

# Friday Times

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## Parliament meets with business owners to discuss plan for economic revival

Al-Kharafi: The government needs to allocate a portion of every tender for SMEs to encourage economic growth



KUWAIT: A general view of the attendance at a symposium organized by the National Assembly on Wednesday to review steps to provide assistance to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). — National Assembly photos



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem



Bader Al-Kharafi, Vice chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of Zain Group

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Bader Al-Kharafi, Vice chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of Zain Group, said the telecoms and banking sectors have committed to not lay off their employees

or reduce their salaries for at least one year due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking at a symposium organized by the National Assembly on Wednesday to review steps to provide assistance to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are struggling

because of the coronavirus crisis, Kharafi, who is also a board member of Gulf Bank, called for legislation stipulating government guarantees for bank loans to the sector in these difficult times.

Kharafi said Kuwaiti employees in the pri-

vate sector are in good shape and are not in danger of losing their jobs.

"The telecoms and banking sectors, where a large number of Kuwaitis are employed, have committed not to touch their salaries

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Central Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel



Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of Economic Affairs Mariyam Al-Aqeel

- Legislation needed for banks to help SMEs
- Panel finalizes law for private sector salary cuts
- Appointment of expats banned in oil sector



MP Safaa Al-Hashem

## Al-Kharafi: Banks, telecoms will not lay off employees



Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan



MP Dr Mohammad Al-Dallal

### Parliament meets with business owners...

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and their positions for at least one year, and this also applies to expatriates," he said.

But he said the problem today is in the SME sector, which requires solid help from authorities, adding that these projects are facing difficulties in securing credit from banks because there are no guarantees. Banks have no appetite to provide loans to SMEs and the Central Bank must issue a law to guarantee 80 percent of these loans, said Kharafi, adding that this will encourage banks to provide the necessary finance.

Kharafi also called for giving a certain percentage of government projects to SMEs, because supporting them has become a national duty and is "inevitable". He said that problems today require actions and attractive statements won't help. Kharafi said the Kuwaiti package of incentives is still more of promises on paper without actions.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem called on the government and the Assembly to listen to the complaints of SMEs and then take actions to support them. Ghanem stressed that the Assembly will not issue legislation that could undermine the interests of SMEs, adding that priority is now given to health

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issues, but after that the economy will be accorded top priority.

The Assembly's health and labor committee is meanwhile scheduled to finalize amendments to a new labor law in the private sector today that would legalize salary cuts to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus. Rapporteur of the committee MP Saadoun Hammad expected the bill to be ready for voting in the Assembly next week.

Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel told the symposium at the Assembly that the draft law allows businesses to cut salaries by up to 50 percent based on mutual agreement with employees. She said the Council of Ministers decided to double the labor support payment for some 72,000 Kuwaitis employed in the private sector as a guarantee against cutting their salary or laying them off.

The amendments will mostly apply to expatriates employed in the private sector, whose number has reached 1.66 million. But government and private companies have already started laying off expat employees. Kuwait Airways has fired some 1,500 expat employees, or 25 percent of all foreign staff. The Municipality said it plans to fire half of its 900 expat employees.

A number of private firms, some of them major companies outside the telecoms and banking sectors, have already laid off thousands of expat employees and cut the salaries of many others after their businesses came to a standstill because of the shut-downs.

Oil Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel told the Assembly symposium that he has issued a decision banning the appointment of expatriates in the oil sector in the current fiscal year 2020/2021 and that he will try to reduce the number of expats in Kuwait Petroleum Corp and its subsidiary companies. The number of expatriates in the oil sector is already very small after oil companies had resorted to contractors to supply manpower almost three decades ago.



(From left) Central Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan, MP Safaa Al-Hashem and Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of Economic Affairs Mariyam Al-Aqeel



MP Ahmad Al-Fadhli



Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Khaled Al-Fadhel



MP Khalaf Dumaitheer



## Worshippers relieved with measures taken at mosques, hope people's number increase



By Nawara Fattahova

**A**fter three months of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic, some mosques in Kuwait reopened Wednesday starting with Dhuhur (noon) prayer. The Ministry of Awqaf has previously announced all health measures and precautions taken to allow Muslims to pray in mosques, including not allowing wudu (ablution), worshippers must bring their own prayer mats, must wear facemasks, must keep a specified distance between them, among other measures.

Muslims who were used to praying at the mosque missed the habit during the past months, and were excited to pray at the mosque again. Many of them even went to a different area to pray there, as none of the mosques in their areas were opened yet.

Meanwhile, the women's sections at mosques were not opened, even in mosques that reopened in the so-called 'model areas'.

Abu Abdullah is one of those who are keen to pray in the mosque when it's possible. As the mosque in his area hasn't opened yet, he went to pray at Masjed Othman in Khaldiya. "It was a bittersweet moment. I'm glad that mosques are finally open, but sad that the atmosphere is not the same as before due to social distancing measures," he told Kuwait Times, describing his feeling.

"I missed praying at the mosque so much. It has become a part of daily life to go to the mosque five times a day. I read the new measures for praying at the mosque, so I brought my own prayer rug, did ablution at home, and wore a mask. There were only about 25 – 30 worshippers for the Dhuhur prayer," added Abu Abdullah.





According to him all worshippers who came were let inside, as the mosque is large and the worshippers were few. "Maybe some people still have concerns about the safety of praying in the mosque, so many didn't come today. The prayer was a bit shorter than usual, as the imams have been instructed to keep the prayers short," he concluded.

Ayoub Al-Khamees was excited to pray again in the mosque of his area, the Ali Bin Abi Talib Mosque in North Ahmadi. "I felt happy and calm to finally be able to pray again in the mosque. It's a different feeling. Of course I missed the feeling of hearing the Holy Quran and praying in Jamaa'. I took a face mask and my own praying mat. Also, sanitizers were provided by the entrance," he pointed out.

Only few worshippers attended the Dhuhr prayer in that mosque as well. "There were about 10 – 14 people because our mosque is somewhat small. All worshippers who came were let in. it's really honorable that everyone is following the rules, and everyone was let in. the prayer was shorter than usual, as per the rules of the Awqaf Ministry. Our Imam did his best to carefully follow the instructions," Khamees further said.



## Local

## Hunting for a job



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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**W**e are passing through a very difficult time these days that does not allow many jobseekers to get a new job because most companies are struggling with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and the issue of hiring and wages are difficult matters for all. I know that we all dream and pray for the days to go back as before the virus, so at least half of our business goes back to its routine.

I believe that there are no winners in this war against the virus. Business owners and companies are losing their businesses and some have been forced to move out of the global market too. Employees are losing their source of income regardless of their financial obligations.

I think banks might understand the situation of companies, but who can support the small employees who rely on their salaries to survive? This is indeed a global nightmare. I support all states that try to activate their economies by reopening their countries to tourists and shoppers. But this is not happening all around the world.

I receive letters from many people who are complaining about the bad financial conditions and some of them have lost their jobs or their wages have been reduced, and I feel their pain. These workers did not cause this epidemic, and despite this, they lost their jobs. The worst part I think is that no one knows when this crisis will be over and if businesses can recover easily and return to normal work.

I do not mean here to return to the time before the coronavirus, but at least within 50 percent of normality to allow people to get new jobs. Yesterday, I received a letter from an expatriate woman who recently gave birth. She was laid off in March before the complete curfew. She is suffering a lot because she is a mother without work and complained about the difficulty of getting a job these days. She is right.

I think sending resumes randomly is a waste of time for jobseekers - just like applying for a job without looking at its requirements. Unfortunately, this global crisis has revealed many things, including that obtaining a job is difficult through automated recruitment, because when a job is announced, the automated system receives thousands of requests. I do not know exactly how the selection process works and who controls the matter, but I guess humans have a role.

I have a bad experience of dealing with employment through advertisements and automatic responses. Sometimes, the chosen candidates are predetermined and tests are just part of formalities. So how can jobseekers get a job these days? That is the question. It is not easy, but not impossible too. Working from home and online is available for those who have skills, such as digital marketing, for example. Also, many courses are available online for multiple specialties and it is a good opportunity to use the lockdown to learn new skills and get a degree.

The world is going through a phase of transformation and it has turned us all away from what we were used to - whether work or lifestyle. This change makes us feel upset or hurt, but it is happening and we have to be ready to cope.

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



**KUWAIT:** Geese walk along Arabian Gulf street in Kuwait City on June 5, 2020, during a partial curfew imposed by the authorities in a bid to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## It is the weekend!



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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**N**ow then, it is the weekend, and most of the day will be spent at home as Friday prayers are yet to be allowed in mosques (except for the Grand Mosque), though the five prayers a day started in a limited number of mosques under certain conditions and procedures. It is impossible to measure how happy people were to be able to pray in mosques. It was like someone who found his missing son, as described by a worshiper.

Well, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is still with us, and it seems that it adopted our planet as its permanent home, so human beings are once again compelled to welcome an unwanted guest who will not go away and will join its ancestors of viruses who belong to the same 'coronavirus' family, like SARS and MERS.

I would like to express my sympathy to the World Health Organization (WHO), which seems to be under great pressure because of the criticisms it is facing. It made matters worse by announcing a few days ago that asymptomatic carriers of the virus do not infect others, only to come the next day and reverse the claim, saying that asymptomatic people were more likely to infect others at a higher rate than those who are symptomatic!

Enough of the pandemic and its fallouts and effects on all aspects of life. All of us with or without corona worry about health and wellbeing, and as I was reading a relatively long article about some types of foods, I was surprised by some information I was not aware of before, so I thought it would be good to share some examples with you.

Many of us keep food in the fridge to eat the next day being, unaware that this practice might actually be harmful, and could be among some reasons for food poisoning! There are foods that become toxic when they are reheated, though there are other foods that will not be harmful if heated several times.

Among the foods I read about are five items that drew my attention because of their popularity in this region. Those include spinach which should be eaten immediately after cooking, or if left for the next day, it should be eaten cold, because it contains nitrate, which becomes nitrite; a toxic element that can cause cancer. I was also surprised that potatoes lose their nutritious value when they are reheated, and can even become toxic.

Many of us eat eggs in many forms, yet if you reheat fried, cocked or boiled eggs, they become highly toxic and may adversely affect the digestive system!

It is very important for you to realize that chicken becomes highly dangerous if eaten after one or more days after cooking, because the protein structure changes when reheated. Mushrooms should be eaten immediately after cooking or without heating.

Having mentioned the foods and what happens to them, I should mention that each of our organs has a favorite meal of its own! Our hair prefers rocca, the brain loves grapes, coconut and fish, the heart craves for apples, while the liver goes for dates and grapes. Our digestive system and the intestines in particular prefer yogurt and apples. Kidneys love water and beans while the immune system is satisfied with garlic. Knees and articulates want cracked wheat and olive oil, and so on. The list is very long.

We must always thank God for creating us and providing us with all that we need to lead a healthy life while we are on the face of this earth. God wanted us to use what we have, not abuse it.

Finally, Allah Almighty says in the holy Quran: "Have those who disbelieved not considered that Heavens and the earth were a joint entity, and we separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?" – 21-30.

# Kuwait Times

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## Local

# Ooredoo Group Companies in MENA, Asia Pacific complete 2020 Ramadan campaign

## Supporting communities amid COVID-19 challenges



Ooredoo Kuwait Team with frontliners.



Ooredoo Qatar distributes Ramadan gifts to workers at Souq Waqif.

**DOHA:** Ooredoo concluded its 2020 Ramadan campaign—a comprehensive program of charitable initiatives supporting communities across its global network of operating companies—while responding to the worldwide challenges of the novel coronavirus.

Ooredoo Group companies across the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia established projects and initiatives targeting marginalised and under-served communities, while rewarding medical staff and others on the front lines of fighting disease. Whereas in previous years the members of the Ooredoo Group have engaged with the communities in which they operate, this year the campaign has been about community-building, bringing people together at a time when essential public health policies are confining them to the home.

As part of the Ramadan campaign, Ooredoo Group released its annual Ramadan commercial with a very distinctive message to usual. 2020's video focused on the way that Muslims across the globe would have a very different Ramadan from the usual, staying apart from family members, friends and neighbours. Shot completely on smartphones in eight different countries, Ooredoo's global Ramadan message encouraged communities to remain strong and keep connected to their loved ones using digital technologies, despite being physically apart.

With its message “even if we can't be together, at least we can still be close,” Ooredoo's Ramadan campaign reached 44 million video views, exceeding all expectations and the records set in previous years.

Talking about the campaign, Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani, Group Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo, said: “Traditionally the holy month of Ramadan brings families together in reflection and gratitude, but this has proven challenging during the pandemic. We are proud of the way our annual Ramadan campaign addressed these issues this year, from the 2020 video promoting digital togetherness, to the practical steps taken to help citizens, customers, communities and the medics and other public servants who support them.”

Ooredoo Qatar announced a raft of Ramadan offers under the umbrella of the ‘Giving More In Ramadan’ campaign, designed to support cus-

tomers in these challenging times. The company has stepped up to the challenge of maintaining its corporate social responsibility activities despite the logistical challenges posed by the outbreak. This meant Ramadan gifts were delivered to patients at the Fahad Bin Jassim Kidney Center, to the elderly at Ehsan Center, to the children at the Orphans Care Center (Deama) and to labourers working at Katara and Souq Waqif, Doha's historic market area, while taking all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of volunteers and gift recipients.

More broadly, a wide range of heavily discounted or free packages of data were made available to customers in order to build practical support for the call, during the Holy Month and beyond, to #StayHomeWithOoredoo. Existing digital initiatives have helped Ooredoo Qatar to bring families and communities closer together at this time of year.

Ooredoo Kuwait has celebrated girgian—a mid-Ramadan celebration marked with children wearing traditional clothes and going door-to-door to neighbours to receive sweets and nuts whilst also singing traditional songs—very differently this year amid the ongoing COVID-19 situation in the country. The company distributed gifts to frontline staff at Sheikh Jaber Hospital and delivered gifts with every order placed through one of the popular delivery companies operating in the country. This initiative reiterates Ooredoo's commitment to joining all segments of society together in the events that matter to them the most.

In Oman, Ooredoo ensured its customers could stay connected to friends and loved ones over Ramadan with special offers on local calls. By making it easier for people to be together even when social distancing, the Ramadan offer on calls cut stress while encouraging people to stay home. Funds were pledged to Dar Al Atta's relief initiative, named “Together in Hardship and Ease”. This ongoing scheme collects donations to support families in Oman whose income has been reduced or those who have experienced job loss due to the coronavirus.

Ooredoo Algeria launched a solidarity caravan in the West, East and centre of Algeria, designed to distribute sohour meals to crucial medical staff, hard at work saving lives. Launched in cooperation with the the Algerian Muslim Scouts was a



Donation of food boxes to more than 2,000 low-income families across Algeria in partnership with the Algerian Red Crescent.

parallel operation, which saw iftar meals distributed to local needy persons. In partnership with the Algerian Red Crescent, boxes of basic foodstuffs were donated to more than 2000 low-income families across the country.

Ooredoo Tunisia built upon an impulse of solidarity between the company and its employees to help hospitals, students and especially needy families impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. During the Holy Month, the company launched a donation campaign through its humanitarian association Ooredoo El-Khair to help families in need via MobiCash. Some 330 families affected by the current crisis benefited from the donations.

Under its “Ramadan Share to Unite Against Covid-19” program, Indosat Ooredoo made a substantial donation to Indonesia's National Disaster Management Authority (BNPB), buying protective equipment and surgical masks, while funding special buses, portable washing stations and disinfectant chambers for use in the fight against the virus. There was also a hefty donation made to assist the Provincial Government of DKI Jakarta and 10 other major cities nationwide in their pandemic countermeasures initiatives, aligned with the company's #StayHomeStayConnected campaign.

Ooredoo Maldives increased support to customers, by strengthening their increasingly important digital connections to friends and family. A wide range of data packages, such as the Daily

Data Combo, were made available at competitive prices, while a new partnership between the company and a popular messaging and calling app made it even easier to get free and immediate alerts for prayer throughout the month of Ramadan. Zakat payments enabled online, easing some of the uncertainties of the ongoing lockdown, while Ramadan-specific social engagements were organised, such as religious quizzes and ‘stories from the Quran’ events. Significant contributions were also made during the Holy Month to support the fight against the ongoing pandemic, including a significant donation to the government to acquire medical supplies and equipment, as well as the donation of 50 intubation boxes to the National Disaster Management Authority. To celebrate the end of Ramadan, special meals were shared with migrant workers in temporary shelters.

Sheikh Saud Bin Nasser Al Thani concluded: “It gives me great pleasure this Holy Month to see Ooredoo's corporate ethos demonstrated in an unwavering message, backed up by practical measures across our whole global footprint. Ooredoo teams in the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia have responded responsibly and courageously to the unprecedented and challenging situation we face, exemplifying Ooredoo Group's values, expressed in a genuine commitment to the spirit of our corporate social responsibility.”



# Annexation dangerous threat to efforts to establish peace: Kuwait

## FM takes part in OIC meeting to discuss Israeli practices

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Wednesday headed the Kuwaiti delegation in the Ministerial Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) extraordinary online meeting to discuss the practices of the Israeli occupation. During his speech, Sheikh Ahmad thanked Saudi Arabia and the OIC for this invitation and for this meeting to discuss the Israeli statements regarding the annexation of lands from the West Bank and the imposition of Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea regions.

### Dangerous escalation

Sheikh Ahmad expressed Kuwait's strong denunciation and rejection of the Israeli occupation plans to annex Palestinian lands in the West Bank. "It is important for the international community to realize that such Israeli threats and provocations of annexation are a dangerous escalation that threatens all the efforts and the initiatives made to establish a comprehensive, just and lasting

peace in the region," said Sheikh Ahmad. The Kuwaiti delegation included the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, and Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs for International Organizations, Minister Plenipotentiary Nasser Al-Hain, and a number of senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### Fight against COVID-19

Separately, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah held a virtual conference meeting on Wednesday with Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) Director General Abdulwahab Al-Bader and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta Fore. During the call, the issues related to cooperation were discussed along with Kuwait contribution and efforts to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Jarallah welcomed UNICEF's commitment to open its office in Kuwait, while Fore expressed gratitude for Kuwait's contribution to the international community. — KUNA



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah



**KUWAIT:** Workers sterilize the main hall of the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait City on June 11, 2020, in preparation for hosting worshippers again. Churches in Kuwait are closed since early March due to the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## 268 Central Prison inmates tested positive

**KUWAIT:** All inmates at the Central Prison were tested for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which revealed that 268 had contracted the virus, the Interior ministry said yesterday. It added that 225 have already recovered, while the rest are still receiving medical attention in isolation. The ministry's correctional facilities sector carried out the testing in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

In other news, an expatriate teacher and his wife; a housewife, were arrested and deported for providing pre-nursery services and babysitting infants at their house, said security sources. Meanwhile, an Arab man denied charges of posting slander on his facebook account.

