapolis last month. Some 20,000 people rallied in front of a courthouse in Paris last Tuesday to demand justice for Traore and Floyd, defying a coronavirus ban on public gatherings.

And a further 23,000 attended demonstrations across the country on Saturday calling for an end to police violence. More French protests were called Tuesday as Floyd was laid to rest in Houston, Texas. Oscar-nominated black French film director Ladj Ly—whose movie "Les Misérables" also tackles the fraught relations between ethnic minorities and the French police—told reporters that "the mural is there to pay homage both to Adama and George Floyd." Students at Ly's Kourtrajme film school in a deprived

Paris suburb worked with JR—Oscar-nominated himself along with Agnes Varda for the 2017 documentary "Faces Places"—on the huge photo montage in central Paris.

Faced with rising anger over the behaviour of French police, Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said Monday that a controversial choke hold used to subdue suspects was being banned. Racist insults and comments made by officers on private police Facebook pages have added to public unease. Traore, 24, died in 2016 after he was pinned to the ground after a routine identity check with the combined body weight of three arresting officers, according to the testimony of one of them.—AFP



A man walks by a giant mural by French street artist JR paying tribute to Adama Traore, a black man who died in police custody in 2016, on June 9, 2020 in Paris.—AFP



This file photo taken on March 28, 2020 shows the Eiffel Tower and the deserted Esplanade du Trocadero in Paris, on the twelfth day of a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) in France.—AFP

## Eiffel Tower to reopen to public on June 25

The Eiffel Tower, one of the most visited sites in Paris, will reopen to the public on June 25 more than three months after shuttering in France's coronavirus lockdown, its operators said Tuesday. The 10-tonne metal landmark will emerge from its longest closure since World War II with limited visitor numbers at first, and face masks mandatory for all over the age of 11, said the Eiffel Tower website. "At first, only visits by the stairs will be available," and not by elevator, it said, as a means of ensuring a safe distance between people to limit infection risk. "To ensure that ascending and descending visitors do not meet in the stairs, ascent will take place from the East pillar and descent by the West pillar," added the website, with a limited number of visitors per floor at a time.

The top level will remain closed for now, "since the lifts taking visitors from second to top floor are small. It might re-open during the summer." The statement said ground markings will be put in

place to ensure people keep their distance from one another, with "daily cleaning and disinfection of public spaces at the tower." The monument, completed in 1889, receives about seven million visitors every year, about three-quarters of them from abroad, according to the tower website. The tourism industry of France, one of the world's most visited countries, has taken a hard hit under a lockdown to halt the COVID-19 pandemic, with hotels, restaurants, museums, and theatres closed.

These included some of the French capital's most famous landmarks such as the Louvre museum, due to reopen on July 6, and the Palace of Versailles which opened Saturday. "The re-opening date of our online ticket office will be soon communicated," said the Eiffel website. "We strongly encourage our visitors to opt for online ticket purchase, in order to avoid the wait at the Tower's ticket offices."—AFP

## 'Harry Potter' star says sorry to fans offended by author's post

The star of the "Harry Potter" movies Daniel Radcliffe has apologised to fans of the book franchise offended by comments from author JK Rowling which have been criticised as insensitive to the transgender community. The British writer sparked controversy and accusations of transphobia last weekend in a Twitter post about an article on menstrual health during the coronavirus pandemic.

Quoting a reference in the article to "people who menstruate", she wrote: "I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" Following criticism, Radcliffe on Monday wrote a post on the website of The Trevor Project, a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) suicide prevention organisation. "Transgender women are women," Radcliffe wrote. "Any statement to the contrary erases the identity and dignity of transgender people and goes against all advice given by professional health care associations who have far more expertise on this subject matter than either Jo or I," he added, referring to Rowling's first name Joanne.

The 30-year-old actor then went on to apologise to any Harry Potter fans

offended by Rowling's comments. "To all the people who now feel that their experience of the books has been tarnished or diminished, I am deeply sorry for the pain these comments have caused you." He stressed his intervention was not about "in-fighting between JK Rowling and myself", noting the writer was "unquestionably responsible for the course my life has taken". But Radcliffe added that "as someone who has been honored to work with and continues to contribute to The Trevor Project for the last decade, and just as a human being, I feel compelled to say something at this moment".

Rowling has vigorously defended herself amid the furore over her post. "I respect every trans person's right to live any way that feels authentic and comfortable to them," she stated on Twitter. "I'd march with you if you were discriminated against on the basis of being trans. At the same time, my life has been shaped by being female. I do not believe it's hateful to say so." Rowling also faced accusations of being transphobic in December when she voiced support for a researcher who was sacked after tweeting that transgender people cannot change their biological sex.—AFP



Daniel Radcliffe and Jk Rowling

# Mind the gap: Affordable Net vital for coronavirus recovery

**KUALA LUMPUR:** From online schooling to working from home or video calls with family, the Internet has helped billions of people adapt and survive during the coronavirus pandemic. But as lockdowns ease and social-distancing rules remain, human rights experts say countries must now ensure all citizens – especially women, the elderly and rural communities – get access to affordable internet to avoid being left behind.

"This virus is going to be around for a while," said Kanni Wignaraja, head of the UN Development Program for Asia-Pacific. "One of the biggest drivers of inequality today comes with who has access to technology and particularly to internet services," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "That is widening the gap and COVID has just put that right at the center."

More than 7 million people have been reported infected with the coronavirus globally, according to a Reuters tally. As authorities sought to contain infection rates during the health crisis, lockdowns and strict restrictions on movement were introduced that led to more businesses, government agencies and other support groups going digital, said Wignaraja.