## Kuwait climbs 14 spots on global environmental index

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait surged 14 spots on a reputable global environmental index, ranking 47th internationally and second in the Arab region amongst 180 countries. Yale University Environmental Performance Index ranks nations according to sustainability, environmental health and ecosystem vitality through data on 32 performance indicators. Commenting on the progress, Director-General of Kuwait's Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah commended new policies the country has taken in regards to the environment. In a statement, he also expressed gratitude for the cooperation amongst state institutions, private establishments and volunteer groups that made all this possible. — KUNA

# Friday Times International

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Muslim funeral rites restricted in S Africa

Scientists unlock the secret to the perfect cuddle

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**PARA STATE:** Cemetery workers wear protective suits as they carry out the burial of Edivaldo da Silva, who died at the age of 77 from COVID-19, at the Recanto da Peace Municipal Cemetery in Breves, Para state, Brazil. —AFP

## Latin America passes 70,000 deaths

### Coronavirus slashes global economy

**SAO PAULO:** The coronavirus pandemic advanced steadily Wednesday through Latin America, where the death toll passed the grim milestone of 70,000 fatalities even as Europe planned to reopen its external borders to foreigners in July. The Americas - North and South - remained the epicenter of the global health crisis, accounting for almost half the 412,926 deaths and 7.3 million infections worldwide, based on an AFP tally of figures released by national health ministries by 1900 GMT.

Brazil accounts for almost 40,000 - or more than half - of Latin America's total deaths, registering 1,274 fatalities in the last 24 hours. Even as the virus continued to cut a swath through the country, economic capital Sao Paulo began reopening shops on Wednesday as part of a gradual resumption of activity. Shopping malls were set to reopen in a slew of cities on Thursday, the day before Brazilians celebrate Valentine's Day. Mexico, with nearly 15,000 COVID-19 deaths, and Peru, with almost 6,000 deaths from 208,000 cases, are also battling a deep surge.

However lawmakers in Bolivia, with a relatively small toll of 487 coronavirus deaths, Wednesday approved the date of September 6 for the country's virus-delayed general elections. Elsewhere, tourism-dependent Miami reopened its beaches for the first time in three months amid evidence that despite nearly two million cases and 112,000 deaths from COVID-19 in the US, that the worst may have passed for the economy. "I almost started crying as soon as I came out onto the beach," said travel agent Julie Isaacson, 63. The

US Federal Reserve projected a solid rebound for the US economy next year. Fed Chair Jerome Powell however cautioned that the outlook remains highly uncertain, and both the central bank and Congress may have to do more to boost the recovery.

#### 'Gradual and partial' reopening

Across the Atlantic, the European Union said it hoped to reopen its external borders to foreigners in July, as leaders look to loosen the economic stranglehold of virus lockdowns that are triggering a steep global downturn. Meanwhile the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said in a grim warning that the world economy is on course to contract by at least six percent this year due to virus shutdowns. By the end of next year, the loss of income should surpass that of "any previous recession over the last 100 years outside wartime", the forecast warned.

EU member states have the final say on border measures. But Brussels is suggesting a "gradual and partial" reopening of external frontiers to travellers outside the bloc from July 1, diplomatic chief Josep Borrell said Wednesday. Greece, whose economy depends heavily on tourism, has already announced it will reopen its skies from June 15 to a list of countries including non-EU states such as Australia, China and South Korea.

Austria and Germany also announced they were easing travel restrictions, though Germany extended a warning against travel outside the EU until August 31. In Spain, where more than 27,000

people have died from COVID-19, La Liga soccer championships are set to resume on Thursday for the first time in three months. Meanwhile in Britain, which has the highest death toll in Europe, Prime Minister Boris Johnson defended what he described as the country's "astonishing" efforts to tackle the virus. But one top scientist there said the number of fatalities could have been halved had lockdown measures been introduced a week sooner. Italian prosecutors said they wanted to question Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and the health and interior ministers over how the government handled the pandemic.

#### Second wave fears

Elsewhere around the globe, clusters of infection were growing as governments relaxed restrictions. Earlier this week, the WHO warned against complacency. The WHO's regional arm, the Pan American Health Organization, has warned that the upcoming hurricane season could further hamper the fight against the virus. Iran announced more than 2,000 new cases Wednesday, part of a recent surge the government attributes to increased testing. Indonesia also posted a record number of 1,241 new coronavirus cases, sparking calls from health experts for the world's fourth most populous country to slow down the easing of its lockdown measures. In India's capital New Delhi, authorities say they expect half a million COVID-19 cases that will need 150,000 hospital beds by mid-July. —AFP

## International

# Europe sets sights on dud antibody tests amid COVID-19 free-for-all

## Over 200 tests flood EU market amid coronavirus crisis

**BRUSSELS:** The market for COVID-19 antibody tests is red-hot. It has ballooned in a matter of months as hundreds of products flood the world for people who want to find out whether they've already had the virus. The problem is, some of them don't work properly. As a result, European authorities aim to tighten regulation of the new sector, to weed out tests that give consistently inaccurate results and crack down on companies that make false claims, three sources familiar with the plans told Reuters.

Much is on the line, even beyond the potential for fraud. Governments and companies are relying on these tests to measure how widely the virus has spread as they rush to get their economies and employees back to work and avoid a second wave of infections, even if they do not prove immunity. False results could undermine that effort. Many people have also been using kits, also known as serological or blood tests, at home or for personal checks in clinics.

Since April the number of antibody kits carrying the region's CE mark of quality doubled to more than 200, according to a list compiled by the EU Commission, the EU executive. Some of these kits are unreliable, half a dozen national regulators and industry sources across Europe told Reuters. A dozen tests have been subject to regulators' warnings for mis-selling, including in

Spain and Sweden. At least nine of them are no longer allowed to be sold in the United States, according to a Reuters analysis of public data from the Food and Drug Administration, which clamped down on the sector last month.

The EU Commission is now looking at changing the self-certification regime that allows test-makers to label their products with the CE mark themselves, an EU official and two European regulatory sources told Reuters, declining to be named as the plans have not been made public. Among changes being examined, companies could be required to have tests reviewed by independent watchdogs before placing the CE mark on them, the sources said.

That would mark a significant toughening of the current regime, whereby makers merely self-certify compliance with EU safety rules and supervisors can subsequently penalise them if their claims turn out to be false. Guidance setting out minimum performance criteria for tests could also be adopted, the two regulatory sources told Reuters. Under current rules, kits can carry a CE mark regardless of their accuracy. When asked about the plans, a spokesman for the Commission, the EU executive, said it was "currently considering the best way forward". "We are assessing a number of different instruments available together with member states to see which action is the most appropriate," he added.

### 'Spending lots of money'

Scientists have not yet definitively proven whether or how long COVID-19 survivors are immune to new infections, even if they developed antibodies. Nevertheless, many people are willing to pay for the tests - and many don't come cheap, selling for anything from a few euros to more than 150 euros in some private clinics in Europe.

It's a potentially lucrative business: testing about 450 million people in the EU would cost billions of euros based on such prices. "People might be spending lots of money for nothing," said Pauline Constant of BEUC, a European consumer organization. Severin Schwan, CEO of Swiss drug giant Roche which has its own antibody test, sounded an alarm in late April, when he said some tests on the market were a "disaster". The World Health Organization also warned that tests on the market were not sufficiently reliable and could not prove immunity.

Such comments were backed up by a study conducted by the Dutch regulator who found in May that none of 16 reviewed tests were trustworthy. "The test results are not reliable. The percentage of false positive and false negative results is too high," the study concluded, without naming the manufacturers. "Those tests are quite meaningless," said a spokesman for the Dutch Health and Youth Care Inspectorate, a part of the health ministry that supervises public health. Despite the

poor results, clinics and labs in the Netherlands are still allowed to offer these tests.

### Industry backs rule review

Introducing an independent review of products would bring forward an EU reform that had been agreed before the coronavirus crisis but was not due to take effect until 2022. In the absence of an EU performance standard for tests, France has already set its own thresholds. About 60 kits have met the country's requirement of at least 90% of correct positive results, a measure known as sensitivity, and 98% of correct negative results, so-called specificity. Under current EU rules, overseen and enforced by national watchdogs, manufacturers must seek authorization before using the CE mark only for so-called home or self-tests, which are those who can be performed at home without professional advice. About a dozen antibody devices have been unlawfully marketed as CE-marked self-tests without prior authorization, according to the Spanish and Swedish regulators. Low performance is not in itself illegal and has been tolerated in Europe in the initial phase of the COVID-19 crisis because tests were rare. But companies cannot exaggerate the accuracy of their devices. An official at the Swedish regulator said the body had yet to start performance checks, while two pharmaceutical industry sources said such checks were rare in Europe. — Reuters

## Student mental health in focus

**SHANGHAI:** Some Chinese students returning to school after lockdown are grappling with familial conflict while others are stressing over how coronavirus disruptions have affected their academic performance, teachers and school counselors say. The heightened post-lockdown anxiety has become a matter of central government concern as domestic media report a spate of suicides by young people. It has also led to unprecedented measures by schools and local governments to focus on student mental health - a topic that like suicide has often been taboo in Chinese society.

"There have been some heartbreaking incidents as schools reopened," Yan Wu, vice mayor of the southern city of Zhuhai, said at China's annual parliamentary meeting last month. "This highlights the importance and urgency of promoting mental health development in young students," he said. At the parliamentary meeting, at least four delegates put forward proposals for more attention to be paid to students' psychological needs.

In one Shanghai district, there have



SHANGHAI: A couple pose for their friends next to The Bund Bull on the Bund along the Huangpu River in Shanghai. — AFP

been 14 suicides by primary and secondary school students so far this year - more than annual numbers for the last three years, Li Guohua, deputy mayor of Shanghai's Pudong New Area district, told financial magazine Caixin in May. "It's the tip of an iceberg," he was quoted as saying. Reuters was unable to contact Li or confirm the number with local authorities. The state-owned Health Times also reported on Sunday that nationwide, 18 students had jumped off buildings in the past three months and quoted experts calling for more focus on student mental health. The

article was, however, soon deleted - a common occurrence in China when sensitive topics are raised.

As China eased measures to stem the outbreak of the coronavirus, students began shifting from online classes back to classrooms in March. One online survey of 1.22 million primary and secondary students conducted that month by the southern province of Guangdong's health commission and a university concluded that 10.5% were potentially grappling with mental health issues. Detailed findings were not published. — Reuters

## Americans ask stargazers for virus answers

**NEW YORK:** When might there be a vaccine? Should I move to avoid a second wave of infections? Will I get another job? Americans anxious from the upheaval caused by the coronavirus crisis are turning to astrologers for answers about an uncertain future. Stargazers and tarot card readers in the United States are reporting an uptick in business due to COVID-19 as people seek advice and comfort for their disrupted lives amid sometimes chaotic messaging from leaders. Michele Bell, 54, hired New York City-based astrologer Jenny Lynch after the virus killed her mother in April.

Bell had spent seven years caring for her mom and was now at a loss about what to do with her life. "I was caught in a very toxic energetic field," Bell told AFP. After studying Bell's chart based on her date, time and location of birth, Lynch told her her horoscope suggested 2021 would be a good time to fulfil her dream of living abroad. "She really gave me some new personal growth to navigate to," said Bell. Almost 30 percent of Americans believe that the movement of stars and planets impacts human lives, a 2017 Pew Research Center poll found. Americans spent \$2.2 billion on "psychic services" in 2018, according to market research firm IBISWorld.

As US residents started to grapple with the new world of social distancing and political leaders sent contradictory signals amid an unprecedented, fast-changing situation, traffic to some astrology sites increased slightly, according to media analytics company Comscore. Visits to Astro.com, Cafe Astrology and Astrology Zone were up in March, when America's epidemic broke out, compared to February, Comscore said. — AFP

## International

# ‘Wrapped in plastic’: Muslim funeral rites restricted in COVID-hit S Africa

## S Africa records 52,991 cases; 1,162 deaths

**CAPE TOWN:** Like Muslims across the world, South African Esa Alexander could not pray by his father-in-law's hospital bed or customarily wash and shroud the body after he succumbed to COVID-19 last week. “We could see the body but it was wrapped in plastic so we couldn't touch him,” said Alexander, 52, a photographer in South Africa's coastal city of Cape Town. Cape Town's Western Cape province has recorded over 65 percent of South Africa's 52,991 coronavirus cases and more than three-quarters of its 1,162 deaths. Risk of catching the disease has prevented the city's Muslim community from burying their dead in line with Islamic tradition. “We couldn't kiss him on his forehead,” Alexander recalled, dismayed at the thought of the 79-year-old spending his last moments alone in hospital. “There was no one there to hold his hand,” he told AFP. “Maybe he wanted to say something to the family.”

Undertaker Ebriham Solomon said bodies had to be wrapped in a double layer of plastic, which he said could be quite upsetting for mourning family members. Relatives also had to don face masks, gloves and aprons to lower the body into the ground. Most had not been able to physically accompany their loved ones through their final days. “I did a funeral... of a family whose father went into hospital eight weeks prior to his demise,” Solomon said. “The only contact they had... was via telephone or video call. Then he died (and) the real send off or goodbye wasn't really there.” The undertaker admitted he did not have the heart to charge funeral-goers for the “costly” personal protective equipment (PPE) provided to mourners.

“We can't burden the family with extra costs,” Solomon said. “A normal funeral is already costly.” Cape Town resident Farhan Richards found her grandfather's funeral on Tuesday “different and difficult”. “No washing was done on the body which was really sad and upsetting because in our religion



**CAPE TOWN:** Members of a Muslim burial organisation prepare the body of a man who died of COVID-19 coronavirus for burial, at the Ghiyatmatiel Islamia Mosque in Athlone, Cape Town. — AFP

that's one of the last rites we need to do,” the 27-year-old said. She regretted not being able to see her grandfather's body before he was buried by funeral workers rather than family, which she also found distressing. “Nobody was allowed to get

that closure,” Richards said. “When they were done putting the body in the hole what I found very disturbing is that they disposed of their PPE wear alongside the body,” she added. “That is dishonoring our dead.” — AFP

## India denies visas to US panel on religious freedom

**NEW DELHI:** India has turned down a travel request for members of a US government panel seeking to review its religious freedom, saying such foreign agencies had no standing to assess the constitutional rights of citizens. Since taking power in 2014, the Indian government has faced criticism for attacks on Muslims and the panel has called for the world's biggest democracy to be designated a “country of particular concern”, along with China, Iran, Russia and Syria. The call by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) was made in an April report urging sanctions against officials of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government after it excluded minority Muslims from a new citizenship law.

Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said the government firmly repudiated the surveys of the commission, which had little knowledge of the rights of Indian citizens, describing it as biased and prejudiced. “We have also denied visas to USCIRF teams that have sought to visit India in connection with issues related to religious freedom,” he told a lawmaker from Modi's ruling group in a June 1 letter. The step was taken because the government saw no grounds for a foreign entity such as the USCIRF to pronounce on the state of Indian citizens' constitutionally protected rights, he added.

Reuters has reviewed a copy of the letter to Nishikant Dubey, an MP who had raised the issue of the panel's report in parliament. The US embassy in New Delhi referred all queries to the commission based in Washington D.C., which was not immediately available to respond. The commission is a bipartisan US government advisory body that monitors religious freedom abroad and makes policy recommendations to the president, the secretary of state, and Congress. However, these are not binding. India would not accept any foreign interference or judgment on matters related to its sovereignty, Jaishankar added. — Reuters

## Denmark calls in Saudi envoy over terror plot

**COPENHAGEN:** The Saudi ambassador was summoned to the Danish foreign ministry on Wednesday after terrorism charges were laid against three leaders of an Iranian Arab separatist group based in Denmark. They are suspected of having received funds from Saudi Arabia. Danish police said they were prosecuting “three people for financing and promoting terrorism in Iran, including in collaboration with a Saudi intelligence service”. “We will not accept such activities under any circumstances and our ambassador in Riyadh has repeated the same message directly to the Saudi authorities,” Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said in a statement, in which he deplored “new very serious charges”.

The trio, all living in Denmark and mem-

bers of ASMLA (Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz), have been facing prosecution since February for spying for Saudi intelligence. According to Danish intelligence service PET, they worked for Riyadh between 2012 and 2018. They are also alleged to have been the target of a planned attack on Danish soil in the autumn of 2018 which Copenhagen believes was sponsored by the Iranian regime in retaliation for the killing of 24 people in Ahvaz, southwestern Iran, in September 2018.

Tehran has formally denied the attack plan in Denmark. Shia Iran regularly accuses Saudi Arabia as well as the United States and Israel of supporting the separatist groups. Sunni Saudi Arabia is the Islamic Republic's main rival in the Middle East. “It is completely unacceptable that foreign countries and their intelligence services bring their conflicts to Denmark and that Denmark is used as a starting point to finance and support terrorism,” said PET director Finn Borch Andersen in a statement. ASMLA is based in Denmark and the Netherlands, according to the Dutch authorities. — AFP

## International

# Hug me tender: Scientists unlock the secret to the perfect cuddle

## ‘Just don’t squeeze too tight’

**TOKYO:** In this era of social distancing and depressing news, we could all do with a good hug. Now scientists have analysed what makes the perfect cuddle - just don't squeeze too tight. A team from Japan's Toho University measured the calming effect on infants of hugs of different pressures, and when given by strangers compared to from parents. By monitoring heart rates for the infant and using pressure sensors on the adult's hand, the researchers assessed the baby's reaction to just being held, a hug with medium pressure, and what they called a "tight hug." According to the results, published in the journal *Cell*, babies were

soothed more by a medium-pressure hug than just being held but the calming effect decreased during a "tight" hug.

The researchers kept the length of the hug to 20 seconds as "it was almost impossible to avoid infant's bad mood during a one-minute or longer hold or hug," they admitted in their paper. Unsurprisingly perhaps, for infants older than 125 days, the calming effect was greater when receiving a hug from a parent than from a female stranger. So, the perfect hug is considered to be medium pressure from a parent, the scientists believe. The infants are not the only ones who feel the benefits of a comforting

hug, the research showed. Parents also exhibited significant signs of calmness while hugging their child. It is known that a hormone called oxytocin, sometimes known as the "love hormone", is released during close physical contact but the researchers said the time period of their hug experiment was too short for this to play a role.

The scientists believe their research is the first time the physiological impact of hugging infants has been measured and say their work should advance knowledge of parent-child bonding and child psychology. There could also be an application in the early detection of autism,

Hiromasa Funato, one of the researchers on the team said. The research centers on the various sensory inputs received during a hug — this is what alters the heart rate, explained Funato. "Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have difficulties in sensory integration and social recognition," he said. "Therefore, our simple hug experiment might be utilized in the early screening of the autonomic function (that regulates unconscious bodily processes), sensory integration, and development of social recognition in infants with high familial risk for ASD," concluded the scientist.— AFP

## COVID-19 fallout takes a heavy toll on young workers

**LONDON:** When Britain went into coronavirus lockdown on March 23, the management at Pierre's employer, a recruitment start-up in London, told staff not to worry about their jobs. But just hours later, the 26-year-old received an email from his boss asking him to call. "I understood right away. It was fairly brutal," he told AFP. He was then laid off with about 15 percent of his colleagues. Pierre is far from being an isolated case in Britain, which is gradually easing out of stay-at-home restrictions, after an outbreak that has left more than 40,000 dead.

The Resolution Foundation, which aims to improve living standards for low- and middle-income families, estimated up to 640,000 18-24-year-olds could lose their jobs this year. That will take the number of unemployed in that age group to over one million, the think-tank said. Its projection is backed up by the Institute of Student Employers, which said more than a quarter of companies are cutting back on graduate recruitment.

Internships are also being reduced by almost a third, it added, after questioning 124 companies. The pattern looks set to be repeated elsewhere, with concerns that job losses, purchasing power and confidence could hit young people, just as did in the 2008 financial crisis. Half of the world's so-called "Millennials" - those aged 25-34 - and the "Generation Z" of 18-24 year olds were already feeling the effects of the global economic meltdown, according to a study by consultancy firm Kantar in May.

Other studies, including those from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Labor Organization, indicate the pandemic is worsening inequality. Young and less qualified people are often on the frontline in the fight against the virus, the OECD noted. The ILO said one in six under-29s had stopped working since the outbreak began and those who have kept their jobs have seen their working hours reduced by 23 percent.

The Kantar study indicated that a majority of young people expect to suffer the consequences of the crisis in the future — more than any other generation. Young women are particularly vulnerable. British group the Young Women's Trust said more than a third (36 percent) worked in sectors hardest hit by lockdown measures, such as catering, retail, leisure and entertainment. For men, the figure is 25 percent. — AFP



BEIRUT: Fishermen gather along Dbayeh's seaside shore, north of the Lebanese capital Beirut. — AFP

## Egypt extends curfew as virus infections rise

**CAIRO:** Egypt will extend a night-time curfew by a further two weeks in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Information Minister Osama Heikal said yesterday, as infections rise. Heikal told a news conference the measure would be enforced from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am, from Sunday June 14 until the end of the month.

Working hours for shops will be until 6:00 pm, instead of 5:00 pm, he said. "Tourism and flights to coastal cities with the lowest infection levels will be restarted from July," the minister added. It is not clear when flights to the capital,

Cairo, will resume.

Heikal also said the government will look into reopening places of worship in cities with low infections starting next month. Since March, authorities have halted air traffic, shuttered schools and closed tourist and religious sites to slow the spread of the virus among Egypt's 100 million people. The health ministry has so far recorded 1,342 deaths out of 38,284 confirmed cases.

Since late last month, it has been reporting more than 1,000 new cases a day. The government has been seeking to gradually loosen lockdown measures, allowing hotels to partially reopen and resuming some public services it had suspended. Last month, Egypt's doctors union warned that a major COVID-19 outbreak could trigger a "complete collapse" of the country's health system. — AFP

## International

# Exhausted Indian doctors fear virus crisis has only begun

## 'We don't know when this is going to peak'

**NEW DELHI:** Doctors in one of India's top private hospitals shuffle through the intensive care unit wearing full protective suits. Every bed is occupied by coronavirus patients, and fear is building that the worst is still to come.

"We don't know when this is going to peak," Dr Deven Juneja told AFP during a pause from his rounds at the Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital in New Delhi, as heart monitors beeped throughout the ward.

"All of us are hoping for the best, but we are mentally and physically prepared for the worst."

Indian authorities have in recent days been loosening their months-long lockdown on people movement that had been aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus.

However they were forced into the easing for economic reasons and, while people across the country of 1.3 billion resume more normal travel, the number of infections is soaring.

There are almost 10,000 new confirmed cases every day and declared infections are now over 275,000 — the fifth highest in the world.

Officially there have been nearly 8,000 coronavirus deaths, although the true number is widely believed to far higher.

Newspapers carry stories of patients dying after being denied care. The government is turning cricket stadiums into field hospitals. Crematoriums are struggling to cope.

In New Delhi, the situation is particularly dire with the city government this week predicting the caseload will balloon 20 fold to more than half a million by the end of July, which the health care system appears woefully ill-prepared for.

Ambulances arrive constantly at the Max hospital, which like other private facilities in the teeming city of 20 million people has been ordered by the government to set aside 20 percent of its beds for coronavirus patients.

With families not allowed to see virus patients, Juneja has to double up as a caregiver, although he is unable to even hold his patients' hands. "All of us are trying to keep our morale up in these difficult times," he said.

"We have to keep ourselves motivated and keep going every day."

Juneja said the surge had started to be felt over the past few days, with an increase in the number of people looking for a bed.

"That has definitely increased the load on us. We want to get our patients well as soon as possible and try to create more beds for our patients," he said.

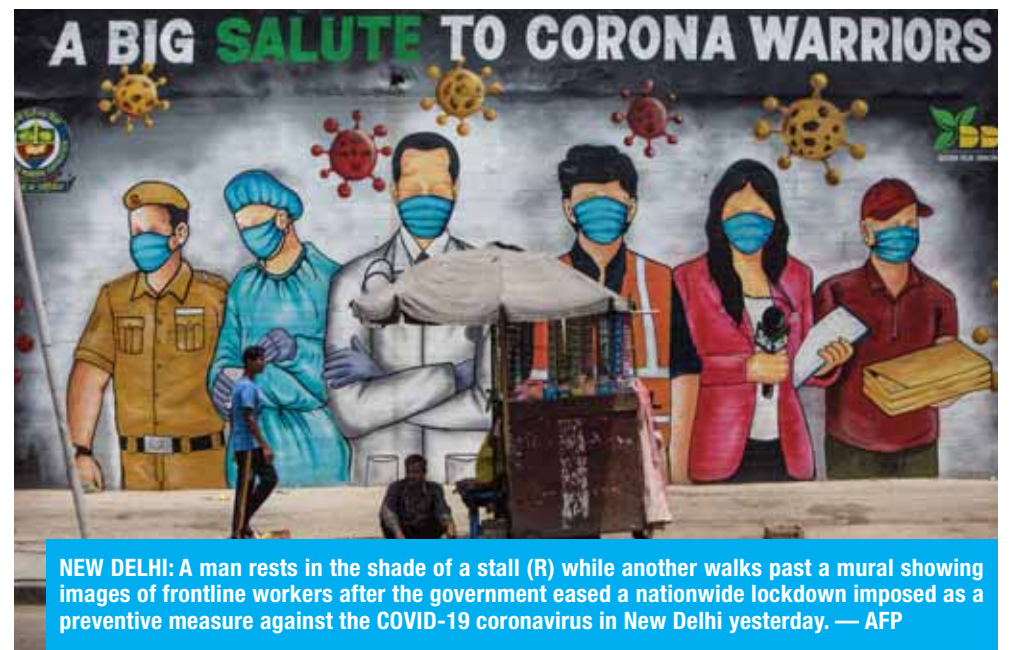
### Courage

The hospital has had to transform drastically, demarcating green and red zones as well as converting the maternity section into a coronavirus care facility.

Posters of Winnie the Pooh and smiling babies greet anxious patients as staff in full protective gear — their names hand-written in black marker pen on the front — screen allcomers for fever and other symptoms.

"I think it definitely scares us a bit, because you never know from where the infection can enter your body," said Jyoti Ester, an infection care nurse.

Vinita Thakur, a nurse in a covid ward, said



**NEW DELHI:** A man rests in the shade of a stall (R) while another walks past a mural showing images of frontline workers after the government eased a nationwide lockdown imposed as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

wearing the protective suits for long hours in the hot Indian summer required immense "physical and mental courage".

"After putting on the PPE we can't drink water, can't eat, can't even go to the washroom," Thakur said in between attending an elderly patient in the ICU.

"There is a lot of sweating and because of that we get burns and rashes. But we have to do

it, we are on the frontline, we can't make any excuses."

A patient on his way to recovery in the ICU told AFP he could not thank the healthcare staff enough.

"I think all these hospital staff are just like God because they risk their own lives to treat patients," said Bhupinder Sharma, 55. "There can be nothing greater than this." — AFP

## George Floyd's brother implores US Congress to act on police reform

**WASHINGTON:** The brother of George Floyd, whose killing by police sparked worldwide protests against racism, made an emotional plea to the US Congress Wednesday to "stop the pain" and pass reforms that reduce police brutality. One day after burying his brother in Houston, Philonise Floyd appeared in person before a House hearing, where he described the anguish of watching a viral video of George's death and demanded lawmakers act to fix law enforcement problems including systemic racism.

"I'm here to ask you to make it stop. Stop the pain," the younger Floyd said.

"I can't tell you the kind of pain you feel when you watch... your big brother, who you looked up to your whole entire life, die — die begging for his mom," he said.

"He didn't deserve to die over \$20," he said, referring to his brother's alleged effort to use a

counterfeit bill before his arrest.

"I'm asking you: is that what a black man is worth, \$20?" Floyd thundered. "This is 2020. Enough is enough." Floyd, who wore an anti-virus mask bearing an image of his brother, wiped his forehead and fought back tears as he implored lawmakers to "listen to the call" he and protesters were making for justice.

"Maybe by speaking with you today, I can make sure that his death will not be in vain."

### 'The pain of America'

George Floyd, 46, died in police custody in Minneapolis on May 25, when a white officer, who has since been charged with murder, pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes. Protests — some violent, most peaceful — erupted nationwide in some of the most serious US civil unrest in generations.

Lawmakers united in expressions of sorrow and support for Floyd, with longtime House Republican Jim Sensenbrenner telling him: "The pain of your brother I think has become the pain of America."

The five-hour-plus hearing came after congressional Democrats unveiled a package of reforms this week aimed at ending police brutality.

The legislation would ban choke holds, make it easier to prosecute officers for abuse, require anti-racism training and bar fired personnel from working in police forces in other districts.

It would also restrict police departments' use of qualified immunity, which shields officers from being held personally responsible for wrongdoing. "If there is no accountability," Floyd family lawyer Benjamin Crump said, police brutality and other abuse "will keep happening."

House Judiciary Committee chairman Jerry Nadler said that while most cops were decent and law-abiding, there was a "systemic problem" in law enforcement that requires comprehensive solutions.

"The nation demands and deserves meaningful change," Nadler said.

With lawmakers agreeing on the need for a genuine discussion about police treatment of African Americans, several Republicans including Jim Jordan expressed their desire to enact reforms.

"It's as wrong as wrong can be," Jordan told Philonise Floyd about George's death, "and your brother's killers will face justice."

Lawmakers heard too from the sister of a security officer who recently died in Oakland, California in a shooting blamed on protesters.

"We will never solve generational, systemic injustice with looting, burning, destruction of property and killing in the name of justice," said Angela Underwood Jacobs, who extended her condolences to Floyd's brother.

She also described as "ridiculous" calls by leftist activists to "defund the police," an effort that has been attacked by President Donald Trump and Republicans as dangerous and misguided.

Tensions rose during an exchange between House Democrat Hakeem Jeffries and Dan Bongino, a conservative radio host and former Secret Service officer.—AFP

## International

# Overworked, underpaid Brazil nurses risk lives to care for patients

## 'Nursing was always an overworked profession'

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Hans Bossan is 40 hours into his 72-hour work week, but despite his marathon nursing shifts and the pandemic claiming an alarming number of his colleagues' lives in Brazil, he barely looks tired.

Bossan works three jobs to provide for his wife and two-year-old daughter — at two different hospitals and a mobile emergency unit.

Double and triple shifts like his are not unusual in Brazil, where the average salary for nurses, nursing assistants and health care technicians is just 3,000 reais (\$600) a month for a 30- to 44-hour work week. The coronavirus pandemic, which has thrust health care workers into the spotlight around the world, has in Brazil also highlighted the plight of nurses, who often face bad working conditions and are now getting sick and dying from COVID-19 at a startling rate.

"Nursing was always an overworked profession, and this pandemic has just made things worse," said Bossan, 41.

"We're highly undervalued. Nurses deal directly with patients, with the virus, we're on the front lines of the war. But not everyone realizes that," he told AFP at his home in a poor neighborhood on the eastern outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.



### Marathon nursing shifts

Nurses have been hit particularly hard as Brazil has become the latest epicenter in the pandemic, with 39,680 deaths, behind only the United States and Britain.

Around 18,000 nurses in Brazil have been infected with COVID-19, and at least 181 have died — among the highest numbers in the world, according to the International Council of Nurses.

Last month, nurses protested in the capital, Brasilia, against the poor working conditions they blame for contributing to their colleagues' deaths. Brazil accounts for nearly one-third of the 600 deaths among nurses and other health professionals registered worldwide by the International Council of Nurses, though the organization says many countries are not doing enough to track the real number.

### 'Anxiety and depression'

More than 80 percent of Brazil's 2.3 million nurses are women. Often they work double and triple shifts caring for patients and then go home to care for their own families — now with the added worry of infecting them.

"It's a time of great anxiety and depression" for the profession, said Nadia Mattos, vice president of Brazil's Federal Nursing Council (Cofen).

When the initial flood of cases hit Brazil's



**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Health professionals check a patient infected with COVID-19 at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Doctor Ernesto Che Guevara Public Hospital in Marica, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil. —AFP

hospitals, health care workers faced shortages of protective equipment and inadequate training on dealing with the new virus, she said.

Although the situation has improved with time, "we're still getting lots of complaints about lack of protective gear or low-quality equipment," she said. The council has set up virtual psychological counseling for nurses, available 24 hours a day.

The group has also pushed for years for nurses' minimum salary to be increased to

\$1,200 a month, double the current average.

### Heroes without capes

One of Bossan's jobs is in the intensive care unit at Che Guevara Hospital in Marica, about 60 kilometers (35 miles) outside Rio. Working behind a face shield with a mask underneath, he monitored the constantly beeping machines helping to keep his patients alive. One of them, 56-year-old Eliane Lima, thanked her health care team from behind her oxygen mask. —AFP

## Cuba's active elderly undeterred by virus

**HAVANA:** The elderly are the most vulnerable demographic to the deadly coronavirus pandemic but in Cuba, despite food shortages and widespread poverty, many senior citizens are still out and about, mainly undeterred.

"Who's old?" jokes 85-year-old Caren More, who lives with her sister Olga, 74, and brother William, 71, in a modest home in Havana. All three suffer from various stages of senile dementia and are among the substantial elderly population on island nation of 11 million. "Age is a risk factor with this illness... Our population has been ageing," said Francisco Duran, the director of epidemiology at the health ministry. "There are provinces and municipalities with an (average) age group over 60, it's high and they have to be protected."

Of the more than 2,100 people infected in Cuba, 63.7 percent were elderly. Meanwhile 80.7 percent of the country's 83 deaths occurred in people over 80 years old.

Cuba has one of the largest proportions of elderly in the region. Most of the country's older citizens have to make do with a pension worth \$10 and must rely on help from family members, although health care is free and medicine is cheap.

Other seniors live alone or in shelters. They have a monthly food portion but it's not enough. Havana's El Vedado municipi-

ality has the highest average age in the country. It's where 31-year-old musician Degenis Bofill lives. He's part of the Corona Volunteers group that helps at-risk people, such as Caren More and her siblings, whom he brings food.

"It's about them not being alone," he said. "Old people in Cuba are very strong. Sometimes when I'm buying food I meet old people in the queue who say to me: I'm not going to stay in my house because if I do, how am I going to eat?" Bofill said.

Olga More echoed the same sentiment: "We feel fine, and with all the companions and friends who come to this modest house to visit us, what more could we ask for?"

### 'Afraid of nothing'

In Arroyo Naranjo, on the outskirts of Havana, 70-year-old Sergio Ballesteros gets up early to look after the field of sunflowers beside his house.

Wearing a face mask, he works alone, able to maintain social distancing rules. "I'm looking after myself, I don't go out but I've kept working. And if you neglect the land, you lose everything," he said. The widower with two children and four grandchildren has worked this way for 40 years. He was nine when the communist regime led by the late Fidel Castro came to power following the 1959 revolution.

Ballesteros has been through tough times before, such as the economic crisis of the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union, which until then was Cuba's main foreign ally.

"At this age I'm not afraid of anything. I've had worse. I've had a heart attack, I've been operated on for cancer. I've been



**HAVANA:** A Cuban young man brings food to Olga (R), 74, and Carmen More O'Farill, 85, as they remain isolated at her home in Havana, amid concern over the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

through various stages.

"Do you think I'm going to be afraid of the virus now? No. Of course, I don't want to die, but I'm not afraid."

Emilio Garcia, 81, is still repairing truck breaks at a workshop in his house. He relaxes in his garden or by playing the lute. Garcia has already lost his brother and sister-in-law, who lived in Spain, to the pandemic. —AFP

## International

# Outbreak quashed, China launches test laboratories spending spree

## New labs are being installed in hospitals

**BEIJING:** China is building hundreds of testing laboratories and stocking up on tests to ramp up screening for the coronavirus, even in healthy people, having all-but stamped out local transmission of the disease. China is looking to make testing universal, available in every corner of the mainland. Procurement documents and official notices show it is sharply expanding its testing capability, already the world's largest, extending it even to rural health facilities as it looks to revive the economy after an unprecedented plunge in the first quarter.

On Monday, the National Health Commission said it would look to "normalise" nucleic acid testing

"If they're willing to be checked, check them all," said the policy notice. Life is increasingly returning to normal in China, where the outbreak first emerged in the city of Wuhan late last year. Last month, Wuhan tested around 6 million people over 10 days at a cost of 900 million yuan (\$127 million), an initiative some experts said largely had the benefit of boosting confidence.

Unlike many countries, tests are widely available in China. Ben Cowling, an infectious disease specialist at Hong Kong University, said he expects many organisations in China to arrange regular screenings of staff. "Testing is expensive, but perhaps not as expensive in China because the reagents

and machines tend to be produced in China," he said.

"It's also not as expensive as local or city-wide lockdowns might be, if outbreaks became larger before being identified."

### NATIONWIDE BUILD-UP

Hundreds of bidding documents issued by hospitals and centres for disease control (CDC) in every province since the beginning of May list requirements for new testing labs, painting a picture of a fast-paced national programme.

The most expensive items are polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines, a key testing component documents show can cost up to \$99,000.

### Nucleic acid testing

Chinese organisations bought 257 PCR laboratories in the last 30 days, according to listings on procurement platform Jianyu360, compared with an average of 21 per month in the previous 12 months.

Those figures represent a fraction of the total, as not all projects are detailed in public procurements. For over two weeks after the virus was identified in January, no hospitals in Wuhan - a city of 11 million - were equipped to conduct tests, meaning no new cases were confirmed until days before the city's lockdown.

Most of the new labs are being installed in hospitals, and most cost between 100,000 and 3 million yuan (\$15,000-\$420,000).



SHENYANG: Researchers work in a lab at the Yisheng Biopharma company in Shenyang, in China's northeast Liaoning province on June 10, 2020. The company is one of a number in China trying to develop a vaccine for the COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

Some institutions require all equipment to be produced within China, though others call for specific foreign-made gear, including PCRs made by Switzerland's Roche Holding AG and U.S.-based Bio-Rad Laboratories Inc.

### PRICE CONTROLS ON TESTS

China has said it can produce 5 million test kits a day, and provincial governments have imposed strict price controls on manufacturers.

Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, compels test makers to cut prices for bulk orders, driving them as low as 16.78 yuan for a nucleic acid test, and 12.9 yuan for an antibody-based kit, according to fig-

ures released on May 9.

Medical institutes will be barred from offering tests if they refuse to buy kits from the few companies that secured contracts at government-negotiated prices, Hubei authorities said.

China does not say how many tests it has conducted, but the figure is widely believed to far surpass other countries. By comparison, the U.S. CDC reported over 20 million tests conducted as of June 5.

"I think everyone will take the tests, even many tests," said Lu Meiping, one of thousands of university students set to return to Beijing this month under quarantine and testing programmes. —Reuters

## Australian PM calls for protesters to be charged

**SYDNEY:** Black Lives Matter protesters should be punished for ignoring coronavirus lockdown rules Australia's prime minister said yesterday, sparking anger by also claiming slavery never existed in the country.

Tens of thousands of Australians demonstrated this week against systemic racism at home and in the United States, and more protests are planned for the coming days.

Critics have called for marches to be banned on health grounds, sparking debate over freedom of speech and the country's colonial past.

Conservative leader Scott Morrison said the protests violated social-distancing rules and hampered lifting a coronavirus shutdown, endangering the economy. Asked during a radio interview if demonstrators should be charged, he said: "I think they should." —AFP

## Malaysia says Rohingya boat tried to enter its waters

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A boat carrying hundreds of Rohingya tried to land in Malaysia this week but turned back after spotting patrol vessels seeking to stop the entry of migrants over coronavirus fears, an official said yesterday.

The boat is believed to have been at sea for three to four months and tried several times to enter the country's waters on Monday before giving up, Malaysian coastguard chief Zubil Mat Som told AFP.

The country has long been a favoured destination for the persecuted Muslim minority from mostly Buddhist Myanmar, with thousands undertaking perilous sea crossings each year.

They usually travel from Myanmar or Bangladesh, where many live in squalid refugee camps, but Malaysia has strengthened maritime patrols in recent months over fears the refugees could be carrying the virus. Up to 300 Rohingya were on

board the latest vessel, Zubil said.

"The presence of navy ships, coastguard vessels and police boats at sea discouraged the migrant boat from entering our waters," Zubil said, adding the vessel was last spotted in Thai waters not far from Malaysia.

They were originally part of another group of 269 Rohingya that was allowed to land in northwest Malaysia on Monday after officials discovered their boat was too badly damaged to be turned back.

Rights groups say the migrants set off from Bangladesh in one vessel but were later separated into two. Malaysia has vowed to send the latest arrivals back to Bangladesh.

Zubil said people-smugglers have now resorted to trying to bring Rohingya into the country using speed boats, which are harder to detect than the rickety fishing trawlers they usually travel on.

"These syndicates are making offers to owners of speed boats to take the illegal migrants into the country," he said. Countries across Southeast Asia have tightened border security to stop the entry of migrants over virus concerns.

Hundreds of Rohingya have in recent times been rescued off Bangladesh after being stranded for long periods on boats, with scores dying on one vessel after Malaysia and Thailand denied it entry. —AFP



## International

# South Korea adoptee seeks recognition as birth father's child

## I begged on my knees out of desperation

**SEOUL:** Growing up in Michigan, Korean-born Kara Bos always knew she was adopted. But when she finally located her assumed half-sister, the woman closed the door in her face and called police. Now a court will rule Friday in a landmark case on Bos' demand to be officially registered as her father's child. It could set a precedent offering nearly 250,000 adoptees a chance to demand legal recognition as members of their biological families — and uncover a host of long-hidden family secrets. Bos, now 38, was two when she was found alone at a Goesan market, south of Seoul, and 10 months later she was adopted by an American couple. She rarely thought about her birth family growing up, but when her daughter turned two, it hit her “deeply what it really meant to abandon a child at this age”.

“I thought about the excruciating pain my mother must have gone through to have to do this, and I wondered about the circumstances she could have been in to have to choose this painful path,” Bos said. Efforts to trace her parents through adoption records proved fruitless, so she submitted a DNA sample to an online genealogy platform in 2016 and found she was related to a young Korean man studying abroad.

They established a relationship and worked out their common ancestor had to be his grandfather — the only person who could tell her who her mother was.

But his family wanted nothing to do with her, re-

jecting her request to meet her father. “It didn’t matter the countless emails I sent begging and promising secrecy and never to contact them again if I could just find out my truth,” she said.

“Even when I begged on my knees out of desperation in front of his oldest daughter’s door for a face to face they would not allow me, and instead called the police on me,” she told AFP, calling her plight “excruciatingly painful”.

She filed a paternity suit, a move that revealed the man’s address. When she appeared at his door asking in basic Korean if he knew her face, he “looked straight at me but then waved me off”.

Nonetheless a court-ordered DNA test showed there was a 99.987 percent probability he was her father. “I just started wailing,” Bos said. “The truth had just set me free.”

Bos is seeking to be included in the man’s family registry, an official Korean document detailing all household members. If Friday’s court rules goes in her favour she will be the first South Korean adoptee so recognised, giving her a legal entitlement to an inheritance and making her eligible to apply for South Korean citizenship.

Around 250,000 South Korean children have been adopted since the 1950s, according to Seoul’s welfare ministry data, most of them overseas — the country was once among the biggest sources for international adoption.

After the Korean War it was a way to remove

Zoom acknowledged that it had shut down and restored the account after the attention.

“Just like any global company, we must comply with applicable laws in the jurisdictions where we operate,” a Zoom spokesperson said.

“When a meeting is held across different countries, the participants within those countries are required to comply with their respective local laws.

“We aim to limit the actions we take to those necessary to comply with local law and continuously review and improve our process on these matters.” The activists voiced outrage, charging that the company may have been under direct pressure from China’s communist leaders.

“If so, Zoom is complicit in erasing the memories of the Tiananmen Massacre in collaboration with an authoritarian government,” Humanitarian China said in a statement.

It called Zoom an “essential” resource in reaching audiences inside China, which rigorously enforces censorship. Zoom reported Tuesday that its earnings had soared in the quarter ending April 30 as both companies and friends, cooped up inside due to COVID-19 lockdowns, embrace the platform to meet virtually.

Its rapid growth has not been without previous problems, with the company forced to confront a rash of racists and other unwelcome gatecrashers who hack into Zoom sessions.

Beijing has developed a sophisticated “Great



**SEOUL:** This picture taken on June 10, 2020 shows Korean adoptee Kara Bos (L) talking with Kim Do-hyun (R), president of a rights group for Korean-born adoptees, at KoRoot in Seoul. — AFP

children, born to local mothers and American GI fathers, from a country that emphasised ethnic homogeneity. More recently, it has been unmarried pregnant women who still face stigma in a patriarchal society — and are often forced to give up their

babies. Hosu Kim, a sociology professor at the City University of New York who researches South Korean birth mothers, around 10 percent of adoptions “point to extra-marital affairs”, with the resulting children never acknowledged. —AFP

## Zoom briefly shuts account over Tiananmen

**WASHINGTON:** Zoom said Wednesday that it had temporarily closed a US account of activists who met to mark the anniversary of China’s crackdown in Tiananmen Square, raising alarm over free speech on the fast-growing video-meeting service. US-based rights campaigners turned to Zoom, which has become a way of life for many people during the coronavirus lockdown, to connect more than 250 people to remember Beijing’s crushing of the pro-democracy uprising on June 4, 1989.

The group Humanitarian China said it had brought in numerous participants from inside China, which has tried to erase memories of the bloodshed — and that its paid Zoom account was shut down without explanation one week later.

The shutdown was first reported by news site Axios. Zhou Fengsuo, a co-founder of the group who was number one on Beijing’s most-wanted list after the Tiananmen crackdown, told AFP that the Zoom account was reactivated on Wednesday.



**HONG KONG:** Activists hold a candlelit remembrance in Victoria Park in Hong Kong, after an annual vigil that traditionally takes place in the park to mark the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown was banned on public health grounds because of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Firewall” that aims to keep out news that is damaging to the leadership.

Authorities go to extraordinary lengths each year to ban commemorations of the Tiananmen crackdown, in which the military killed hundreds of unarmed protesters — by some estimates, more than 1,000 — who had packed the capital to seek

reform. PEN America, the literary group that defends free speech, denounced Zoom’s move.

“We wouldn’t tolerate it if a phone company cut off service for someone expressing their views in a conference call; we shouldn’t tolerate it in the digital space either,” said the group’s CEO, Suzanne Nossel. —AFP

## International

# North Korea warns US to stay out of inter-Korean affairs

## Washington should 'hold its tongue and mind its internal affairs'

**SEOUL:** North Korea rebuked Washington yesterday for criticising its decision to cut communication links with Seoul, warning it to stay out of inter-Korean affairs if it wanted to ensure a smooth presidential election. In a statement carried by the KCNA news agency, a senior North Korean foreign ministry official slammed the "double-dealing attitudes" of the US as "disgusting".

Washington should "hold its tongue and mind its internal affairs first", said Kwon Jong Gun, director general of the Department of US Affairs, if it wanted to avoid experiencing a "hair-raiser" and ensure the "easy holding" of November's presidential vote.

The implicit threat comes just a day before the two-year anniversary of the landmark summit in Singapore where Kim Jong Un shook hands with Donald Trump, becoming the first North Korean leader to meet a sitting US president.

Negotiations over the North's nuclear programme have been deadlocked since the collapse of a second Trump-Kim meeting in Hanoi

last year over what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in exchange for sanctions relief.

Analysts say it has taken no substantive steps towards giving up its weapons but the impasse has left Pyongyang frustrated over the lack of concessions.

It has increasingly turned its anger towards Seoul rather than Washington, carrying out a series of weapons tests in recent months.

Since last week it has issued a series of vitriolic denunciations of the South, and on Tuesday announced it was cutting all official communication links with its neighbour.

The US State Department said it was "disappointed" by the decision.

Seoul and Washington are security allies and the US stations 28,500 troops in the South to protect it from its neighbour. Pyongyang is subject to multiple UN Security Council sanctions over its banned weapons programmes but has carried out a series of tests in recent months — often describing them as multiple launch rocket systems, although Japan and the US have called them ballistic missiles. — AFP



In this picture taken on June 7, 2020 and released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (C) speaks during the 13th Political Bureau meeting of the 7th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in an undisclosed location in North Korea. — AFP

## Australia won't be 'intimidated' amid China economic threats

**SYDNEY:** Australia warned yesterday it would not be intimidated by attempts at economic "coercion" after China threatened to undermine the multi-billion dollar flow of Chinese tourists and students to the country.

Beijing has issued warnings in recent days that Chinese should avoid Australia due to concerns about racist incidents targeting ethnic Asians during the coronavirus pandemic.

The comments were the latest salvo in a long-brewing diplomatic dispute between Australia and its largest trading partner.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison dismissed yesterday allegations of racist treatment of Chinese as "rubbish".

"It's a ridiculous assertion and it's rejected," he said during a radio interview. "We have an important trading relationship with China and I'd like to see that continue," Morrison said.

But he warned his government would "never be intimidated by threats" or "trade our values in response to coercion from wherever it comes".

During the pandemic racism toward Asians has reportedly increased, according to the New South Wales anti-discrimination commission.

Tensions have grown steadily in recent years between the two governments as Australia has moved

to counter Chinese moves to build its influence both domestically and across the Pacific region.

More recently Canberra angered Beijing by leading calls for an international probe into the origin and handling of the coronavirus pandemic in central China.

China has since taken several steps targeting trade with Australia, including the attempts to discourage Chinese travellers, who represent the biggest groups of foreign tourists, and overseas students.

The effect of Beijing's travel advice will only be known once Australia's borders — closed to all non-essential inbound and outbound travellers due to the pandemic — reopen.

Education is Australia's fourth-largest export with more than 500,000 international students enrolled last year, bringing about Aus\$37 billion into the economy.

After Canberra's support for a 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

## Dozens killed as south China hit by floods and rainstorms

**BEIJING:** Floods and mudslides in south China have uprooted hundreds of thousands of people and left dozens dead or missing, state media reported yesterday.

The bad weather has wreaked havoc on popular tourist areas that had already been battered by months of travel restrictions during the coronavirus outbreak.

Torrential downpours unleashed floods and mudslides that caused nearly 230,000 people to be relocated and destroyed more than 1,300 houses, official state news agency Xinhua reported, citing the Ministry of Emergency Management.

In southern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, six people were reported dead and one missing, Xinhua said.

Streets were waterlogged in popular tourist destination Yangshuo, forcing residents and visitors to evacuate on bamboo rafts.

The local government said more than 1,000 hotels had been flooded

and more than 30 tourist sites damaged. One owner of a family-run hotel told Xinhua that the guest rooms were submerged in one metre (three feet) of rainwater.

The extreme weather has dealt a hefty blow to the region's tourism sector, which is still reeling from the COVID-19 epidemic.

The emergency management ministry said there were direct economic losses of over 4 billion yuan (more than \$550 million) from the flooding, Xinhua reported.

In Hunan Province, at least 13 people were killed in rain-triggered disasters, and another eight people are missing or killed in southwestern Guizhou province, according to the local emergency response departments, Xinhua said.

The heavy downpours began at the beginning of June and have led to "dangerously high water levels" in 110 rivers, Xinhua reported. Further rainstorms are expected in the next few days across the south. — AFP

# Friday Times Lifestyle

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**JK Rowling says she is survivor of sexual assault**

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White King, the first white lion cub to be born in Spain, is fed a bottle of milk at the Guillena World Park Reserve in Sevilla on Wednesday.—AFP

**Coronavirus puts damper on Albania's blowout wedding tradition**

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**In Spain, the white lion cub whose mum didn't want him**

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## Lifestyle | Features

# 'Gone with the Wind' removed from HBO Max after racism protests

**"G**one with the Wind" was removed from the HBO Max streaming platform Tuesday, as mass protests against racism and police brutality prompt television networks to reassess their offerings. The multiple Oscar-winning US Civil War epic released in 1939 remains the highest-grossing movie of all time adjusted for inflation, but its depiction of contented slaves and heroic slaveholders has garnered criticism. "'Gone With The Wind' is a product of its time and depicts some of the ethnic and racial prejudices that have, unfortunately, been commonplace in American society," an HBO Max spokesperson said in a statement to AFP. "These racist depictions were wrong then and are wrong today, and we felt that to keep this title up without an explanation and a denouncement of those depictions would be irresponsible."

Demonstrations have swept the United States since the May 25 killing of African American George Floyd while in police custody, with calls growing for police reform and the broader removal of symbols of a racist legacy, including monuments to the slave-holding Confederacy. Floyd died last month as a white Minneapolis officer pressed a knee into his neck for almost nine minutes. The officer has been charged with second-degree murder.

"12 Years A Slave" writer John Ridley said in a Los Angeles Times op-ed Monday that "Gone with the Wind" must be removed as it "doesn't just 'fall short' with regard to representation" but ignores the horrors of slavery and perpetuates "some of the most painful stereotypes of people of color." The film will return to the recently launched streaming platform at a later

date, along with a discussion of its historical context, the company said. No edits will be made, "because to do otherwise would be the same as claiming these prejudices never existed." "If we are to create a more just, equitable and inclusive future, we must first acknowledge and understand our history."

### 'Normalized injustice'

Meanwhile Tuesday, long-running reality series "Cops" was canceled by Paramount Network. The show followed real-life US officers on duty for over three decades, but had been accused of glamorizing aspects of policing and distorting issues such as race. "'Cops' is not on the Paramount Network and we don't have any current or future plans for it to return," a network spokesperson told US media Tuesday. Police shows—both reality and scripted—are among the most-watched on US television but have come under scrutiny. Civil rights group Color of Change, which campaigned against the show for its depiction of suspects and alleged masking of racism in police forces, welcomed the news Tuesday. "For 30 years, #COPS has normalized injustice and misrepresented crime, policing and race," tweeted president Rashad Robinson. "But it's far from the only crime TV show to do so." Dan Taberski, whose podcast "Running from Cops" claimed the show allowed police to remove unflattering material during editing, said he was "hopeful its cancellation 31 years later is a sign of positive change to come." Popular reality cop show "Live PD" has also been removed from schedules, while Jessica Alba-starring scripted procedural "LA's Finest" saw its season premiere delayed Monday.



In this file photo a copy of the book "Gone With the Wind" by Margaret Mitchell, signed by producer, director, and most of speaking cast of the 1939 Hollywood film, is pictured 18 October 2007 in Los Angeles. —AFP

And in the UK, the BBC said it had pulled sketch show "Little Britain"—which features scenes where white actors wear makeup to portray characters from other ethnic backgrounds—from its iPlayer streaming service. "Times have changed since Little Britain first aired so it is not currently available on BBC iPlayer," a spokesperson for the national broadcaster said Tuesday. —AFP

## Oscars board elects 'Selma' director as diversity increases

**T**he organization behind the Oscar awards elected "Selma" director Ava DuVernay on Wednesday as it slightly increased its number of female and black governors. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has repeatedly been hit with criticism in recent years for a lack of diversity both among its members, and among the Oscar nominees and winners they select. "As a result of this election, the number of female Academy governors increases from 25 to 26, and people of color increases from 11 to 12, including the three Governors-at-Large," the Academy said in a statement.



Ava DuVernay

DuVernay's election comes well after the #OscarsSoWhite movement was launched in January 2015 in response to the Academy picking an all-white slate of nominees—the same year "Selma" was in contention. The movie about Martin Luther King Jr's civil rights march did earn a best picture nomination, and won best original song, but was seen to have been snubbed in other categories. Its star David Oyelowo, who failed to pick up a nomination, last week claimed Academy members had threatened to sink the "Selma" after cast and crew protested the death of Eric Garner with "I Can't Breathe" T-shirts at the film's 2014 premiere.

The Academy responded on Thursday, tweeting: "Ava & David, we hear you. Unacceptable. We're committed to progress." The expression "I Can't Breathe" has once again become a rallying cry for anti-racism protesters after the death of George Floyd last month. Garner and Floyd were both African American men who were suffocated to death in police custody. Four of those joining the board for the first time are women, including Lynette Howell Taylor—who produced this year's Oscars ceremony—while Whoopi Goldberg was among those re-elected. —AFP

## JK Rowling says she is survivor of sexual assault

**"H**arry Potter" author JK Rowling revealed on Wednesday she is a survivor of domestic abuse and sexual assault. The celebrated British writer said in a blog post that she was disclosing the information to give context to her controversial past comments about transgender women. "This isn't an easy piece to write," Rowling said in a 3,695-word essay on gender identity and her own troubled past. "I've been in the public eye now for over twenty years and have never talked publicly about being a domestic abuse and sexual assault survivor," Rowling wrote. "This isn't because I'm ashamed those things happened to me, but because they're traumatic to revisit and remember."

Rowling caused a scandal by tweeting last weekend about "people who menstruate". "I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" The tweet forced "Harry Potter" star Daniel Radcliffe to apologise to trans women who may have been offended by Rowling's remark. "Transgender women are women," Radcliffe wrote in a post for The Trevor Project website. The feud dated back to comments from December in which Rowling expressed support for a woman who had lost her job over what her employer deemed to be "transphobic" tweets.