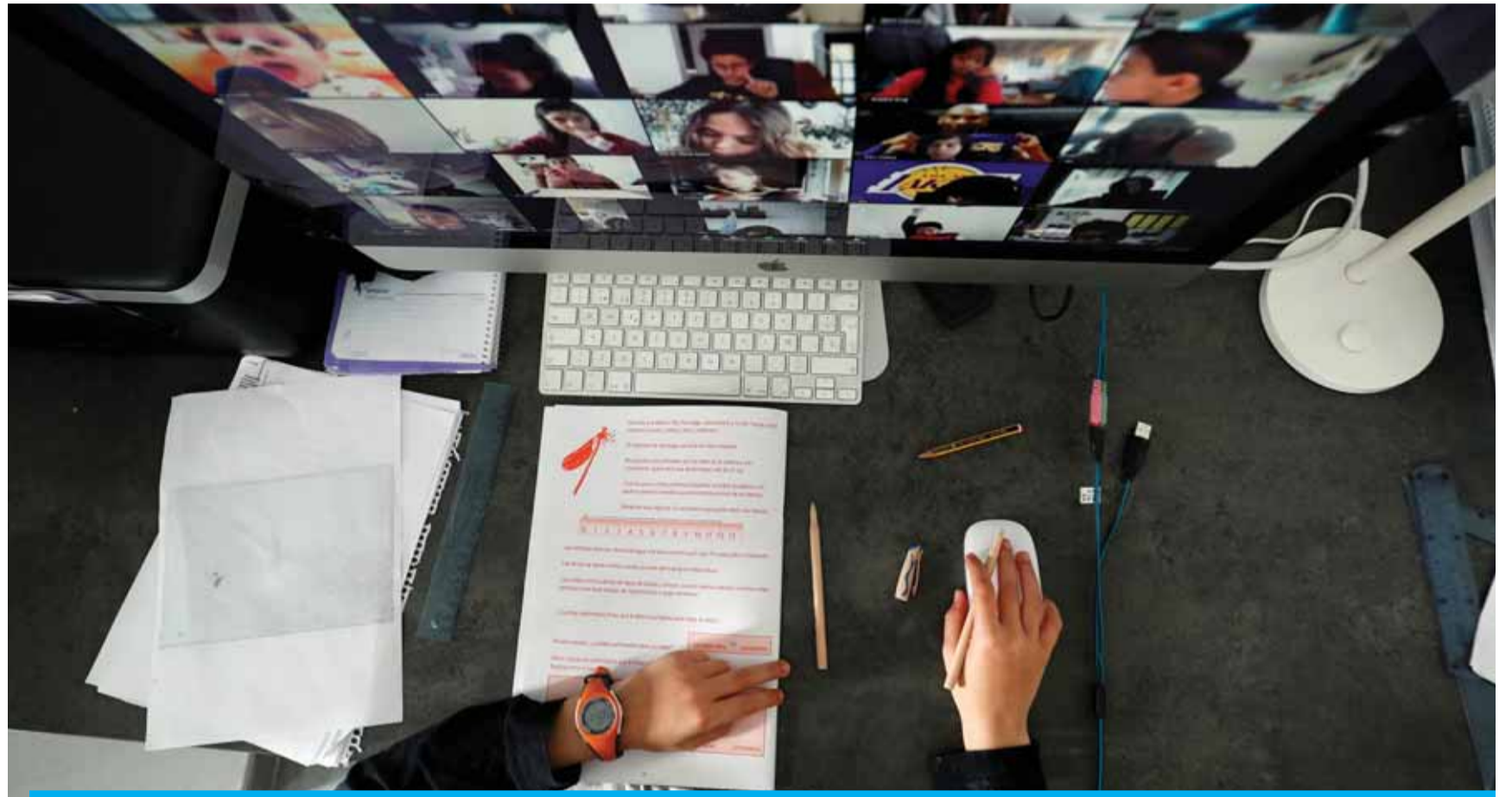
Queuing for hours to obtain a death certificate or social benefits could become a thing of the past, human rights and digital experts say, while shopping, education and even cultural events have gone digital amid coronavirus lockdowns. That makes it vital for countries to look at how they can improve affordable Internet access when rebuilding their economies and disbursing post-coronavirus benefits, they added.

"There is a lot of talk about defining the new normal in the post-Covid world and for me 'new normal' needs to include broadband access for all," said Doreen Bogdan-Martin, director at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the UN's Internet and telecoms agency.

## Digital gap

By the end of 2018, about half of the world was connected to the internet, according to the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI). This still left about 4 billion people offline, said Anju Mangal, Asia lead for the global body, which works with governments, business and civil society groups to promote affordable Internet policies. In the developed world, 87 percent of people are connected, compared with 47 percent in developing nations and 19 percent in the least developed countries, according to the ITU.

In addition, women are also 23 percent less likely than men to use Internet on their mobile, with the



EL MASNOU, Spain: A student takes classes online with his companion using the Zoom app at home during the coronavirus outbreak on April 2, 2020. — Reuters

gap widest in South Asia, it said. "Gender gap is a major issue," said Fiji-based Mangal, adding that having access to the Internet and technology could help girls from rural communities get access to home schooling and the same benefits as others who live in urban areas.

Examples of technology projects that target women and girls included those that look to improve digital literacy, enable access to benefits and help with farming techniques to boost food security, she added. The ITU has set a target of connecting 75 percent of the world's population to fast internet via cable or wireless by 2025.

## Cyber crime

Some governments and telecom operators have

taken steps to help more people go online during the coronavirus crisis. In Bangladesh, coronavirus contact tracing apps and helplines were made free to use, while telecom firms in other developing countries have provided free calls, texts and data to both students and customers. But to improve Internet affordability and access longer-term, governments, telecom companies and mobile operators should work together, said Mangal, adding that this would avoid silos developing that can hinder such efforts.

Public consultations when developing new policies will also help tailor solutions to communities, she said. Goals include providing smartphones, improving coverage areas and frequency of connection, increasing data allowance, ramping up download speeds and introducing laws to protect the vulnera-

ble from cyber-crimes, said Mangal.

The ITU's Bogdan-Martin said the coronavirus pandemic has also resulted in a "huge surge" of online criminal activity. Cyber crimes that have increased as internet and technology access has improved include online bullying and sex abuse, hacking, revenge porn and trafficking. "Bad actors have been exploiting fear and uncertainty," she said in a statement last month.

Furthermore, as most internet service providers are private businesses, authorities must also ensure monopolies do not form and control prices, Wignaraja and others said. Where Internet coverage is not profitable – especially the "last mile" in remote or rural areas – states must step in to ensure they are reached, said Wignaraja. — Reuters

## Future of flying: Masks, checks...

Continued from Page 1

Endau Analytics. While the fallout from the 2001 attacks could be used as an "indicator" of what to expect, the COVID-19 challenge was a "far more serious... global event", he said.

The United Nations' civil aviation agency has drawn up a set of guidelines for safe flying in the wake of the pandemic, from mandatory wearing of masks to the disinfection of areas people come in contact with. In addition, industry body the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has suggested governments collect passenger data – including health information – ahead of travel, and that access to airports be

restricted to staff and same-day travellers.

Other measures outlined in their guidelines include the redesign of gate areas to reduce congestion, faster and smoother boarding and baggage collection procedures, and even "prohibiting queues for the washrooms" to limit passenger interaction. "The COVID-19 crisis is the biggest disruption in the history of the aviation industry. The recovery is going to be long and slow," Albert Tjoeng, regional spokesman for IATA, told AFP.

Implementing new regulations is already proving challenging – and chaotic. While some US airlines require masks be worn in-flight, it has proven difficult to enforce this rule if passengers are defiant. In India, which resumed domestic flights last week, some cabin crew wore protective suits with masks, plastic visors and blue rubber gloves, but, according to media reports, had no idea if they were supposed to quarantine post-flight.

Mumbai airport put in place social distancing rules but these quickly fell apart when angry travellers harangued staff after flights were cancelled last-

minute. The most hotly debated measure in the industry has been whether to leave middle seats empty. Japan Airlines and Delta are among carriers doing so but Michael O'Leary, the boss of Irish low-cost airline Ryanair, has said the idea is "idiotic" and would stop his firm making money.

The emergence of COVID-19, which was first reported in China last year and has since infected more than seven million people worldwide, brought air travel to an almost complete halt with entire fleets grounded and mass layoffs. IATA forecasts international carriers are in line to make a combined net loss of more than \$84 billion this year. "We don't know exactly how the trajectory of this recovery will look," Singapore Airlines chief executive Goh Choon Phong said, after the carrier reported the first full-year loss in its 48-year history.

There are some signs of recovery as major economies ease lockdowns – with IATA pointing to a growth in flight numbers from April to May – but flying looks set to struggle to return to pre-virus levels. A

confusing patchwork of rules imposed by countries at different stages in tackling their outbreaks makes it tricky for consumers to plan holidays or visit family abroad.

Some nations are maintaining bans on travellers from hard-hit nations or requiring people to enter quarantine on arrival, typically for a 14-day period. Countries that have kept the virus in check are looking at creating "travel bubbles", or reciprocal agreements with other places on similar outbreak curves, but these can have onerous requirements.

A "fast lane" for essential business and official travel between some parts of China and Singapore has been launched, but travellers need sponsorship and have to take a virus test before departure and on arrival. Many who previously flew frequently may simply choose not to for the time being. Fazal Bahardeen, chief executive of Singapore-based Islamic travel specialist HalalTrip, told AFP: "If I have to go through all the hassle, I might as well not travel unless I really have to." — AFP

## Arab mission to Mars designed...

Continued from Page 1

"The UAE wanted to send a strong message to the Arab youth and to remind them of the past, that we used to be generators of knowledge," he told AFP.