Rowling said on Wednesday that "accusations and threats from trans activists have



JK Rowling

been bubbling in my Twitter timeline" ever since. "Huge numbers of women are justifiably terrified by the trans activists: I know this because so many have got in touch with me to tell their stories," she wrote. Rowling ended her post by affirming that she was "a survivor (and) certainly not a victim". "I haven't written this essay in the hope that anybody will get out a violin for me, not even a teeny-weeny one," she said. "I've only mentioned my past because, like every other human being on this planet, I have a complex backstory, which shapes my fears, my interests and my opinions."

'Mentally sexless'  
Rowling said she had spent many years thinking about trans issues because of her own troubles with gender identity when she was young. "When I read about the theory of gender identity, I remember how mentally sexless I felt in youth," she wrote. "As I

didn't have a realistic possibility of becoming a man back in the 1980s, it had to be books and music that got me through both my mental health issues and the sexualised scrutiny and judgement that sets so many girls to war against their bodies in their teens." The 54-year-old said she spent a period feeling "ambivalence about being a woman" before learning that "it's OK to feel confused, dark, both sexual and non-sexual, unsure of what or who you are".

She also argued that "the current explosion of trans activism" has resulted in too many people undergoing gender reassignment surgery without giving it sufficient thought. "I want to be very clear here: I know transition will be a solution for some gender dysphoric people, although I'm also aware through extensive research that studies have consistently shown that between 60-90 percent of gender dysphoric teens will grow out of their dysphoria," she said. "So I want trans women to be safe. At the same time, I do not want to make... girls and women less safe." But she also stood up for her right to speak freely about an issue that she said has been with her throughout life. "As a much-banned author, I'm interested in freedom of speech and have publicly defended it, even unto Donald Trump," she wrote. Rowling's books have been banned in parts of the world because of their association in some cultures with witchcraft and the occult. —AFP



Elona Demollari wears a wedding dress at Geraldina Sposa salon in Tirana.—AFP photos

## Coronavirus puts damper on Albania's blowout wedding tradition

Elona Demollari does not know when her big day will come, but she is trying on wedding gowns anyway as Albanians yearn for the return of the big, brash weddings that are a cornerstone of social life in the poor Balkan country. Albanian nuptials traditionally bring together hundreds of guests for lavish feasts and all-night dancing, with families often taking years to scrape together enough money to afford them. Yet because of the coronavirus pandemic thousands of couples are unable to say their vows with the fanfare they dream of, and the new health restrictions have brought a multi-million euro industry to its knees.

Small gatherings are permitted, but such a ceremony is out of the question for Demollari, a 31-year-old prison director who wants a big blowout with more than 300 guests. In any case, the bride-to-be also has no choice but to wait as the pandemic has stranded her fiancé, a construction engineer, in Italy for the past three months. Her sister, meanwhile, is marooned in Canada. So she is taking her time with the preparations, seizing on the recent reopening of the Geraldina Sposa wedding salon in Tirana to try on some gowns. "Despite the pandemic, I haven't given up. It's a challenge," she said. The average salary in Albania, one of Europe's poorest countries, is around 400 euros (\$450) a month.

But money is often no object when it comes to wedding bashes, with a price tag that can mount to tens of thousands of euros. Often both families throw celebrations, with village festivities that can last for days. "It is a tradition in Albanian society. We spend beyond our means for the wedding day. We like to look good even if we can't afford it," said Marcela Lati, who runs the Geraldina Sposa salon with her husband.

### Superstition

Couples who set their wedding dates before the virus arrived in Albania, where it has claimed some 35 lives, must also contend with local superstition. "Changing the date of a wedding is bad luck, which is one of the reasons we decided to keep it," said Erion Mucollari, a 30-year-old computer engineer. She and her partner had planned to invite 400 people but settled for a small house party, complete with protective masks and gloves, in April while the country was under lockdown. Those who do decide to wait may also put off moving in together, as sharing a roof before marriage is still not "widely accepted by traditional families", said Elsa Ballauri, a human rights activist. In Albania's strongly family-oriented society, marriage is "a very important institution because it perpetuates family ties," said Aferdita



Marcela Lati, owner of Geraldina Sposa salon, shows the new arrival collection of wedding dresses on her salon in Tirana.

Onuzi, an anthropologist. It is also a "matter of honour" for parents, she said. Instead of toasting "to your health", Albanians will often wish a youth: "to your marriage!"

For now, party spaces are quiet while dresses hang idly at wedding shops. "Brides should be wearing them, dancing beautifully surrounded by

200 people," laments shop owner Armanda Toska, who also produces a reality TV show centred on weddings. She says the coronavirus is the enemy of a wedding's most important element—atmosphere. "We Albanians are very energetic people, we like to celebrate, we like music, to party loudly with a large number of guests."—AFP

## Fossil of 2 million year old frog found in Argentina

Argentine paleontologists have uncovered fossilized remains of a rare species of frog that lived two million years ago, the science and technology agency at the La Matanza national university said Monday. "We know very little about prehistoric frogs and toads," said Federico Agnolin, a researcher at the Natural Science Museum. "Frogs and toads are very sensitive to climate and environmental changes, which makes them an important source to understand past climates." The fossil was discovered 44 meters (144 foot) underground during the digging of a well in San Pedro, around 180 kilometers to the north of the capital Buenos Aires.

It consisted of a "very small humerus (arm bone) of a tiny amphibian, distinct from horned and tree frogs," said Angolin. Despite the fossil's size, it was possible to identify the frog because Anuras, the tailless amphibians group to which frogs and toads belong, have a unique structure at the distal end of the humerus that forms the elbow joint, Angolin said. That peculiarity gave the frogs great agility. "Discovering a new species of amphibian from the end of the Pliocene—beginning of the Pleistocene is a huge boon for Argentine paleontology," he added. The Pleistocene geological epoch began around 2.6 million years ago. —AFP

## Tourism returns timidly and cautiously to Cancun

Maria Eugenia Sanchez and Sebastian Fernandez basked in the brilliant Cancun sunshine having snapped up a deal as part of the Mexican seaside resort's reopening following three months of coronavirus lockdown. "We wanted to leave the country this year and go to Europe, but due to this situation with the lockdown and (lack of) money it wasn't possible. So we decided to take advantage of the deals and come to Cancun for a few days," Sanchez told AFP. The couple, both of whom are in their 30s and work in a law firm in Mexico City, spent \$80 on their airfare, around \$100 less than the normal cost. "We've come to relax, to free ourselves from stress after so much tension and uncertainty," said Fernandez, who was working remotely while in Cancun. They were among the few tourists to arrive as the town reopened its doors on Monday.

Tourism accounts for 90 percent of the economy in the southeastern Quintana Roo state where Cancun is located, and local authorities have declared it an essential activity—although hotels are not allowed to exceed 30 percent capacity. Tourism in the rest of the country of 127 million will be reactivated according to local risk levels. Mexico is one of the 10 most visited countries in the world and tourism accounts for 8.7 percent of its GDP.

But it is also one of the worst hit countries in Latin America by the coronavirus pandemic. With more than 124,000 cases, it has the fourth

highest number of infections in the region, and with over 14,600 deaths, it comes in second only after Brazil for fatalities, according to Wednesday's figures. Cancun, one of the most popular tourist destinations, has recorded 325 deaths and more than 1,500 cases.

### 'Nothing to eat'

Approximately 40 hotels have reopened, with staff disinfecting surfaces and lounge chairs beginning early in the morning. They were authorized to open after northern Quintana Roo's status was changed from red to orange under Mexico's new "traffic light" plan to restart the economy. When the area achieves yellow status, hotels will be allowed to increase capacity to 50 percent, and full occupancy will be permitted once Quintana Roo is declared a green zone. Hotels have opened with strict rules about social distancing, disinfection stations and face masks for staff.

Starting last week the regional tourist promotion council began intensive advertising to attract foreign visitors. Mario Ruiz, one of 90,000 sector employees laid off during the crisis, has already had interviews for a new job. With no salary and unpaid rent building up, he's at the end of his rope. "There's nothing to eat. They tell us to stay at home because you can catch it, but you can't (stay home). Not even the rich can!" Ruiz told AFP. —AFP

## Lifestyle | Features

# COACHELLA MUSIC FEST CANCELLED FOR 2020 DUE TO PANDEMIC



In this file photo fans react to performances at the 2017 Stagecoach Country Music Festival at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California.

California's premier desert music fest Coachella, which had been postponed until October because of the coronavirus pandemic, has been cancelled for 2020, health officials announced Wednesday. The festival, held annually in Indio, California, was initially set to take place over two weekends in April and was to be headlined by Rage Against the Machine, Travis Scott and Frank Ocean. It was moved to October as the deadly COVID-19 virus spread across the United States.

However on Wednesday Riverside County Public Health Officer Cameron Kaiser decided to scrap the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and Stagecoach Country Music Festival. "I am concerned as indications grow that COVID-19 could worsen in the fall," said Kaiser. "In addition, events like Coachella and Stagecoach would fall under Governor (Gavin) Newsom's Stage 4, which he has previously stated would require treatments or a vaccine to enter. "Given the projected circumstances and potential, I would not be comfortable moving forward." Kaiser said he was aware that his decision would impact many people but stressed that his first priority was to protect the health of the community. The Coachella festival is one of numerous high-profile events, including South by Southwest and Ultra Music Festival, that have been cancelled because of the pandemic.—AFP



In this file photo taken on April 30, 2017 fans react to performances at the 2017 Stagecoach Country Music Festival at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on January 22, 2015 people visit Disneyland in Anaheim, California.—AFP

## Disney eyes July restart for California theme parks

Disneyland in California announced plans Wednesday to reopen next month—but at "significantly limited" capacity, and with no opportunities to hug Mickey Mouse or high-five Donald Duck for the time being. Under the plans—which still require government approval—the resort near Los Angeles, including Disneyland and Disney California Adventure, would welcome visitors back beginning July 17. Disneyland is the world's second-most visited theme park, drawing tens of thousands of visitors each day, but it closed in mid-March due to coronavirus concerns.

The move comes on the heels of the successful reopening of Shanghai Disneyland last month, and follows a similar timetable to the restart of Disney World in Florida, which has already received government approval. Theme parks provide a significant portion of the Mouse House's revenue. Last month, Disney said the division's quarterly operating income fell 58 percent from a year earlier, largely due to the coronavirus pandemic. When the California parks reopen, all guests will need to book reservations in advance, and social distancing measures mean no parades or "nighttime spectacles" until a later date. "While character meet-and-greets will be temporarily unavailable, characters will be in the parks in new ways to entertain and delight guests," Disney said in a statement.

Hotels at the site would reopen the following week under the scheme. The plans were unveiled as calls on social media and a Change.org petition grew for Disney's parks to rebrand their "Splash Mountain" rides. The popular log flumes are based on the controversial 1946 Disney film "Song of the South"—a movie long accused of peddling racist tropes about the post-Civil War South, and never released on home video in the United States.—AFP

## Khloe Kardashian doesn't care what people think about her appearance

The 35-year-old reality TV star was recently slammed by fans for being unrecognizable after posting new pictures to Instagram but Khloe is unconcerned. A source told Us Weekly: "Khloe doesn't care about the backlash she's been getting from fans saying she doesn't look like herself in her recent photos. "She thinks she looks great. And actually [she] does not care what people think as long as she's happy." And Khloe can see the funny side of the situation, as she

clapped back at a fan who asked why she looked so different by joking: "My weekly face transplant clearly." Meanwhile, it was recently revealed that Khloe is "reconnecting" with Tristan Thompson in lockdown. The former couple decided to isolate together in Khloe's house amidst the current Covid-19 pandemic so they could both be with their daughter True, two, but it has been claimed they are closer than ever, after their bitter break-up when Tristan cheated on her by kissing pal

Jordyn Woods. A source told Entertainment Tonight: "Khloe and Tristan have been isolating together and have really enjoyed their time with daughter True. "This alone time has really allowed them to reconnect without outside influences."—Bang Showbiz



Khloe Kardashian



Zoo director Juan Luis Malpartida feeds a bottle of milk to White King, the first white lion cub to be born in Spain, at the Guillena World Park Reserve in Sevilla.—AFP photos



Zoo director Juan Luis Malpartida presents White King.

## In Spain, the white lion cub whose mum didn't want him

His name is White King, he's 10 days old and the zoo says he's a real "teddy bear". But the lioness who bore him rejected him after a traumatic birth. Born on May 31, the cub is the first white lion born in a Spanish zoo. Curled up in the arms of Juan Luis Malpartida, director of the Mundo Park zoo near the southern city of Seville, he's getting no shortage of cuddles and even a bottle of milk. "It was a bad birth," he told AFP, adding that the mother, a white lioness brought over from Thailand four years ago had "laboured for 14 or 15 days before giving birth". And when he finally emerged, he was a hefty little fellow. "Just imagine what she went through, I don't know how she got him out," says Malpartida, a 73-year-old who has spent his life surrounded by animals.

In the first three days, he didn't feed and after realising his mother "wasn't paying him any attention", they pulled him out of the compound, dehydrated and suffering from "hypothermia and

hypoglycemia". By Wednesday, the change was evident. "It's the first day I've seen with his head held up, trying to run," he said. For now the mother appears happy enough after her ordeal. "She's totally calm," he said, indicating she appeared to have put the trauma of the birth behind her. "She wanted to be free of the cub, she was ready to mate again."

White King will be one of the biggest attractions when this zoo, which counts 3,000 animals, reopens on Thursday following a three-month closure due to the epidemic. For now, the Mundo Park staff will keep looking after him. "When we see he's ready to be reunited with his parents, we'll do it. But it's a delicate issue because then he will competing with his father" for the mother's attention. — AFP



White King, the first white lion cub to be born in Spain, sits on grass at the Guillena World Park Reserve.



White King, the first white lion cub to be born in Spain, is presented to the press.

## Galapagos welcomes six new 'Darwin's flycatcher' chicks

Six little vermilion flycatcher chicks have hatched in the Galapagos Islands, officials said Tuesday, in a boost to the dwindling numbers of the brilliantly coloured songbird. Just 40 breeding pairs remain on the upper part of Santa Cruz island in the archipelago, located 620 miles (1,000 kilometres) off the coast of Ecuador and made famous by Charles Darwin's studies of their breathtaking biodiversity. Also known as Darwin's flycatcher, the bird has been registered on a dozen islands.

Park officials are trying to boost the population by clearing introduced plant species from the island floor that make it difficult for the chicks to feed, Galapagos National Park director Danny Rueda said. Rangers are also placing larvicide at the base of their nests to prevent parasitic flies from entering the hatchlings of the young, where they feed off their blood with fatal consequences.

The island province is a Natural World Heritage Site and is home to unique flora and fauna. In January a scientific expedition to the Galapagos Islands discovered a tortoise with a "strong" genetic link to a presumed-extinct subspecies made famous by a popular specimen named Lonesome George. George, the last known member of the *Chelonoidis nigra abingdonii* Pinta tortoise species, died on Santa Cruz aged over 100 in 2012 without ever breeding.—AFP



Handout photo released by Galapagos National Park of a Darwin's flycatcher or little vermilion flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus nanus*) in the Santa Cruz island of Galapagos on December 18, 2019.—AFP

## 'We'll be back': Italy prison escapees promise to return

Two inmates who escaped from a prison in Rome last week left guards a courtesy note, saying they had business to take care of but would be back shortly, a newspaper reported Tuesday. The two cousins, Davad Zukanovic, 40, and Lil Ahmetovic, 46, broke out of Rebibbia prison overnight on June 2 by scaling a wall using a water hose left in a courtyard. But before they escaped, they left a note in their cell explaining they had personal reasons for needing to flee, said the Repubblica daily.

They were driven by "the need to protect their children from a nasty business they had got themselves into," the daily said, paraphrasing the contents of the letter. The inmates specified that only they could make things right, as their wives were also both in jail. At the end of the signed note, Zukanovic and Ahmetovic promised to return in about 15 days once everything was sorted, the paper said. The men were serving sentences until 2029 for non-violent crimes, including fraud and receiving stolen goods. — AFP



A woman wears a Venice carnival mask during a tourism event to mimicking the Italian holiday experience in Vilnius.



People sit for a "white dinner" during a tourism event to mimicking the Italian holiday experience in Vilnius.

# Roman Holiday: Lithuania capital turns Italian as virus stops travel

With virus travel restrictions preventing summer holidays abroad, Lithuania's capital is offering a low-cost alternative by mimicking the look and feel of different countries at weekends. France, Japan and the US are among the more than half-a-dozen nations that Vilnius residents can get a taste of without leaving the Baltic city. Last weekend Italian music filled the Old Town, while local restaurants offered Mediterranean dishes as green, white and red flags fluttered nearby.

Aurelija Baniulaitiene, a Lithuanian civil servant who came

with a friend to an open-air restaurant, said the southern European atmosphere helped her "leave the lockdown cocoon". In the weeks to come, the theme will change to India, the United States, France, Spain, Germany and Japan. Rasa Kliostoraityte, a translator who presented three books by contemporary Italian writers as part of the initiative, hoped it would allow "people to enjoy the Italian spirit without leaving the city".



Visitors check out the legendary Italian Vespa scooters and Italian Alfa Romeo cars at Town Hall Square during a tourism event to mimicking the Italian holiday experience in Vilnius, Lithuania on June 6, 2020.—AFP photos





A woman wears a Venice carnival mask during a tourism event.



An entertainer dressed up as Super Mario the Italian plumber makes giant bubbles for children in the Bernardine Garden.

Her husband, Italian-born singer Mario Di Pasquale, had mixed feelings before taking his guitar to the stage near the 17th century St John's Church bell tower that dominates the city's skyline. "I had to think if it is fine to celebrate Italy now, when it is suffering so much pain," the 44-year-old told AFP. "I have not forgotten the victims for a moment and I pay my respect with my songs. Italians themselves started singing folk songs from balconies when the outbreak started," he added.

A short walk away, in a former Jewish neighbourhood, jeans designer Milda Paukste used pieces of denim to stitch an outline of the Italian peninsula on a sheet laid out in the street. "On top of it, I put everything Italian that I found at home, from spaghetti to a Versace perfume and a cup of espresso. I see it as a creative way to educate people," said Paukste, 35. In the nearby Town Hall Square, hundreds of Lithuanians admired a collection of iconic Vespa scooters and Alfa Romeo cars.



People pose for a photo during a tourism event.



An entertainer dressed up as Super Mario the Italian plumber makes giant bubbles for children in the Bernardine Garden.



People sit in cafes during a tourism event to mimicking the Italian holiday experience in Vilnius.



An entertainer dressed up as Super Mario the Italian plumber makes giant bubbles for children in the Bernardine Garden.



A map of Italy made from old jeans and other Italian guide books and photos are on display during a tourism event.



A woman presents a map of Italy made from old jeans and other Italian guide books and photos during a tourism event.