"People of different backgrounds and religion coexisted and shared a similar identity," he said of the Arab world, where many countries are today wracked by sectarian conflicts and economic crises. "Put your differences aside, focus on building the region, you have a rich history and you can do much more."

Sarah Al-Amiri, the mission's deputy project manager, said it was imperative that the project have a long-term scientific impact. "It is not a short-lived mission, but rather one that continues throughout the years and produces valuable scientific findings – be it by researchers in the UAE or globally," she told AFP. She said that the probe will provide a comprehensive image of the weather dynamics in Mars' atmosphere with the use of three scientific instruments.

The first is an infrared spectrometer to measure the planet's lower atmosphere and analyze the tem-

perature structure. The second, a high-resolution imager that will provide information about the ozone; and a third, an ultraviolet spectrometer to measure oxygen and hydrogen levels from a distance of up to 43,000 km from the surface.

The three tools will allow researchers to observe the Red Planet "at all times of the day and observe all of Mars during those different times", Amiri said. "Something we want to better understand, and that's important for planetary dynamics overall, is the reasons for the loss of the atmosphere and if the weather system on Mars actually has an impact on loss of hydrogen and oxygen," she said, referring to the two components that make up water.

Sharaf said that fuelling of the probe is to begin next week. It is scheduled to launch on July 15 from Japan's Tanegashima Space Centre and return to Earth in Feb 2021, depending on many variables including the weather. "If we miss the launch opportunity, which is between mid-July and early August, then we'd have to wait for two years for another window," Sharaf said.

But hopes are high that the mission will take place as scheduled, and not be derailed by the coronavirus pandemic. In a new sign of warming ties between Israel and Gulf Arab nations, the Jewish state Tuesday wished the UAE success with the mission. We "hope this step will contribute towards deeper cooperation between all countries in the region," its foreign ministry's "Israel in the Gulf" Twitter account wrote in Arabic. — AFP

ways to improve the population structure currently tilted in favor of expats. The committee will meet with representatives of the Public Authority for Manpower, Supreme Planning Council and the Central Statistics Bureau, in addition to the interior ministry to discuss draft laws submitted by MPs related to the population structure.

MPs have submitted at least two draft laws in the past few weeks calling to replace all expat employees in the government and for imposing quotas on expat communities in the country. MP Mohammad Hayef meanwhile said he submitted a draft law to appoint more Kuwaitis as judges to replace a large number of Arab judges, mostly from Egypt. The draft law sets guidelines for Kuwaitis eligible to apply to become judges.

## Tributes, calls for justice at...

Continued from Page 1

the brutality," he said, charging: "The signals that we're sending is that if you are in law enforcement, that the law doesn't apply to you." Acknowledging the presence of the parents of previous victims of police violence – including Eric Garner, Botham Jean and Michael Brown – Sharpton said they "know better than anyone else the pain" of the Floyd family.

"Until we know the price for black life is the same as the price for white life, we're going to keep coming back to these situations over and over again," the preacher told The Fountain of Praise Church in southern Houston. Though the occasion was solemn, the church echoed with music and words of fond remembrance for a man whose savage death galvanized a movement.

"Even in a pandemic, people are walking out in the streets not even following social distancing because you've touched the world," Sharpton said. "And as we lay you to rest today, the movement won't rest until we get justice." Floyd died on May 25 as a white Minneapolis officer pressed a knee into his neck for almost nine minutes, his pleas of "I can't breathe" becoming a rallying cry for protesters.

His death has come to embody fractured relations between communities of color and police in the US and beyond as tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets. The Fountain of Praise was the final stage in a series of ceremonies before Floyd's coffin was conveyed by horse-drawn carriage in the early evening to his final resting place by his mother's grave.

On the way to the Houston Memorial Gardens cemetery, the cortege passed hundreds of well-wishers who chanted Floyd's name. "Rest in power" was scrawled in blue chalk on the road, while one held up a sign saying: "We will never forget." Some 500 guests – all masked due to the coronavirus pandemic – were at the funeral, including actors

Channing Tatum and Jamie Foxx, filmmaker Tyler Perry, singer Ne-Yo and boxing champion Floyd Mayweather who is reportedly paying all expenses.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, who has visited the family, offered words of condolence to Floyd's children in a video message urging them to "change the world for the better" in their father's name. "Today now is the time, the purpose, the season to listen and heal," said Biden, who suffered his own tragedy with the deaths of a wife and two children. "Now is time for racial justice... Because when there's justice for George Floyd we will truly be on our way to racial justice in America."

The funeral comes after the Minneapolis authorities pledged to dismantle and rebuild the police department in the city where Floyd died during an arrest for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. Derek Chauvin, the 44-year-old white officer who was filmed pressing his knee on the handcuffed Floyd's neck, faces up to 40 years if convicted on charges of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter. His bail was set on Monday at \$1 million with conditions, or \$1.25 million without.

Three other policemen involved in Floyd's arrest are charged with aiding and abetting his murder. All four officers have been fired. The arrest was caught on chilling cellphone video played in all corners of the world over the past two weeks.

Floyd was born in North Carolina, but grew up in Houston's predominantly African American Third Ward where he was remembered as a towering high school athlete and good-natured friend. Demonstrators have taken to the streets for two weeks of the most sweeping US protests for racial justice since the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

The demonstrations were marred by several nights of violence that focused attention at home and abroad on police brutality as numerous videos have emerged that allegedly show incidents of heavy-handed policing. The Democrats have introduced legislation in both chambers of Congress, that they hope will make it easier to prosecute officers for abuse, and rethink how they are recruited and trained. Some US cities have already begun to embrace reforms – starting with bans on the use of tear gas and rubber bullets. — AFP

## Joy, sacrifice as mosques reopen...

Continued from Page 1

MPs have filed draft laws calling to suspend the payment of rent for commercial uses throughout the shutdowns ordered by the government, while one bill calls for exempting commercial tenants for six months.

Meanwhile, a parliamentary committee in charge of developing human resources will hold two days of meetings with various government bodies to discuss



Stars

**Daily SuDoku**

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**Yesterday's Solution**

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5	9	6	2	4	3	8	1	7
9	6	3	1	5	7	2	4	8
8	2	5	6	9	4	7	3	1
1	4	7	3	2	8	9	5	6

easy


STAR TRACK

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




Getting in touch with your closest friends could bring about some intense communication, with many revealing some of your deepest concerns, Aries. Your thinking should be greatly influenced by feeling, so you might experience a high level of understanding that your friends are going to appreciate. This could well bring all of you closer together and increase future contact. Enjoy your day!

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



Relationships with those closest to you, particularly friends and love partners, should be enhanced by an increased understanding of their emotional world, Libra. You're likely to identify even more strongly than usual with others' feelings, and this could provide inspiration for artistic activities of some kind. This is also a great day to have deep, philosophical conversations with your friends.

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



A heightened level of intuition and understanding of others might catapult you to the center of attention at a gathering, Taurus. Knowledge combined with experience results in wisdom today. Insights could lead to more efficient ways of doing things. You'll probably pass this on to others, especially since more than one person could ask you for insights into their particular situation.

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




Dealing with the ups and downs of other family members could be easier for you today than usual, Scorpio. You're less inclined to be logical and more apt to identify with what other people feel. This will increase your understanding of their situation's undercurrents, and they'll likely appreciate your empathy. Don't forget your own concerns. You may see a lot of things in a different light today.

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




Communication with friends who have traveled widely could have you hankering to make a future visit to a distant place that you've always wanted to experience. At the very least, you'll probably want to take a virtual tour of your city of choice. If you're dreaming of traveling to a foreign country, you may want to take a stab at learning the language. Actually, this is a good time to study a language - your mind is particularly sharp.

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



Today your mind is strongly influenced by feeling and intuition, Sagittarius, so you'll be able to communicate especially well with others. You might sense what they need to hear before they know it themselves. This ability could be used in many ways. It could enhance your writing skills. If you're into performance of any kind, it could sharpen your ability to speak, teach, or act. Make the most of it.

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




Dreams or visions could put you in touch with deep feelings that you may not have been aware of before, Cancer. This could enable you to release traumas from your past and give you a new sense of lightness. However, your logical mind is very much at work, so you could use this experience to shed light on others' experiences and help them, too. Whatever happens today is likely to produce noticeable results.

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




You generally like to think of yourself as someone who faces life logically and rationally, Capricorn, but today your intuitive side could prove a valuable resource, especially when it comes to dealing with others. Your communicative ability is enhanced by a strong sense of what others are thinking and feeling. This opens the door to more effective communication with everyone - friends, lovers, colleagues, even strangers.

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



Relationships of all kinds are likely to be strengthened by an increased level of understanding today, Leo. Your thinking is greatly enhanced by your emotional intuitiveness, so you'll be more able than usual to identify with the needs and desires of those around you. As a result, acquaintances could become friends, and friendships could progress into bonds that last for life. Romance also benefits from intensified empathy. Enjoy.

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




Your intuition is usually very strong, Aquarius, and your level of empathy enhances your relationships. Today, however, a burst of logic could enable you to see many things in a different light. This adds a new dimension to your communicative abilities and could prove valuable in bringing you closer to the ones you love the most. It can also increase your understanding of yourself.

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



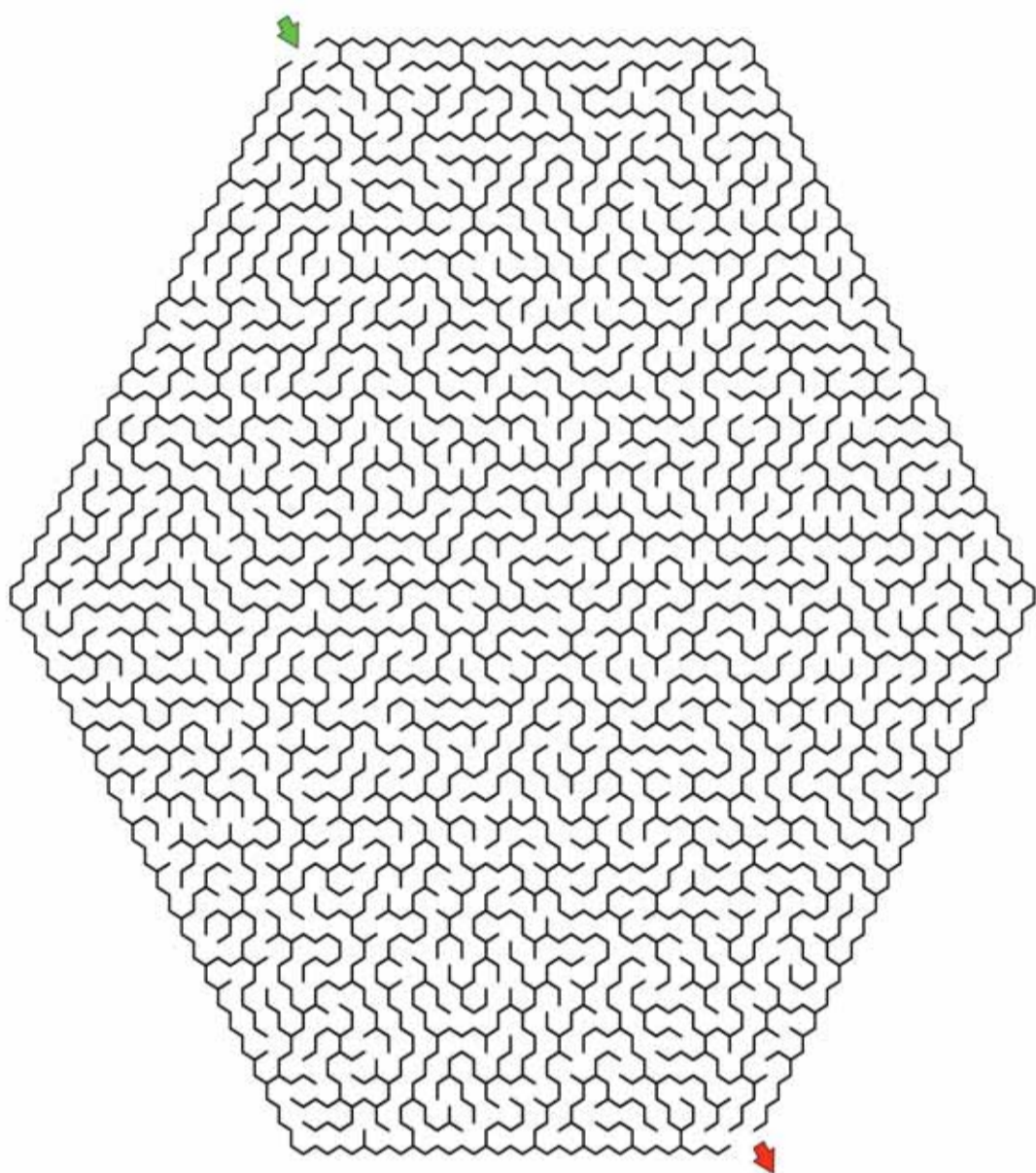
Today your emotional intuition intensifies your mental abilities, Virgo. Friends and family members are likely to grow closer to you. You may be more aware of what they really need and want, and they could see you in a new light. This can make you feel loved and wanted. The downside is that your empathy is so high that you may pick up on everyone's aches and pains. Try to keep yourself bathed in the white light.