#### 'Great for kids'

Lithuania itself re-opened for tourists from most European countries earlier this month after containing the spread of the disease. Reported COVID-19 deaths stand at just 71, with case numbers at 1,720 in the eurozone nation of 2.8 million people. Many European countries are beginning to re-open their borders but health concerns are hindering efforts to bring visitors back and the travel. In the capital's Bernardine Gardens, the entrance gate invited visitors to enjoy "An Italian holiday in Vilnius". Inside the park, a children's entertainer was disguised as the video game character Super Mario, an Italian plumber. "This is great for kids after the quarantine. A nice opening of the summer season," Justina Sapokiene said as her five-year-old daughter played with the character in his trademark red overalls and a blue shirt.—AFP



Women dressed for the Venice carnival during a tourism event.



People sit in cafes during a tourism event to mimicking the Italian holiday experience in Vilnius.





An Italian music group performs at Konstantinas Sirvydas Square.



People sit in cafes during a tourism event to mimicking the Italian holiday experience in Vilnius.



Visitors check out the legendary Italian Vespa scooters and Italian Alfa Romeo cars at Town Hall Square.



Visitors check out Italian Alfa Romeo cars at Town Hall Square.

Kids Page

Daily SuDoku

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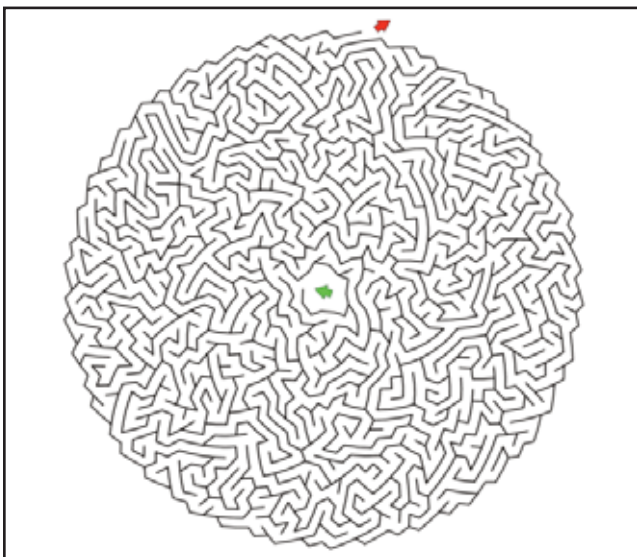
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Yesterday's Solution

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3	4	9	6	1	7	8	2	5
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very hard

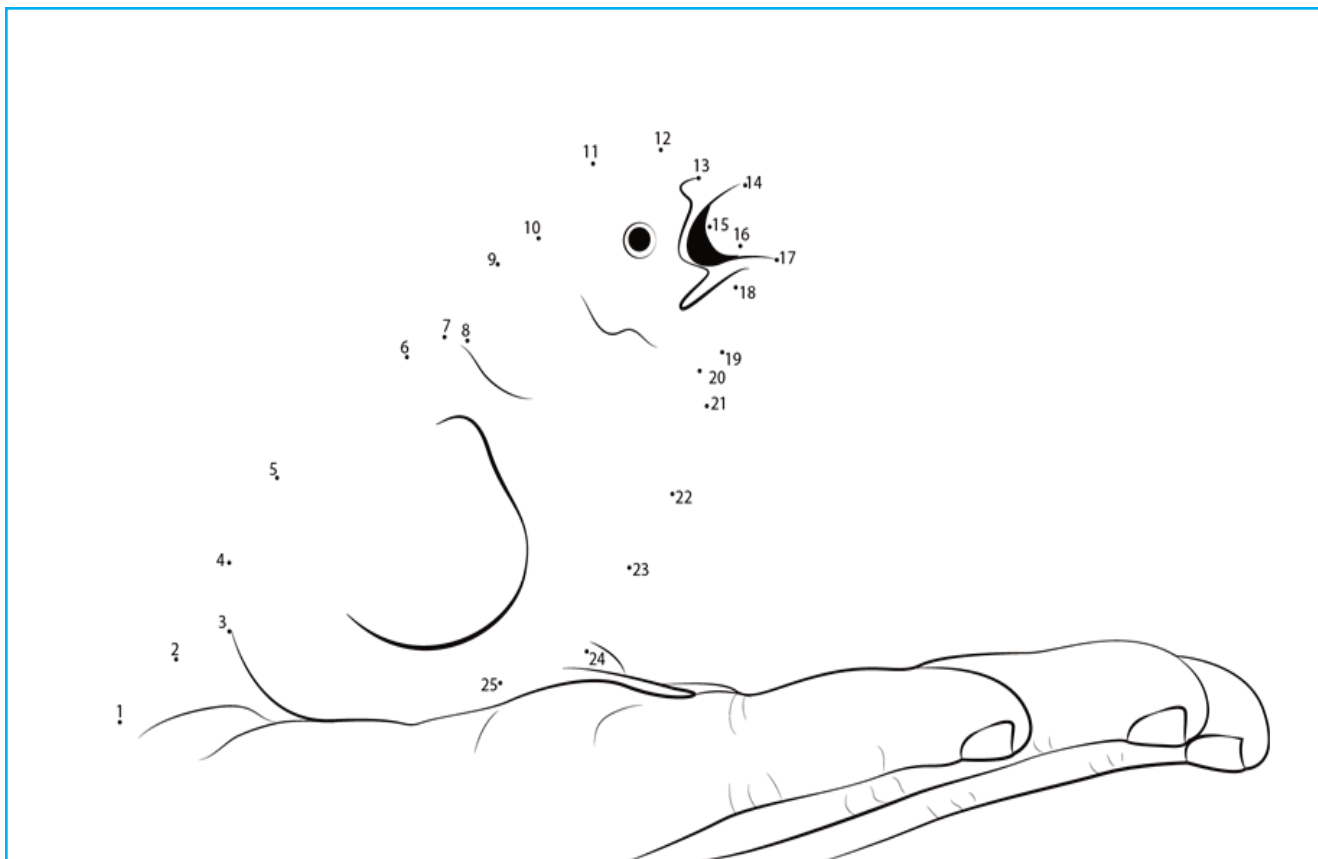
Kids Mazes



Color It



### Join the dots



### Word Search

#### Lights, Camera, Action!

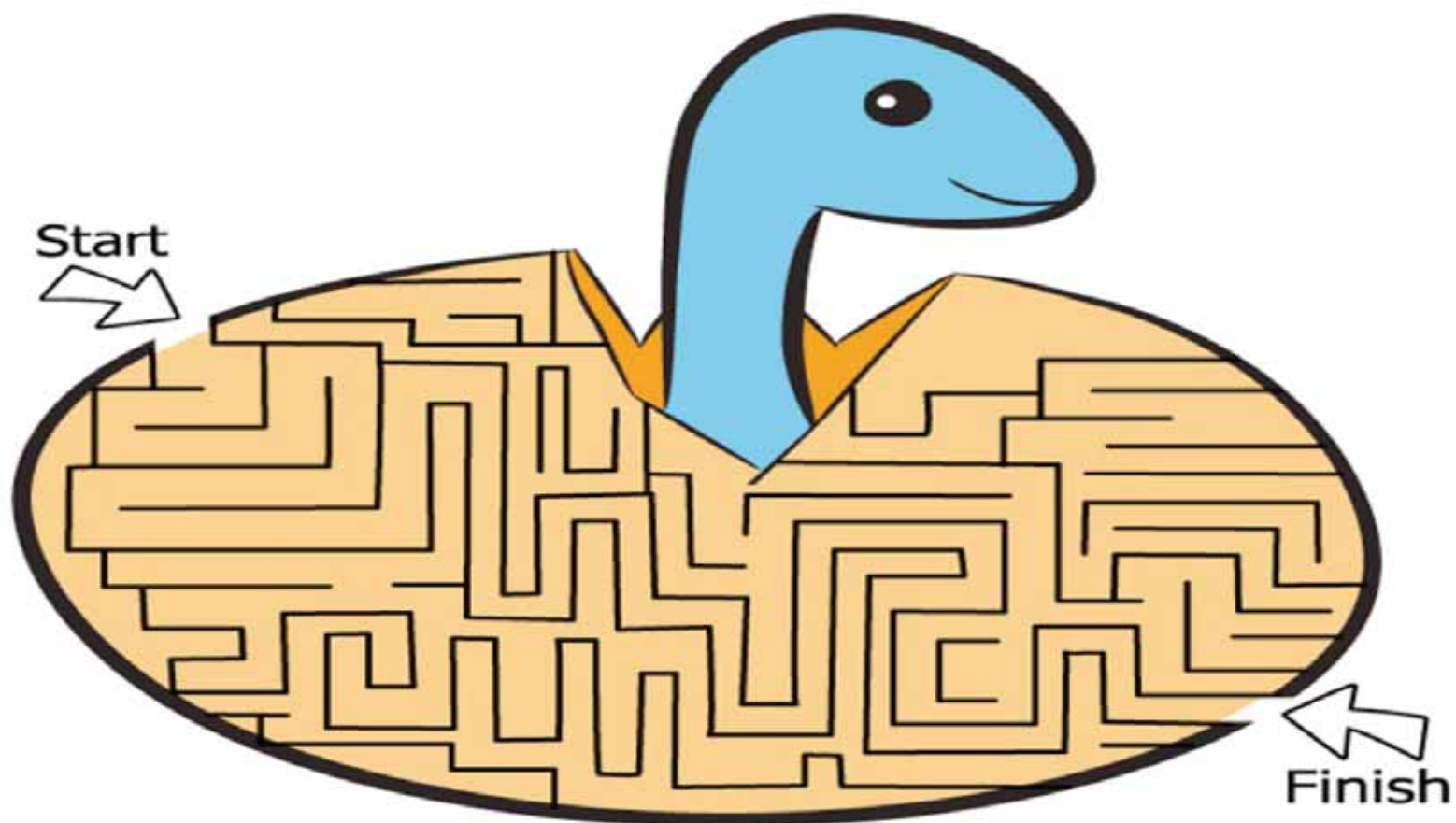
Find and circle all of the movie related terms that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a Roger Ebert quotation.

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T S E R U T N E V D A E S R E M A K E
N O U O P G W O O L C T S D O S M H Y
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R O L O C N O I T C I F E C N E I C S
    
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|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| ACTOR           | DOCUMENTARY | PREQUEL         | SOUNDTRACK         |
| ADVENTURE       | DRAMA       | PROJECTOR       | SPECIAL EFFECTS    |
| ANIMATION       | ENDING      | PROP            | STAR               |
| BIOGRAPHY       | EPIC        | REEL            | STILL              |
| BLACK AND WHITE | FAMILY      | REMAKE          | STORYLINE          |
| CAMERA          | FANTASY     | RETAKE          | STUDIO             |
| CINEMATOGRAPHY  | FILM        | ROMANCE         | SUPPORTING ACTRESS |
| CLASSIC         | HERO        | SCENERY         | SUSPENSE           |
| CLOSEUP         | HORROR      | SCIENCE FICTION | THEME              |
| COLOR           | MAKEUP      | SCREEN          | THRILLER           |
| COMEDY          | MUSICAL     | SEQUEL          | TWIST              |
| COSTUME         | PLOT        | SILENT          |                    |

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## Stars

## STAR TRACK

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

A group with which you're affiliated with could suddenly seem to grow closer, and a family feeling could develop among its members. One of the members could suddenly appear to you in a new light, Aries, and a romantic attraction might develop. Whether you pursue it or not depends on your situation, but you'll still feel closer to your friends now. Some intimate conversations could take place amid discussions of other matters.

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

Family members might want to get out in the world today, perhaps to attend a festival or rally. This is an excellent day to do this sort of thing, Taurus. You should be feeling especially energetic and enthusiastic, and you're likely to attract some interesting new people your way. Expect your mind to be stimulated by lectures or speeches given by public figures. Hop in the car, get out, and have some fun.

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

Family members who live far away might be planning a visit in the future, and you could discuss it at some length today, Gemini. A lot of phone calls or emails could be exchanged. You might be considering a move to another state or country, but you aren't likely to make definite plans now. Whatever your plans, however, they're likely to prove exciting and cause you to anticipate the future. Enjoy your day.

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

Insights shared by a family member could lead to possible ways to increase your income. Expect to handle a lot of paperwork regarding money, Cancer, but this is a positive development and definitely should leave you feeling good about your situation. This is a great day to do in-depth research. Your intuition is high and you're apt to see right through superficial appearances to the heart of any matter that interests you.

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

If you need to execute legal papers of any kind, Leo, you couldn't find a better day to do it. Relationships, particularly romantic ones, should be especially warm, supportive, and rewarding. New and interesting people could cross your path. You might feel an instant bond with at least one of them. If you aren't currently romantically involved, you could well experience something exciting today. Communicating with new people is gratifying and stimulating.

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

Home and family are apt to be your primary focus today, Virgo. Work around the house might take up a lot of your time. You might want to spruce up the place and make it more beautiful. Gardening could be especially rewarding now. If you've wanted to try some recipes from a new cookbook, this is the day to do it. Your creative impulses regarding food are at an all-time high.

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

Today a strong sense of destiny could lead you to someone new - either a potential close friend or prospective romantic partner. You're apt to feel especially protective toward this person, Libra, and even though he or she is new to you. You could feel as if you've known this person forever. Artistic activities benefit from increased intuition and physical and mental energy. Expect to shine! Enjoy your day.

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

Volatile emotions may come to the surface among the members of your household today. This could prove irritating for you, Scorpio, but try to avoid becoming involved in others' quarrels. At times like this, a lot could be said that shouldn't be said, and apologies won't necessarily wipe it out. This is a great day to get some work done around the house, as your physical energy is high. Make use of your good aesthetic sense.

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

Someone distraught or angry, perhaps a relative, might phone you today expecting a sympathetic ear and soothing words. You'll be more than able to provide them. This is a great day for writing, whether a letter to a friend or the first chapter of a novel. Your ability with words is operating at a high level. If you're planning to teach or mentor, know that words will flow freely.

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

A lost possession could be recovered today. A gift, either money or a long-desired item of some kind, could bring tears to your eyes, Capricorn. Your sense of self-worth should be high at his time and could cause you to feel nurturing towards everyone around you who doesn't have your self-confidence. New opportunities for increasing your income could come your way. Make the most of them.

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

Today should prove to be a wonderful day, Aquarius. Your physical energy is good, and you should be looking and feeling wonderful. Though you'll probably want to spend most of the day at home, you're likely to attract lots of interesting people in intriguing fields into your aura. Your ability to express your feelings is also high, so expect some stimulating conversations about whatever strikes your fancy. Enjoy your day.

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

Today you might feel as if you're walking around in a daze, Pisces, but it's a good daze. Your imagination and artistic abilities are sharp. Your intuition is especially attuned, and the thoughts and feelings of others are more apparent to you than they realize. You might feel unusually restless at some point and consider getting in a workout, or at least going for a walk. Do it. Get those endorphins flowing.

## Country Codes

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



## Business

FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2020

**34** Chinese street vendors rush to sell amid virus**34** Asia stocks snap winning streak**35** Just Eat Takeaway to buy Grubhub

SINGAPORE: A man rides a bicycle past commercial buildings in the financial business district in Singapore as the city state eased its partial lockdown restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

# ‘50 drivers fight for 1 order’

## Southeast Asia gig economy slammed by virus

**SINGAPORE:** Indonesian motorcycle taxi driver Aji chain-smokes and checks his smartphone constantly while waiting for orders by the roadside in downtown Jakarta on a hot June morning, but is staring at the prospect of another fruitless day. Before the coronavirus outbreak hit, the 35-year-old father of four would ferry at least 20 passengers for a daily income of between \$13 and \$20 as a driver for homegrown ride-hailing app Gojek.

But when transportation services halted under a city lockdown, Aji considered it a good day if he got more than two food delivery orders, which pay him \$0.70 each time. On some days, he has had none. Even with restrictions eased this week, he is struggling to feed his family. “The situation is that there are many drivers but orders are few,” he said, asking to be identified only by his first name. Eleven drivers for Gojek and Grab, which is backed by SoftBank Group, in Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand told Reuters they’ve similarly struggled, with income slashed by more than half as the pandemic batters Southeast Asia.

And, disappointingly, for both drivers and the companies, an increase in food deliveries - forecast as a major growth area for both firms - has come nowhere near compensating for the losses in transport. Even in Vietnam, seen as a recovery success story, drivers are reeling. “The pandemic may cost me and many colleagues our vehicles, which we had bought using bor-

rowed money,” said Grab car driver Tung in Hanoi, fearing that lenders may repossess the vehicles. Unions representing Gojek and larger Singaporean rival Grab, Southeast Asia’s most highly valued startup at \$14 billion, say thousands of drivers are in the same situation, especially in Indonesia, both firms’ largest market.

### Core promise

Their plight threatens a core promise of both companies: that they can improve the lives of tens of millions of people across Southeast Asia even as they provide big paydays for their blue-chip corporate and financial investors. Southeast Asian governments have warned millions could end up jobless as a result of the outbreak. The two firms told Reuters they are supporting drivers with measures ranging from food packages and vouchers to low-interest bank loans and car rental rebates. But the crisis has also led them to cut the subsidies that have fueled their growth. Doubts have also crept up about the ride-hailing model globally and on whether investors will continue pumping in massive funds into the startups.

Even before the pandemic, Grab and Gojek - like Uber and Lyft in the United States and other ride-hailing firms around the world - were operating at a steep loss. Grab co-founder Tan Hooi Ling has warned the company may potentially face a “long winter”. Both companies still have plenty of cash. One source with

knowledge of the matter said Grab has \$3 billion in reserves. Sources familiar with Gojek’s finances said it was finalising an over \$3 billion investment round at a \$10 billion valuation; Facebook and Paypal announced investments in Gojek’s fintech arm just last week, and it also counts Google and Tencent among its backers.

Each has avoided major layoffs so far, though Grab is implementing voluntary unpaid leave for staff and Gojek is reviewing its services. In the United States, Uber, whose Southeast Asia business was bought by Grab, said it would cut 23% of its workforce. “Transport has fallen off a cliff, food has held steady, while logistics went through the roof and online payments are high... so having a portfolio of products helps,” said Gojek Chief Operating Officer Hans Patuwo. “If we were only a transport company, I’d be quite bowled over.”

Executives and investors at both firms point to the resurgence of orders at Chinese ride-hailing company Didi Chuxing as cause for optimism. “The rate of recovery will be mostly dependent on when government lockdowns end,” said Grab Operations Managing Director Russell Cohen, noting Grab’s transport business had previously been profitable in several markets. The crisis has revived speculation among investors about a merger of the two firms, which sources say has been discussed in early 2020, but not led to serious talks. Gojek said any reports of a merger are inaccurate. A

Grab spokesman declined to comment.

### Food delivery

Grab and Gojek have long touted the fast-growing food delivery industry as a big opportunity. But with platforms taking only a 20%-30% commission that is shared with drivers, margins are slim. And growth did not materialize in every market during the lockdowns. A restaurant chain CEO in Jakarta said food delivery had not picked up in Southeast Asia’s largest economy due to people cooking more at home and as most orders traditionally consisted of lunches for office workers, who are now at home.

Aji described food delivery in Indonesia for Gojek as a “fight”, with “sometimes 50 drivers for one order”, with Grab Vietnam drivers recounting similar experiences. Even in Thailand, where orders jumped for both Grab and Gojek, profitability remains distant. According to an April interview with local media by then Grab Thailand chief Tarin Thaniyavarn, food delivery was fast-growing but loss-making during the pandemic, with costs mounting and competition steep. Tarin said Grab Thailand lost more than \$22 million in 2018, while rapid growth led to losses nearly doubling in 2019. “Imagine last year’s loss-making business growing rapidly in a short period of time, while the business that used to make profits for us is nearly gone,” he said. — Reuters

## Business

# Asia stocks snap winning streak, bonds rally on downbeat US Fed

## Fed cautious on economy, ready to take further action

**SYDNEY:** Asian shares retreated yesterday as a gloomy outlook from the US Federal Reserve challenged market optimism on the global economy, while bonds rallied on speculation that yet more stimulus would be needed to ensure recovery. After a slow start, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan slipped 1.4%, likely putting an end to a 10-session winning streak. Japan's Nikkei slid 2.1% in its largest daily loss in five weeks, while Chinese blue chips eased 1.0%. E-Mini futures for the S&P 500 fell 1.5% to extend an overnight pullback on Wall Street, while EUROSTOXX 50 futures lost 2.2% and FTSE futures 1.7%. In a reality check to the stock market's recent euphoria, the Fed predicted the US economy would shrink 6.5% in 2020 and unemployment would still be at 9.3% at year's end.

Data out earlier had also shown core US consumer prices fell for a third straight month in May, the longest stretch of declines on record. As a result, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said he was "not even thinking about thinking about raising rates". Instead, he emphasized recovery would be a long road and that policy would have to be proactive with rates near zero out to 2022.

"While Powell did not commit to any new action at this time, his focus on downside risk and uncertainty reinforces the message that they will take further action, probably by September," JP-Morgan economists said.

"Outcome or calendar based guidance looks likely and Powell left the door open for moving to some form of interest rate caps." Powell confirmed the Fed was studying yield curve control, a form of easing already employed by Japan and Australia. All of which, saw yields on 10-year Treasuries fall 9 basis points on Wednesday, the biggest daily drop in almost two months. Yields were down at 0.71% yesterday, a sharp rally from last week's peak of 0.96%. The risk of more easing initially had the US dollar under pressure, seeing it touch a three-month low on a basket of currencies at 95.714.

"The Fed's view – that you'll be paid almost nothing for holding US dollars until at least 2022 – is never going to be helpful for any currency," noted analysts at CBA. The dollar later steadied as risk appetite waned and stocks came off. It was last at 107.20 yen, after hitting a one-month trough at 106.87. The euro edged back to \$1.1339, having hit its highest since mid-March on Wednesday at



**HYDERABAD:** A labourer carries a rice sack from a civil supplies godown to load in a transport vehicle for distribution in the districts of Telangana state after the government eased a nationwide lockdown. — AFP

\$1.1422. The prospect of super-low rates for longer had been a boon for gold overnight, but it ran into selling in Asia falling 0.4% to \$1,728 an ounce. Oil prices turned lower amid renewed concerns about

demand and after US data showed crude inventories had risen to record highs. Brent crude futures fell \$1.27 to \$40.46 a barrel, while US crude lost \$1.41 to \$38.18. — Reuters

## China's street vendors rush to sell

**BEIJING:** Snacks, underwear, jewelry and even rabbits - Chinese hard-hit by this year's economic turmoil are selling their wares on the street after a top leader offered support to hawkers despite long-standing curbs on the practice. Many are meeting stiff resistance from police, who have spent years trying to sweep such stalls off the streets to clean up their city's image, and reviled urban management officers known as "chengguan", who have repeatedly and sometimes violently cracked down on street peddlars - usually low-income migrant workers. The mixed messaging began when a government website reported that Chinese Premier Li Keqiang had told street stall holders they were a key part of the economy during a visit to northeast China last week.

"The street vendor economy and the small shop economy are important sources of employment... and are just as vital to China as high-end luxury stores," Li told traders, after asking how they had fared during the last few months of restrictions due to the coro-

navirus epidemic. While not backed by any formal policy, Li's comments spurred people nationwide to set up street stalls, including on the back of bikes and even on pavements. But just as they took to the streets after Li's comments, they were shooed out of central hotspots in Beijing as authorities vowed to step up scrutiny. Wang Zhiping, a 72-year-old former street cleaner originally from central Henan province, took up street selling after hearing Li's words of encouragement.

"I only started last week, but business hasn't been very good. I have no other source of income and my health is too poor to continue cleaning," said Wang, who sells socks in a Beijing underpass. "Li Keqiang is a senior Communist Party member. Why are the chengguan going against what the Communist Party is supporting?" People's Daily, a Communist Party mouthpiece, called for stricter oversight of street traders, while the state-run Beijing Daily claimed that the stalls were backward and "not suited" to the city. "I only started selling grilled pancakes this week but chengguan have chased me off four times already," said a middle-aged woman, who refused to give her name, running a mobile food stall in the capital's Chaoyang district.

### 'I'm hungry already'

Outside Beijing though, some cities and provincial capitals have loosened

restrictions as the virus outbreak was brought under control. And there was online rejoicing of street vending with hashtags including "If you were a street vendor, what would you sell?" and "Everyone is street selling" getting millions of views on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform. But in another conflicting message, one of the most popular discussion threads on the topic was censored on Wednesday, and the hashtag "street vending economy" was deleted.

Even so, photos of streets crammed with stalls and car boot sales have been going viral on Weibo, where many first-time stall holders - often millennials - complained business was slow. "Today's my first time... customers passed by and asked about the price but didn't buy since they thought it was too expensive," wrote one woman who photographed herself selling toys on the street in Dongguan, Guangdong province, on Tuesday. "I'm hungry already, but can I buy lunch if it will mean a greater loss?" Analysts have questioned whether these traders can have enough of an impact as Chinese authorities seek to revive the world's second-largest economy, which has seen unemployment soar this year. Premier Li revealed last month that there are 600 million people who earned 1,000 yuan (\$140) or less per month in China — barely enough for rent in one of the country's lower-tier cities. — AFP

## Spike in black unemployment 'heartbreaking'

**WASHINGTON:** Declaring there is "no place" for racism in American society, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Wednesday said it is "heartbreaking" to see the spike in unemployment for African Americans so soon after it reached a historic low. The shutdowns imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have inflicted damage nationwide, but the hardest-hit are those in low-income service fields who are least able to bear the pain, Powell told reporters.

After falling to its lowest on record in February, 5.8 percent, black unemployment spiked to 16.7 percent in April. And despite an unexpected decline in the national jobless rate in May, for black workers it actually ticked up a notch. For Hispanic workers, unemployment surged to 18.9 percent but dipped in May to 17.6 percent. "Unemployment is going up more for Hispanics, more for African Americans, and women have borne an extraordinary and notable share of the burden beyond their percentage in the workforce," while just two months ago "we had, effectively the first tight labor market in a quarter century," Powell said. "It's heartbreaking. And you know, we want to get it back. We really want to get it back."

As he spoke, demonstrations continued outside the White House - a few blocks away from the Fed's headquarters - as part of nationwide upheaval over the latest death of a black man, George Floyd, at the hands of police. Powell promised the Fed will "use our tools to support maximum employment." "But obviously, that's something that's going to require an all of society, all of government response." While the central bank chief, who resolutely steers clear of politics, declined to comment on the causes for inequality in the US economy, he strayed from his usual script to comment on the recent "tragic events that have again put a spotlight on the pain of racial injustice in this country." — AFP

## Business

# Jobs gone, investments wasted as safaris leave mounting toll

## Safaris bring billions of dollars to rural communities

**MABARHULE:** When Khimbini Hlongwane spent most of his small safari tour company's savings on the deposit for a new minibus in February, it seemed like a safe bet. His revenues had doubled in the previous year. And bookings by American, British, and Brazilian tourists hoping to catch a glimpse of elephants, giraffes and lions at South Africa's famous Kruger National Park were up.

Now, with borders closed and airlines grounded due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa's multi-billion-dollar safari industry is unravelling and he can no longer afford the payments on the new 21-seater, which sits collecting dust in the parking lot. "It hasn't moved since the day we bought it," said Hlongwane, who has been forced to stop paying the salaries of his five employees. "We couldn't have been using that money to survive right now." From Kenya's Masai Mara to the Okavango Delta in Botswana, rural communities that depend on safaris for income are seeing their livelihoods and dreams shattered. Hundreds of thousands of people rely on the sector, not to mention their dependents.

A slump in tourist dollars has hit conservation projects hard. And even as countries around the world loosen lockdowns, game parks, lodges and travel agencies face a grim future. The safari industry generates some \$12.4 billion in annual revenues for South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia - Africa's top wildlife tourist destinations - according to an estimate by Safari-

Bookings. But a survey of over 300 tour operators conducted by the online safari travel platform this month showed that almost 93% reported a drop in bookings of at least 75% due to the pandemic. Cancellations have also spiked, the majority of them said.

### 'How long can we carry on?'

Leon Plutsick's Distinctly Africa lodge on the Manyeleti private game reserve bordering the Kruger National Park had been full in March. Today, his employees are sitting at home and baboons have ransacked his unstaffed kitchen. "We're getting to a point where we have to ask ourselves how long do we carry on?" he said. "A lot of us are living on reserves just to survive."

Plutsick is not alone. A survey of close to 500 businesses in the Kruger Lowveld district - South Africa's safari heartland - conducted by the local tourism agency last month, found 90% believed they would not survive even if international borders opened immediately. Over two-thirds of them have laid off employees. The lack of tourist dollars is forcing wildlife projects across Africa to make cuts, and beyond the human cost, conservationists worry that growing desperation in rural communities hit by COVID-19 could fuel a wave of poaching.

Three popular game parks in South Africa recently dehorned dozens of rhinos as a preventative measure, hoping that it would make them less attractive targets for poachers. In Mababarhule, a community

on the edge of Kruger National Park, roughly half of residents were already jobless before the pandemic. Freelance workers like Siphso Nkosi - a tour guide and father of four who typically makes around 550 rand (\$33) per tour - have found themselves without a safety net. "We'd saved some money. But its running out, so we'll start starving," said Nkosi, standing outside a half-completed community hall that was being built using tourist donations.

### 'A bigger hole?'

The Madilika Craft Centre sits so close to the boundary of the Kruger National Park that lions can sometimes be heard roaring in the distance. A layer of dust now coats the pink walls of the women's co-operative, which shut when the private game lodges where it sold its traditional Xitsonga beaded jewellery closed down in March.

Now, with her income gone, co-founder Jane Mashele is hoping the sweet potatoes and spinach in her garden will be enough to feed her four orphaned grandchildren. "We started the center because we were tired of sitting at home with no jobs," she said. "This is terrible." In South Africa, which has recorded the most COVID-19 cases of any African nation, Tourism Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane warned parliament last month that up to 600,000 jobs were at risk if the sector remained shut until September. Governments' relief initiatives - like South Africa's offer of 50,000 rand (\$3,000) one-

time grants to small tourism businesses - will do little to staunch the losses, some operators said.

In the face of looming financial calamity, the Tourism Business Council of South Africa - the industry's lobby group - is pushing for international tourism to resume as early as September. With the pandemic's peak on most of the continent still predicted to be months away, that appears unlikely. South Africa's government has instead said regional and international tourism are only expected to resume next year. Kenya, Namibia and Rwanda also remain closed to international visitors, while in Zambia tourists are permitted but face a two-week quarantine upon arrival. Tanzania has dropped quarantine requirements and is welcoming foreign guests.

One East African tour operator said even if restrictions were eased, international travellers could be discouraged by the possibility of quarantines when they return home. In the meantime, South Africa, for one, hopes domestic visitors can drive the first phase of a recovery. South African national parks are now opening for self-driving safaris. But overnight visits and travel across provincial borders remain banned under current restrictions. Even when permitted, some operators worry that local visitors will not be enough to save their businesses. "To open for two or four or six people, is it actually worth it?" asked lodge owner Plutsick. "I'll just be digging myself a bigger hole." —Reuters

## Just Eat Takeaway to buy US' Grubhub

**NEW YORK:** Anglo-Dutch meal delivery firm Just Eat Takeaway.com agreed to acquire US company Grubhub for \$7.3 billion to form the world's largest online food delivery company outside of China, they announced Wednesday. The deal comes as both companies have experienced strong growth in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic from customers stuck at home who have boosted digital orders.

The combined company will have a major presence in four key markets - the US, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands - and position the enterprise for greater growth in the US, they said in a news release. Grubhub has been effective in navigating the "fragmented" US market - but "the US remains an underpenetrated market" that is "nowhere near its end-state," the companies said. "Just Eat Takeaway.com will prioritize sustainable growth over profits, as this has been a major driver of its strategy and success in Europe," the press release said. Grubhub had held talks previously with ride-hailing giant Uber, but the discussions fell apart over price after Uber proposed \$6 billion, a banking source told AFP recently.

Under the Just Eat Takeaway.com deal, which must be approved by shareholders of both companies, investors in Grubhub will receive 0.6710 of Just Eat Takeaway shares for each Grubhub share. That values Grubhub at \$75.15 a share, compared with a closing price Wednesday of \$59.05. Shares of Grubhub surged 5.9 percent to \$62.50 in after-hours trading Wednesday. —AFP

## HUAWEI P40 Pro is available now in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Huawei recently announced the long awaited HUAWEI P40 Pro complete with a unique design, powerful 5G capabilities and an advanced Ultra Vision Leica camera system, along with features that are built to give an ultimate 5G performance for every kind of user. Now available across all HUAWEI online platforms and certified retailers for a price of 289,900 KWD.

Equipped with the HUAWEI Quad-Curve Overflow Display, the HUAWEI P40 Pro is inspired by the art of motion, curving the display along all four edges for a shape that is reminiscent of water almost overflowing from the rim of a full cup. In addition to a borderless look, slim bezels and streamlined round corners also allow for a more ergonomic hold. Design innovations also include a refractive matte finish of Silver Frost and a glossy finish of Black. The HUAWEI P40 Pro is powered by the Kirin 990 5G chipset which delivers integrated 5G connectivity with comprehensive 5G band support along with robust AI performance and power efficiency. It provides support for 2G/3G/4G and 5G networks in both 5G Non-Standalone (NSA) and Standalone (SA) modes. The HUAWEI P40 Pro also supports WiFi 6 Plus for 160MHz bandwidth and advanced 1024-QAM modulation to achieve the industry-leading peak theoretical transmission speed of 2400Mbps.

In terms of the camera, the HUAWEI P40 Pro comes with the Ultra-Vision Leica Quad Camera setup with the Huawei Ultra Vision Wide Camera sensor, measuring 1/1.28 inches, one of the largest smartphone camera sensors in the industry. The camera setup consists of a 50MP Ultra Vision Wide Camera, a 40MP Ultra-Wide Cine Camera, a 12MP 5x Optical Telephoto Camera and a ToF Camera.

Meanwhile, the SuperSensing SuperZoom lens system of prism and precision-engineered zoom components support 5x optical zoom and 50X dig-



ital zoom for a more refined zooming experience. This is further complemented by OIS and AIS stabilization. Additional features also include Ultra Slow-Motion video at 7680 fps, while the Ultra-Wide Cine camera allows for 4K UHD time-lapse videos.

The front dual camera setup consists of a 32MP AF Camera and the depth sensing camera, which is perfect for selfies, groupies and even bokeh effects and can also record 4K UHD videos with crisp details. Innovative camera features include Audio Zoom that allows users to amplify the audio of a subject by zooming into them during recording. AI Golden Snap, uses AI algorithms to pick the best postures and facial expressions, while AI Remove Passerby and AI Remove Reflection, allow to remove unwanted passerby and glare from reflections. The HUAWEI P40 Pro comes with a large capacity battery of 4200 mAh for all-day performance along with support for TÜV Rheinland safety-certified HUAWEI Wired 40W SuperCharge and HUAWEI's fast wireless SuperCharge technology. The HUAWEI P40 Pro comes with Huawei Mobile Services and HUAWEI AppGallery. One of the top 3 app marketplaces globally, it comes with a wide range of global and local apps and is available in more than 170 countries/ regions with 400 million monthly active users globally.

## Business

NBK Economic Update

# Activity shows tentative signs of revival as lockdown start to ease

**KUWAIT:** Financial markets enjoyed another strong month in May, buoyed by a gradual easing in coronavirus-driven lockdowns and travel restrictions, fresh policy stimulus announcements and slightly more positive - if still very weak - economic data. The US S&P for example surged nearly 5% in May and is now just 6% off its mid-February peak - a rally strong enough to feed perceptions that stocks have become disconnected from economic fundamentals that are still poor.

Meanwhile key government bond yields remained very low amid central bank buying aimed at supporting the recovery. Oil prices have also continued their strong recovery from April lows, with Brent reaching above \$40/bbl helped by improved sentiment on demand but more importantly aggressive OPEC+ supply cuts in effect since May and which were extended in early June.

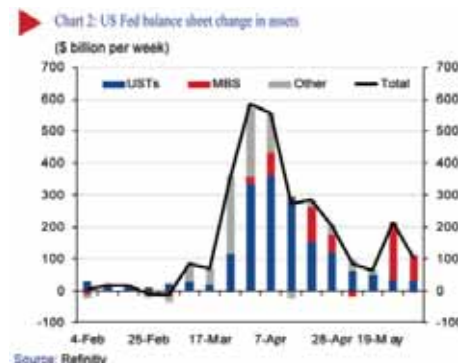
## US activity crawls back

Notwithstanding the riots and protests linked to racial tensions that have spread across the country since late May, a mild degree of optimism surrounding the economy has returned as lockdown rules are gradually lifted, businesses reopen, policy stimulus measures take effect and some economic data has surprised to the upside. ISM activity surveys have shown both the manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors starting to recover, though at 43 and 45 respectively in May, both remain at levels consistent with a steep economic downturn. There were also surprisingly upbeat signs from the labor market, with non-farm payrolls rising 2.5 million in May, confounding expectations of a massive 8 million fall, and clawing back some of the 20.7 million collapse in jobs seen in April. The unemployment rate declined to 13.3% from 14.7% the previous month. Although some analysts have highlighted possible flaws in the survey, the figures at face value point to furloughed employees returning to work at a decent rate as businesses reopen, especially in the badly-hit recreation and leisure sector.

However, the strength and durability of the recovery remains uncertain. One fear is that unemployment could linger at very high levels due to the US policy of making transfer payments to individuals (and not just to employers), which may discourage people from returning to work and also weaken ties with their former firms. Such concerns could escalate if a proposal by House Democrats to extend unemployment benefits as part of a new stimulus package is adopted - though the same measures would in theory secure spending power to help the recovery. GDP is still seen contracting an historic annualized 40% or more in 2Q20, following a 5% drop in Q1.

The Federal Reserve has made no fresh policy announcements over the past month, preferring to allow some time for its previous stimulus measures - including cutting its policy rate to 0-0.25%, offering cheap loans to businesses and almost unlimited QE - to filter through and judge their effectiveness. Indeed the Fed's dramatic balance sheet expansion has slowed recently implying an easing in market conditions.