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

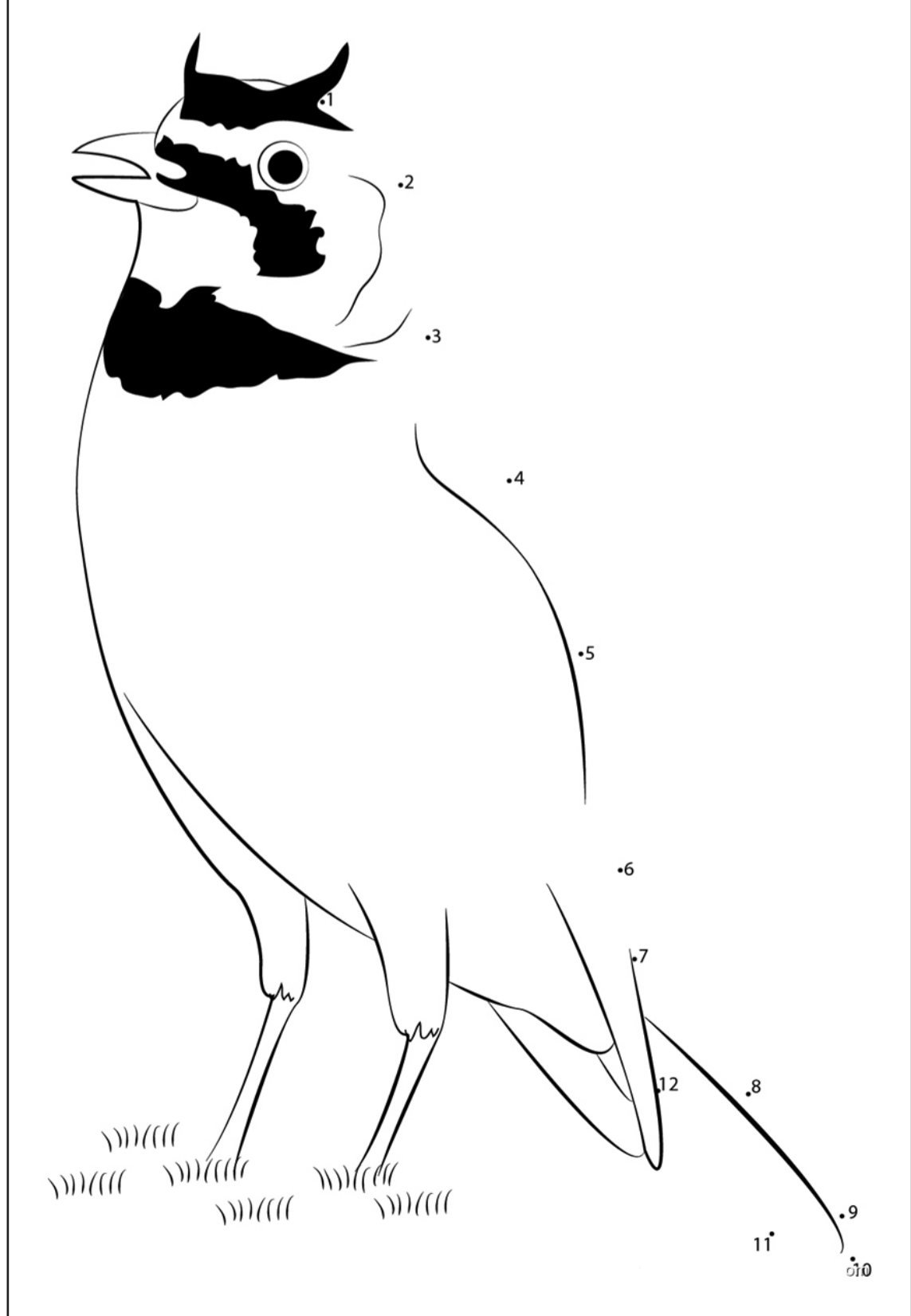


Your intuition is heightened almost to the point of telepathy today, Pisces, you may be able to sense what others want and need even before they know it themselves. You could also experience a few visionary impressions that prove valuable inspiration for creative and artistic work. When images well up from your psyche, don't dismiss them as irrelevant.

Find the way



Join the dots



Word Search

**Through the Looking Glass**

Find and circle all of the Through the Looking Glass words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a quote by Humpty Dumpty from the book.

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

ALICE	GNAT	OYSTERS	TIGER-LILY
BEETLE	GOAT	PAWNS	TRAIN
BOAT	GOLDEN CROWN	POETRY	TWEEDLEDEE
BROOCH	GUARD	RATTLE	TWEEDLEDUM
CARPENTER	HAIGHA	RED KING	UMBRELLA
CHESS	HATTA	RED KNIGHT	UNICORN
DAISIES	HILL	RED QUEEN	VIOLET
DINAH	HUMPTY DUMPTY	ROSE	WALRUS
ELEPHANT	JABBERWOCKY	SHAWL	WHITE KING
FAWN	KITTY	SNOWDROP	WHITE KNIGHT
FROG	LION	SOLDIERS	WHITE QUEEN
GARDEN	LOOKING GLASS	SQUARES	

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Professional surfer Carissa Moore surfs in Tahiti. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## IOC confirms protest ban remains

WASHINGTON: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has confirmed that athletes are still banned from protesting at the Games after several sports moved to allow protests in the wake of George Floyd's death in police custody, the Telegraph has reported.

Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter states "no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas." Athletes who breach the rule are subject to discipline on a case-by-case basis and the IOC issued guidelines in January clarifying that banned protests include taking a knee and other gestures.

The IOC told the Telegraph the guidelines were still in place and that it would not speculate on "hypothetical cases 13 months before the Olympic Games", the newspaper said.

Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man, died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes on May 25.

His death sparked worldwide protests against racial injustice, with several soccer players in Germany's Bundesliga delivering their own messages of support during games. World governing body FIFA, which has shown zero tolerance for players expressing their views on the field, has asked competition organisers to use "common sense" regarding protests over Floyd's death.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, who was widely criticised for the league's handling of Colin Kaepernick's kneeling protests in 2016, said on Friday the NFL had made mistakes in not listening to players and encouraged them to speak out and "peacefully protest". Anti-racism movements was discussed at an IOC executive board meeting yesterday.

While athlete protests at the Olympics are rare, at the 1968 Mexico City Games black U.S. sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos bowed their heads and raised black-gloved fists on the podium to protest racial inequality. — Reuters

# Dana White says Abu Dhabi 'Fight Island' to host UFC 251

## Stevenson dominates as boxing returns to Las Vegas

NEW YORK: Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) chief Dana White said on Tuesday the mixed martial arts promotion's "Fight Island" was located in Abu Dhabi and it will host four events next month including UFC 251.

White had said in April that the UFC was close to securing a private island to stage bouts for international fighters unable to enter the United States due to travel restrictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said Yas Island was being prepared to host UFC 251 on July 11 and three Fight Night events — on July 15, 18 and 25 — with all the infrastructure needed being set up at the venue which is less than a mile from the international airport.

"Everything will happen on the island," White said on the UFC's Facebook page. "Nobody will leave the island. They're going to have their own private training quarters where people can train themselves."

"We really do have an Octagon (for training) out in the sand. The infrastructure's going to be unbelievable. The people in Abu Dhabi do everything right." The three championship fights in UFC 251 will be headlined by the welterweight bout between challenger Gilbert Burns and champion Kamaru Usman.

The UFC postponed several events scheduled between March and May due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, which has killed over 110,800 people in the US. The promotion resumed action without fans present on May 9 in Florida.

Meanwhile, undefeated American Shavkat Rakhimov stopped Felix Carballo with a punishing body shot in the sixth round Tuesday to win the main event of boxing's first major fight card since

the start of the coronavirus outbreak.

The 22-year-old Stevenson easily won the 10-round non-title fight by delivering a devastating left hand to Carballo's rib cage for the knockdown at 1:31 of the sixth round.

Stevenson, who is the World Boxing Organization featherweight champ, completely dominated the Puerto Rican to improve to 14-0 with eight knockouts. There were no fans allowed into the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino conference center because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's a different atmosphere," Stevenson said. "Losing the weight was different. Training in the gym was different. I couldn't be around anybody. Even when fighting and there was no crowd was different. I would catch him with mean shots and there would be no 'Ooohs' or 'Aaahs.'"

Stevenson also forced Carballo to take a knee in the first round. Stevenson said he injured his left hand in the fifth round but was still able to land solid blows. "I hit him with everything I could early. I wobbled him a bunch of times. He took a lot of punishment, and I started realizing that head shots weren't going to get him out of here. So I started going to the body more," Stevenson said.

Stevenson, who is black, wore a T-shirt reading "Black Lives Matter" for his post-fight interview. "My people right now, they're protesting and there's a lot going on in our community, a lot of people trying to stand up for what's right," he said. "I couldn't really go out there and protest with them because I had a fight coming up and I didn't want to risk catching corona."

"Now that the fight is over, I'll go out there and protest. Mask up, gloved up, I'll go out there and help my people out." — Agencies



SAN JUAN: File photo taken on March 25, 2014 shows Dana White, President and CEO of the UFC, addresses the audience during a press conference in San Juan Puerto Rico. Mixed martial arts supremo Dana White said yesterday his Ultimate Fighting Championship will stage a series of bouts on Yas Island in Abu Dhabi next month to ease travel headaches for international fighters. — AFP

## Sammy to confront ex-Sunrisers players on racist language

MUMBAI: Former West Indies captain Daren Sammy has sought clarification from his former Sunrisers Hyderabad team mates over potentially racist language directed at him when he was part of the Indian Premier League franchise from 2013-14.

Sammy said he did not know the meaning of a Hindi word that some unnamed Sunrisers team mates would call him and only became aware of its racial connotations after watching a TV show that discussed the issue. "I was listening to (Indian-American comedian) Hasan Minhaj talking about how some of the people in his culture view or describe black people," Sammy said on Instagram.

"... I was angry after listening to him describing a word that they use to describe black people, which he was saying is not in a good way... and it was degrading."

"Instantly I remembered when I played for Sunrisers in 2013 and 2014, I was being called the exact

same word he described that was degrading to us black people.

"I will be messaging those people... Because if it was in any way, shape or form what Minhaj said it meant, I'm very disappointed and I'd still be angry and deserve an apology from you guys."

Several elite athletes have spoken out about racism in sport and society after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, in police custody in Minneapolis.

Sammy said the word was also used to describe Sri Lankan team mate Thisara Perera.

"I assumed it meant something else that was uplifting. But every time I was called it, it was me and Thisara, there was always laughter in the moment."

"... But you could understand my frustration and my anger when it was pointed out to me that it wasn't funny at all."

Sunrisers Hyderabad declined to comment when contacted by Reuters. — Reuters

## USOPC chief backs athlete protests

LOS ANGELES: The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee has signalled it will challenge rules banning athletes from protesting at the Olympics after hearing from US athletes last week.

In an open letter to Team USA athletes released late Monday, USOPC chief executive Sarah Hirshland said US officials had until now "failed to listen and tolerated racism and inequality."

The statement follows weeks of protests across the United States against racism and police brutality following the death of unarmed black man George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis on May 25.

The USOPC had faced scrutiny for its sanctions handed out to hammer thrower Gwen Berry and fencer Race Imboden, who both protested on the podium during last year's Pan-American Games in Lima.

Berry, who raised a clenched fist on the podium, and Imboden, who knelt down, were given a year's probation by the USOPC and warned they could face severe sanctions if they carried out similar protests again.

International Olympic Committee rules bar any "demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda" at the Games.

However Hirshland hinted the US would seek to review that policy after setting up an



USOPC chief executive Sarah Hirshland.

athlete-led group which would "challenge the rules and systems in our own organisation that create barriers to progress, including your right to protest." The move came after Hirshland held "town hall" meetings with dozens of US athletes last week to hear their views.

Hirshland added that the pain suffered by members of the black community was "unconscionable." "For decades you have spoken about equality and unity and sacrificed your moment on the podium to call for change," Hirshland wrote.

"And we have failed to listen and tolerated racism and inequality. I am sorry. You deserve better. You matter. Black lives matter."

"It is time to match your courage...to remove the barriers, to change the rules, and to empower black voices to be heard."

Berry, who last week had demanded an apology from the USOPC over its handling of her case, described Hirshland's remarks as "encouraging."

"I think it demonstrates that athletes' peaceful protesting is powerful and it can promote change," Berry was quoted as saying by the Washington Post on Tuesday.

"It's a step in the right direction. We need to challenge the rule."

In remarks to USA Today, Berry added she believed athletes should be allowed to protest peacefully at the Olympics. — AFP

"For Olympic athletes, we literally only get one chance every four years," Berry said. "So it's important to them. If they want to speak in that moment, they (should) have the right to, because they worked for that." — AFP

## Sports

# Beyond bizarre: Justin Thomas has 'different feel' as PGA Tour returns

## 2020 is beyond a bizarre year so far, especially in the world of sports

LOS ANGELES: Justin Thomas says getting back into the swing of things on the PGA Tour after a three-month break due to the coronavirus pandemic has a different feel to it.

It means daily temperature checks, filling out health questionnaires, knowing where the hand-sanitizing stations are and social distancing on the tee boxes.

The Charles Schwab Challenge will be full of firsts as the PGA Tour's restart begins today in Texas with the 148-field teeing off at the Colonial Country Club.

"I would say 2020 is beyond a bizarre year so far, and especially in the world of sports it's just going to be different," said the former world number one Thomas.

"If we all want to get back and play the game that we love we're just going to have to get over the fact that it's going to be different and be a little weird."

World number one Rory McIlroy and second-ranked Jon Rahm of Spain lead a strong field that includes 15 of the world's top 20 players.

World number three Brooks Koepka, defending champion Kevin Na, Dustin Johnson and Phil Mickelson are also teeing up at the course in Fort Worth, Texas.

Some of the sport's top players from outside of North America decided to skip the event because travelling to the US would mean a two-week quarantine, including 10th-ranked Englishman Tommy Fleetwood.

### FLOYD RESPECT

The biggest change, since the Tour was shut down in March at the Players Championship, is that organizers are not allowing any spectators this week. The Tour is also going to leave open the 8-46

am tee time and instead have a one-minute moment of silence to mark the death of George Floyd, who has become a symbol of racial injustice in America.

American Jordan Spieth said it is important for the Tour to show its support for the US black community.

"I think it's really cool. I think it'll be something that hopefully we can kind of stick with however long we need to. But I think it's certainly a really nice thing to do with the way things have been," Spieth said.

One player who will be notably absent is Tiger Woods who has won 15 major championships and is chasing Jack Nicklaus (18) for the most in history. Woods looked sharp in a recent exhibition match with Mickelson, Tom Brady and Peyton Manning.

Fellow American Thomas says it will be interesting to see how the social distancing works, especially on the tee boxes which can get pretty crowded with players, caddies and officials.

"What'll be weird is when you stand on the tee boxes trying to separate yourself a bit from your competitors."

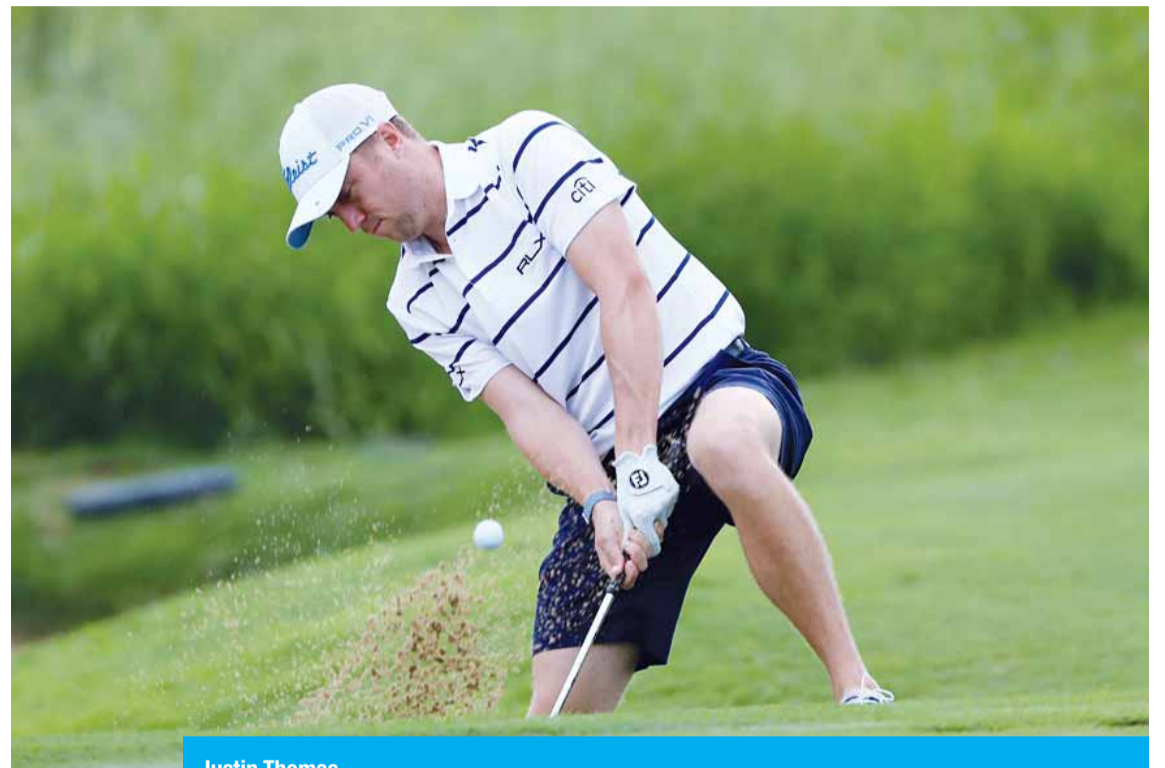
"Normally when you're on the tee box everyone is crunched up in the same area. It'll be a little bit unusual just trying to actually focus on social distancing on the tee."

Thomas said he got tested for the coronavirus and it came up negative.

"I think the (SARS-CoV-2 virus) swab test was probably the most uncomfortable so far. There was nothing comfortable about it," he said.

"But I've done the testing. I've gotten approved. I have my pass that gets me in the locker room, that gets me in the clubhouse, dining."

Thomas has been staying in shape by working out in his backyard and practising socially-distanced golf with friends. But he expects some rust



Justin Thomas

because of the length of the layoff.

### FEELING 'RUSTY'

"It's not just going out and having a money game with your buddies," he said. "Every shot counts. It's cumulative score for four days, and that's the thing that's going to be the hardest because I sometimes feel rusty after two, three weeks off, let alone four months."

"The fact that that four-footer I have on the first hole matters. Yeah, if I hit this ball into a hazard that's a penalty stroke, or a penalty area or whatever. It's real."

The PGA Tour cancelled 11 tournaments during

its shutdown, and revised its remaining schedule.

The first five events of the restart, including the Charles Schwab, will be played without spectators. The first tournament to have fans will be The Memorial, July 16-19 in Dublin, Ohio.

After the Charles Schwab, the PGA Tour will feature the RBC Heritage (June 18-21) in Hilton Head, South Carolina; the Travelers Championship (June 25-28) in Cromwell, Connecticut; and the Rocket Mortgage Classic (July 2-5) in Detroit, Michigan.

The PGA Championship will be played August 6-9 in San Francisco and the US Open is rescheduled for September 17-20 in New York. —AFP

## Leverkusen beat minnows to book place in Cup final

VOLKLINGEN: Bayer Leverkusen beat lowly Saarbruecken 3-0 away on Tuesday to reach next month's German Cup final and bring the fairytale run of the fourth division side to a jolting end.

Two goals inside the opening 20 minutes swiftly ended home hopes as top-flight Leverkusen advanced to the July 4 decider in Berlin where they will meet the winner of Wednesday's clash between holders Bayern Munich and Eintracht Frankfurt.

French flyer Moussa Diaby put Leverkusen ahead in the 11th minute and Lucas Alario added a second eight minutes later, before substitute Karim Bellarabi rounded off the scoring in the 58th.

Saarbruecken were the first team from the fourth tier to reach the last four of the cup, taking the scalps of

two top-flight and two second division clubs along the way, but had the odds stacked against them ahead of Tuesday's game.

They had not played for 94 days since the German regional league was suspended and then prematurely ended because of the novel coronavirus health crisis.

This was in contrast to their high-flying Bundesliga opponents, who resumed playing one month ago and whose superior match fitness was evident almost from the opening whistle.

Diaby timed his run perfectly to beat the offside trap and get onto the end of a clever forward pass over the defence, which he then hooked into the goal from close range.

Alario added a second from a tight angle after a mix-up in the hosts' defence. Leverkusen, also still content for another trophy in this season's Europa League, continued their dominance and added a third goal, just before the hour, through Bellarabi after a series of slick passes.

Yet they were also guilty of squandering several good chances after that and could easily have won by a far



VOLKLINGEN: Leverkusen's Italian forward Lucas Alario (L) and Saarbruecken's Manuel Zeitz vie for the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) semi-final football match 1 FC Saarbruecken v Bayer 04 Leverkusen in Volklingen, southern Germany on June 9, 2020. —AFP

larger margin.

Saarbruecken's Markus Mendler misused his effort in front of goal to squander their best chance for a consolation on the stroke of fulltime.

Leverkusen, who won the German Cup for the only time in 1993, last appeared in the final in 2009 when they lost to Werder Bremen. — Reuters

## Ten years on, mixed results for WCup hosts S Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Today marks the 10th anniversary of South Africa hosting the World Cup, the first and only time Africa staged the biggest single-sport global tournament.

A decade on, the report card about football in the republic is mixed with successes including a thriving national league and multi-sport use of virtually all the World Cup stadiums.

Negatives include a poorly performing national team, the absence of South Africans from four of the five major European leagues and a national association beset by personality clashes.

Here, AFP Sport looks at five successes and failures of South Africa 10 years after drawing with Mexico in the opening game and subsequently becoming the first hosts not to reach the last 16.

## Oyarzabal urges Real Sociedad to give season a final flourish

MADRID: "I am happy where I am, I feel loved," says Mikel Oyarzabal, Real Sociedad's captain and creator, often linked with Manchester City but whose best chance of playing in the Champions League next season might be to stay where he is.

Real Sociedad are fourth in La Liga, one point ahead of Atletico Madrid, after Oyarzabal's penalty helped them beat Eibar on March 10, the league's

last match that was played behind closed doors before fixtures were suspended completely.

A week earlier, another Oyarzabal penalty sent La Real through to their first Copa del Rey final in 32 years, this one against Basque rivals Athletic Bilbao for the first time ever. In February, they had each knocked out Real Madrid and Barcelona on the same night. Oyarzabal, together with Martin Odegaard who is flourishing on loan from Real Madrid, has been at the heart of it. The Spanish number 10 who marauds off the left has been fouled twice as much as Lionel Messi and sits below only five players with 14 goals and assists combined.

It has already been a brilliant season and it is tempting to wonder if it will be judged a success

ful, regardless of how Real Sociedad place at the end of La Liga's sprint finish that begins on Thursday.

"Listen, not for me," Oyarzabal says, in an exclusive interview with AFP. "We are a few points ahead so what we all want is to sit in the Champions League, to live that competition next year. "Everyone is completely plugged in now and it feels like a good time to fight for where we are."

It is not only about where they are but how they got there, with many seeing Real Sociedad as the best team to watch in Spain this season. "People can say nice things but it's more about what we feel," says Oyarzabal. "We feel comfortable, we feel happy and I think that shows in how we play. —AFP

## Malaysia badminton ace eyes golden future

KUALA LUMPUR: Lee Zii Jia's charge up the badminton rankings has sparked hopes that Malaysia has found a successor to the legendary Lee Chong Wei — and someone who can finally win the country a first Olympic gold.

The 22-year-old jumped to world number 10 after establishing himself in the sport's elite with some big-name scalps at the start of this year before play was suspended because of the coronavirus.

He defeated China's Olympic champion Chen Long to reach the semi-finals of the prestigious All England Open in March, and beat China's ninth-ranked Shi Yuqi at the Malaysia Masters in January.

But he remains relaxed about being touted as the heir to fellow Malaysian Lee Chong Wei, a three-time Olympic silver medallist and one of the greatest players of his generation until his retirement last year.

"From the beginning, everybody said I am the next Lee Chong Wei, that I am going to replace him," he told AFP.

"It made me (feel) pressure but now, slowly, I have become more mature.

"I am starting to accept those pressures, and turn them into motivation."

The major disappointment in former world number one Lee Chong Wei's glittering career was that he failed to win badminton's biggest prizes, being beaten to gold by his nemesis Lin Dan of China in the 2008 and 2012 Olympic finals, and the World Championships in 2011 and 2013.

But Lee Zii Jia, despite the weight of expectation, is downplaying his chances of winning gold at the virus-delayed Tokyo Games next year, which would be his first Olympics. "I don't think about it... I will just go and try my best to gain some experience," he said. "For me no pressure, just go and fight, and try my best."

### PACKED CALENDAR

He has received advice from the elder Lee, 37, and is using the same two coaches his compatriot did before the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Lee Chong Wei, who retired last year after failing to regain form following successful cancer treatment, made it to the men's singles finals in Rio in 2016 only to be defeated by China's Chen, who a year earlier had also relegated him to silver at the World Championships.

"Their combination, I think, is very good," said Lee Zii Jia of the backroom team of head coach Hendrawan and assistant Tey Seu Bock.

"They have worked with Lee Chong Wei for many years, maybe they will share some experiences with me about how he trained." Lee Zii Jia has an attacking style but in recent matches has shown more patience and consistency, such as during his 21-12, 21-18 victory over Chen in his first appearance at the All England Open. —AFP

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**18** USOPC chief backs athlete protests



**19** Beyond bizarre: Justin Thomas has 'different feel' as PGA Tour returns



## La Liga title race looks to forgotten stars

### Lifelines for Eden Hazard and Luis Suarez



**BARCELONA:** File photo taken on December 21, 2019 shows Barcelona's French forward Antoine Griezmann (R) celebrates with Barcelona's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez. Two points separate Spain's greatest rivals FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF ahead of the return to top-flight games on June 11, 2020, when the derby between Sevilla and Real Betis will end a 93-day hiatus. Neither Eden Hazard nor Luis Suarez expected to play much after Hazard underwent surgery on a broken foot and Suarez had an operation on his right knee in January. — AFP

**MADRID:** When La Liga stopped they were not expected to play any part in the rest of the title race but when the season resumes today, Eden Hazard and Luis Suarez could be set to decide it.

Hazard was looking beyond Real Madrid to the Euros after undergoing surgery on his right foot in March while some felt Suarez had played his last game for Barcelona after having a knee operation in January.

Instead, both have been thrown a lifeline, Suarez to preserve his career at Barca and Hazard to kickstart his with Madrid.

After Real Madrid paid 100 million euros (\$108.4 million) to sign him from Chelsea last year, fans sprinted outside the Santiago Bernabeu to beat the queues for Hazard's unveiling, and around 50,000 made it inside.

However questions were soon being asked about his weight in pre-season, and he has struggled with injury all season.

Every time he has come back, Hazard has needed time to find form, initially lacking that burst of speed and change of direction that at his best, can leave a de-

fender for dead. But reports from Valdebebas have been positive, with Thibaut Courtois saying on Sunday he had been surprised by the Belgian's "rhythm" before adding a note of caution. "We can't expect him to be on top form without playing," he said.

Barca coach Quique Setien has been similarly circumspect over Suarez, who is also not renowned for quick returns to sharpness after time away.

"He is better than we expected," Setien said on Sunday. "But the question is how ready he is after so long out and whether he is ready to start."

Despite winning the Clasico on March 1, Madrid were in a slump before the hiatus, that 2-0 victory over Barcelona their only win in five games.

They lost the defensive steel that saw them go 21 matches unbeaten either side of Christmas and a familiar bluntless, still lingering from Cristiano Ronaldo's departure, remains.

Hazard was supposed to help fill the creative void but 11 games over five and a half weeks offers no room for rustiness and, unlike Suarez, this is still a new team to him. Fifteen appearances in 10 months hardly breeds familiarity.

Barca meanwhile need bodies as they have only 19 fit senior players, which leaves them surprisingly ill-equipped to capitalise on two extra substitutes.

The club sold back-ups in January to raise funds for a striker that never arrived and instead they were left to exploit La Liga's emergency signing rule in February to poach Martin Braithwaite from Leganes.

But Suarez brings experience and quality, not to mention the best out of Lionel Messi.

In full flow, Messi could see off Real Madrid but the Argentinian has had his own injury problems this season, the latest a minor thigh complaint that led to him missing three training ses-

sions last week. Barcelona have a two-point advantage and the marginally more favourable fixtures, particularly as the usually heated atmospheres at Sevilla and Alaves will be negated by empty stands.

They play Atletico Madrid at home too but have not lost to them at Camp Nou in 14 years.

Yet bubbling distrust of the Barca board could resurface at any moment and Madrid have the better head-to-head record, meaning they only need to be level on points to be crowned champions.

They play away at high-flying Real Sociedad and Athletic Bilbao but more important could be how they take to their new training ground home, the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium, while renovation work continues at the Bernabeu.

Madrid have Marco Asensio fit again while Gareth Bale has been the fittest of anyone in training. Zinedine Zidane's knack for winning knock-out tournaments might even be well-suited to a 39-day sprint finish.

Zidane was close to the sack in September but almost a year later, only one thing is certain. Nothing is the same. — AFP

## Kaepernick deserves apology, job: Jenkins

**LOS ANGELES:** New Orleans Saints safety Malcolm Jenkins called on the NFL to apologise to Colin Kaepernick on Tuesday, saying recent expressions of contrition would be meaningless while the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback remained isolated from the sport.

Jenkins, one of the founding members of the NFL's Players Coalition, which works to reform the US criminal justice and education systems, said the NFL had still yet to properly address Kaepernick's case.

Kaepernick was the first NFL player to begin protesting in 2016, refusing to stand for the US national anthem as a way of drawing attention to racial

injustice and police brutality.

The 49ers star was subsequently released by the team in early 2017 and has not played in the NFL since, later alleging he had been blackballed by the league. In a stunning U-turn on Friday, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said the league had botched its handling of player protests and vowed to support peaceful protests in future, although he did not mention Kaepernick.

Jenkins said on Tuesday the failure to acknowledge Kaepernick by name, and the fact that the 32-year-old remained unemployed, were marks against the NFL.

"I still don't think [the NFL has] gotten it right," Jenkins told CBS's "This Morning" program.

"Until they apologise, specifically, to Colin Kaepernick, or assign him to a team, I don't think that they will end up on the right side of history."

"At the end of the day, (the NFL have) listened to their players, they've donated money, they've created

an Inspire Change platform; they've tried to do things up to this point.

"But it's been one player in particular that they have ignored and not acknowledged, and that's Colin Kaepernick. That's the only thing people want to hear. If it's not going to correct that or acknowledge that, then everything else doesn't need to be said."

Jenkins comments were backed by Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan who told a conference call on Tuesday that Kaepernick should be given a chance to win a spot back on an NFL roster. "As far as Colin being back in the league, I think he should have every opportunity to," Ryan said.

"His protest is being heard at this point. It might have taken too long, but I think he should have every opportunity to have a job and to have a spot in this league."

Kaepernick was also name-checked on Tuesday at the Houston funeral of George Floyd, whose death at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis on May



**Struggled with injury**