However the pace of the decline in price pressures if sustained could at some point force the Fed's hand on further loosening, especially if the economic recovery disappoints: core PCE inflation plunged by the most in nearly 20 years in April to 1.0% y/y from 1.7% in March and well below the 2% target. One option that the Fed



has to push interest rates into negative territory, though various officials have expressed aversion to this including due to the impact on money markets (which would face negative returns). More plausible could be a move towards stronger

There are signs that economic policy is becoming more active. The ECB announced in June that it would expand the size of its €750 billion PEPP QE program to €1.35 trillion and extend its purchases until at least June 2021 (previously end-2020) - a move aimed at reviving growth and keeping borrowing costs especially for vulnerable countries such as Italy and Spain low. The bank justified this by slashing both its growth and inflation projections: regional output is now seen contracting 8.7% this year (+0.8% in March) and not recovering to pre-Covid levels until 2023.

Inflation will plunge to just 0.3% this year and 0.8% in 2021, well below the near-2% target. The policy loosening suggests the ECB is undeterred following a ruling by the German constitutional court in May that the bank may have overstepped its mandate with an earlier (but still active) QE program, which if not adequately re-butted could ultimately lead to a fracturing of support for the single currency. There was also important news on fiscal policy, the response of which until now had been disappointingly timid due to constraints facing more Activity across Europe also shows signs of stirring as lockdowns are eased, with the Eurozone composite PMI rebounding from an astonishing low of 13.6 in April to an improved but still weak 31.9 in May. There has also been good news so far on the unemployment rate, which - despite GDP plunging 3.8% q/q in Q1 and a projected -10% or more in Q2 - ticked up only fractionally in April to 7.3% from a pre-crisis 7.2% in February.

In Italy it even fell, though this merely reflected a large number of people leaving the workforce. One explanation for the resilient labor market is the effectiveness of wage- subsidy programs across the region, which have allowed firms to sustain their workforces despite plunging revenues. However the risk is that if demand for the same jobs does not return, the support money will have been misallocated.

The EU has proposed that it be allowed to issue its own bonds for the first time worth €750 billion (around 3.5% of GDP) to finance a regional recovery plan benefiting particularly hard-hit countries and crucially, €500 billion of this will be allocated as grants rather than loans. The approval of Germany - previously reluctant to consent to debt sharing - represents a landmark step on the path to further European integration,

which could also be accelerated by the UK's departure in January if this improves regional cohesion.

The plan could still take months to approve and some 'frugal' northern countries are opposed to the idea, though they will be under huge pressure to yield in the circumstances. Meanwhile, Germany - breaking from its normal conservative fiscal stance - announced a €130 billion (4% of GDP) stimulus package of its own, to include a temporary 3% point cut in VAT to encourage consumers to bring forward purchases and kick start demand.

## Japan falls into recession

The Japanese economy contracted by an annualized 3.4% in 1Q20 (-7.3% in 4Q19), as a global slowdown weighed on exports, firms cut back on investment and as consumers limited spending to essential goods amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Japanese exports saw their biggest drop since the 2009 global financial crisis in April, falling 22% y/y (-12% in March), affected mostly by weaker global demand for cars and industrial materials. Imports also remained in decline, falling 7.2% reflecting continued weakness in domestic demand as well. To help mitigate the recessionary impact of the pandemic, the government in May finalized its second economic stimulus package in as many months. The package, which matches April's package of ¥117 trillion (\$1.1 trillion) brings total stimulus measures unveiled by the government to around ¥234 trillion (\$2.2 trillion), one of the world's largest, and equal to around 40% of Japan's GDP. The additional stimulus will be funded by a second record budget, of ¥31.9 trillion (\$290 billion), and from other sources including loans and investments from government-backed lenders worth around ¥39 trillion (\$350 billion). These will be used to ramp up medical spending, provide financial aid to struggling firms and support students who have lost their part-time jobs.

## China recovery weighed down

Latest survey and high-frequency data depict a tepid economic recovery in China. The official manufacturing PMI slipped slightly to 50.6 in May (50.8 in April). Gains in industrial activity remain weighed down by continued contraction in export orders, a reflection of weak external demand. This has in turn weighed on the labor market, with companies continuing to shed jobs. Separately however, the official non-manufacturing PMI ticked up to 53.6 in May (53.2 in April) on a rise in construction activity. Concern for the job situa-

tion was behind the authorities' decision in May to drop hard GDP growth targets for the year. Instead, the authorities' focus will shift towards job creation through more targeted fiscal and monetary stimulus. The aim will be to create at least 9 million urban jobs in 2020 (the lowest target since 2013 and down from 2019's target of 11 million).

Meanwhile the government has penciled in a budget deficit of at least 3.6% of GDP in 2020, up from 2.8% in 2019. It also increased the quota on local-government special bond issuances to \$527 billion (up from around \$300 billion) to support infrastructure spending. The PBOC is also supporting the economy by guiding lending rates lower and helping struggling private firms to raise money via equity financing and bond sales. Subdued inflationary pressures will help the central bank maintain its accommodative monetary stance.

Tensions between the US and China continue to escalate over the Hong Kong security law imposed by the Chinese authorities. The US said it would start revoking its trade and travel agreements with Hong Kong and threatened to impose sanctions against China. In retaliation, China banned the import of some major US farm products, which were part of its commitment to the Phase-One trade deal with the US. Reflecting these dynamics and the authorities' wish to boost exports amid the weak global economic backdrop, the yuan depreciated 1.1% in May against the US dollar to a low of RMB7.13/\$1.

## India's economic growth slows in Q1

India's GDP growth fell to 3.1% y/y in 1Q20 (4Q of FY19/20), the lowest pace of expansion since 2009, and bringing growth in the full financial year to a modest 4.2% from 6.1% in FY18/19. Economic activity has suffered due to the coronavirus and a national lockdown that commenced in late March. While weakness was visible across the board, investment and consumption have suffered the most, contracting by 6.5% and 2.7% y/y respectively in 1Q20. Weak demand and extended lockdowns have had a severe impact on business activity, with the services and manufacturing PMIs still deep in contraction territory in May at 12.6 and 30.8 respectively, although rising modestly from the previous month. On the other hand, the GDP figures showed government spending held fairly steady at 1.2%. Meanwhile, the fiscal deficit came in at 4.6% of GDP in 1Q20, missing the revised target of 3.8% mainly due to lower tax revenue following some tax breaks in 4Q19.

## Sports

# Full crowds, rule tweaks and Dan Carter as Kiwi Super Rugby returns

## Fans offering full-throated support and generating an electric atmosphere

**WELLINGTON:** Super Rugby makes a comeback in New Zealand this weekend with full crowds allowed in a major landmark for professional sport's emergence from the coronavirus shutdown.

High-profile Auckland Blues recruit Dan Carter will be among those looking on as rugby reaps the reward of New Zealand's success in achieving zero cases of COVID-19.

Organisers say the competition will be the first professional sport played without crowd restrictions anywhere in the world since the pandemic took hold, although football leagues in Vietnam and Turkmenistan might dispute the claim. It is certainly highest profile sport to throw open its doors and its visibility was given an added boost with All Black legend Carter's shock decision to sign for the Blues at the age of 38, five years after his international retirement.

Super Rugby Aotearoa — the Maori name for New Zealand — is a temporary domestic replacement for the suspended 15-team southern hemisphere club competition, which has been in limbo since mid-March.

Featuring New Zealand's five Super Rugby teams, the 10-round competition will have two matches each weekend.

The opening fixture Saturday sees Otago Highlanders meet Waikato Chiefs at Dunedin's Forsyth Barr Stadium, where student fans in

"The Zoo" section of the ground are sure to offering full-throated support and generating an electric atmosphere.

The Highlanders' backline has been boosted by the recruitment of livewire former international Nehe Milner-Skudder, while the Chiefs are missing newly anointed All Blacks captain Sam Cane with a back strain.

### BARRETT BLUES DEBUT

The second match on Sunday pits Auckland Blues against Wellington Hurricanes at Eden Park, where the crowd is expected to exceed 35,000. The Blues are on a high after signing Carter, although the two-time World Cup winner and three-time world player of the year admits he is several weeks away from being match fit.

Even if Carter does not take the field, Beauden Barrett said his presence at training had been "immense". "The boost he's given to the team and me personally, it's been huge," said Barrett, himself a two-time world player of the year. It will be Barrett's first appearance for the Blues since he transferred from the Hurricanes at the end of last season and Wellington halfback TJ Perenara promised him warm reception from his former teammates.

"I'm sure there'll be a few words out there but it'll be in the spirit of the game," Perenara told reporters. Barrett will not face off against



**NAPIER:** File photo taken on February 29, 2020 shows fans celebrating a try during the Super Rugby match between New Zealand's Hurricanes and Japan's Sunwolves. There will be no crowd restrictions when Super Rugby resumes in New Zealand this weekend. — AFP

younger brother Jordie, who the Hurricanes said was nursing a shoulder injury.

The competition has introduced some experimental rule changes that New Zealand Rugby said were designed to add excitement to the game, including a golden point winner in extra-

time if scores are level after 80 minutes.

Teams can also replace a player who has been red-carded after 20 minutes, instead of playing the rest of the match down one man. Referees have also been told to strictly police the breakdown, to ensure a fast-flowing game. — AFP

## Tigers choose Torkelson first overall in MLB draft

**LOS ANGELES:** American Spencer Torkelson was the top pick in Major League Baseball's 2020 entry draft on Wednesday, going first overall to four-time World Series champion Detroit Tigers. The 20-year-old Torkelson, who plays infield for Arizona State, is primarily a first baseman but also can play third base.

A right-handed hitter, Torkelson had a .340 batting average, six homers and 11 RBIs in 17 games during the 2020 season, which was cut short because of the new coronavirus pandemic. In three college seasons overall, he delivered a .337 batting average, a .463 on-base percentage, a .729 slugging percentage, 54 homers and 130 RBIs in 129 games.

This is the first time Detroit has had the top pick since 1997 when they chose pitcher Matt Anderson, who spent seven years as a middle reliever before retiring.

The Tigers, who won their last World Series title in 1984, struggled mightily last season, finishing with the worst record in the league with just 47 wins and 114 losses.

Commissioner Rob Manfred opened the draft

broadcast with a speech in which he promised that baseball would help bring positive change in the aftermath of the protests over racism following the death of George Floyd in Minnesota.

In a show of unity, each club then displayed a "Black Lives Matter" sign before the player selections began.

MLB was criticized for initially taking nine days to respond to the Floyd's death. Of the four major North American sports, baseball has the third highest number of black players at 8.4 percent. Basketball has the biggest percentage of black players at 74.4 percent and hockey has the lowest with different ethnicities making up three percent. Black athletes make up 68 percent of NFL rosters.

Major League Baseball was hit by allegations of racial discrimination in 2018 when a former employee of the Seattle Mariners said general manager Jerry DiPoto had called her "a cocky Latina". In 2004, MLB settled a lawsuit with Juri Morioka, who worked in their New York offices, after she charged them with overt racism against Asians. —AFP

## Fans welcome as Djokovic helps tennis emerge from virus

**BELGRADE:** After being suspended for three months due to the coronavirus pandemic, top-level international tennis returns this weekend in Belgrade with a charity tournament hosted by world number one Novak Djokovic and where fans will be welcome.

The Adria Tour will be held until July 5 in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia. On the tournament's first stop, on Saturday and Sunday, the Serbian star will be joined by world number three Dominic Thiem.

Germany's Alexander Zverev and Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov, ranked seventh and 19th in the world respectively, are also set to take part. The ATP and WTA Tours have been suspended since March due to the pandemic and will not resume at least until the end of July.

The French Open was postponed until September and Wimbledon was cancelled for the first time since World War II. The four tennis stars will play under regulations allowing up to 1,000 people to attend open-air sports events, which were introduced in Serbia on Monday.

The matches will be played at Novak Tennis

Centre, financed by Djokovic's family, with a view of the Danube river. Tickets sold out in seven minutes after they were put on sale online last Wednesday.

The event will be broadcast live in more than 100 countries, its director Djordje Djokovic, Novak's younger brother, said. "Every spectator will get a mask at the entrance, disinfectants will be placed throughout the complex," Djordje Djokovic said.

Also, the entire centre will be disinfected after every match. "We are professionals in this sport and we want to play," said the 33-year-old Djokovic. However, two tennis giants — Roger Federer, out for the rest of the year following knee surgery, and Rafael Nadal, who recently resumed training — will be absent. "Taking the situation into account, I didn't have the nerve to call and invite them," said Djokovic. Both Djokovic and Thiem were training during the lockdown. "I had a tennis court so I could train every day," said Djokovic referring to his period of confinement in Spain, where he was staying with his family at a home in Marbella. —AFP

## Sports

# Italian football emerges from virus crisis with cup semis in balance

## Milan will be without injured Zlatan Ibrahimovic

**ROME:** This week's Italian Cup semi-final, second leg matches were set to bring football back to a nation emerging from the coronavirus crisis, but with two days until the scheduled kick-off the two matches are still awaiting government approval.

Juventus' home clash with AC Milan Friday was supposed to be the first competitive match played in Italy since the country became Europe's COVID-19 epicentre, and the start of what the football authorities hope will be a return to normality.

More than 34,000 people on the peninsula have died because of the virus since the start of the crisis, with the vast majority in northern regions like Piedmont and Lombardy which host Juve and Milan. However, although the virus still persists, Italy began to gradually emerge from a stringent lockdown last month and has been slowly moving back towards regular life since, with the return of football pitched as the latest sign that the worst should be over. Public broadcaster RAI has already announced its coverage of the two last four encounters, with Napoli v Inter Milan scheduled for Saturday.

However, while Health Minister Roberto Speranza on Wednesday confirmed the dates for the semis and the June 17 final in Rome, he only said that the government was "leaning towards authorising" the last three matches of the competition.

Speranza's comments at the Italian Senate come just as it appeared that weeks of squabbling between Italy's football authorities and the government had been left behind, with what will likely be a large, sport-starved TV audience ready for the two matches behind closed doors.

Should, as expected, Friday's match take place fans will see a tie delicately poised at 1-1 following February's entertaining first leg at the San Siro, which saw the 'Rossoneri' leading until Cris-

tiano Ronaldo scored a stoppage time penalty to take a draw and an away goal back to Turin. Milan will be without injured Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who had sparked the seven-time European champions into life after returning in December, as they attempt to beat Juve in Turin for the first time since 2011.

Forward Samu Castillejo, who said he was robbed at gunpoint in Milan on Tuesday, and defender Theo Hernandez are suspended. Milan coach Stefano Pioli will likely point to Ante Rebic, who had scored seven goals in nine games before football succumbed to the virus, as the goal threat.

They will be helped by Wednesday's ruling which eliminates extra-time in the event of deadlock after 90 minutes for both last-four second legs and next week's final.

The cup is more of a priority for fallen giants Milan, whose last major honour came nine years ago, than for Juventus, who later this month resume a tight Serie A title tussle with Lazio.

However Juve coach Maurizio Sarri told Sky on Wednesday that Juve were "lucky" to have the cup, Serie A and Champions League seasons played at separate intervals as they chase European glory to go with their domestic dominance.

"We can focus on our targets one at a time, and this could be an advantage for us," he said.

"But we'll only know once we're out on the pitch because this is a very odd situation. After such a long break we've not even been able to play proper matches in training."

Sarri is reportedly wary of risking players who are not 100 percent fit, and will leave out Gonzalo Higuain for his starting lineup. However with Ronaldo, Paulo Dybala and Douglas Costa likely to start, goals should not be a problem.

Whoever comes out on top will face either Antonio Conte's



**TURIN:** File photo shows the Italian Serie A official soccer ball and logo are pictured prior to the Italian Serie A football match. Italy's football bosses approved on June 8, 2020 the holding of play-offs should the restarting season be suspended again and an algorithm with which to decide the league table should the campaign come to a definitive halt. — AFP

Inter Milan or Napoli, who hold a 1-0 lead ahead of Saturday's second leg in Naples.

The cup is Napoli's best chance of European football next season following a tumultuous campaign that has featured dressing room disputes and the sacking of Carlo Ancelotti.

Inter are off the pace in the title race and in search of their first trophy since winning the cup in 2011. — AFP

## Joshua, Fury 'agree deal' for all-British mega-bouts

**LONDON:** British heavyweight world champions Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury have agreed in principle to meet in two blockbuster fights, according to both camps on Wednesday.

Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn has been negotiating with Fury's management for several weeks and he said the terms were in place for the fighters to go head to head.

No contracts have been signed yet, but Hearn expects WBA, IBF and WBO belt holder Joshua to face WBC champion Fury to determine the undisputed king of the heavyweight scene in 2021.

"We're making great progress. There is still a lot to overcome. We are looking at venues and dates," Hearn told Sky Sports.

"We're in a good place," he added. "It's fair to say that, in principle, both guys have agreed to that fight. Two fights.

"(There's) a lot to overcome in the meantime. We're moving in the right direction. I'm confident that both guys have given their blessings for the fight to go ahead."

Hearn said the first bout could happen in the summer of 2021.

Joshua is due to fight Bulgaria's Kubrat Pulev next, while Fury, 31, has a rematch due with American Deontay Wilder.

"The biggest fight in British boxing history has just been agreed. Two-fight deal. Tyson Fury versus Anthony Joshua next year," Fury said on Instagram.

"I've got to smash Deontay Wilder's face right in in my next fight and then we go into the Joshua fight next year." Joshua, 30, is still on course to face Pulev despite injuring his knee during a recent training run.

He was seen with a knee brace and crutches during a Black Lives Matter protest at the weekend.

But even if both Fury and Joshua win their next bouts there may yet be a further delay before they meet in the ring as the WBC have said Dillian Whyte must fight for their version of the heavyweight title before the end of February 2021. Hearn though said both the Joshua and Fury camps had "approved the structure" of the proposed deal. "We have the Dillian Whyte mandatory which is due before this fight," Hearn added.—AFP

## LeBron James looks to promote African-American voting rights

**WASHINGTON:** Basketball star LeBron James announced Wednesday that he and several other professional athletes plan to found a charitable organization to protect black Americans' voting rights, five months ahead of the country's presidential election, The New York Times reported.

The move also comes as mammoth protests have swept the United States and the world calling for an end to hundreds of years of racial discrimination against black people.

"We feel like we're getting some ears and some attention, and this is the time for us to finally make a difference," James told The New York Times.

The organization, called More Than A Vote, aims to encourage African Americans to register to vote and to show up to the polls for the November 3 elections.

The group will also fight against any factors that could contribute to African Americans' disenfranchisement.

"Yes, we want you to go out and vote, but we're also going to give you the tutorial," James told the Times. "We're going to give you the background of how to vote and what they're

trying to do, the other side, to stop you from voting." James, who has more than 135 million followers across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, said he plans to use social media to denounce attempts to limit voting from racial minorities.

"King James" himself will finance the project, joined by basketball players Trae Young and Jalen Rose, football player Alvin Kamara and comedian Kevin Hart.

The group plans to collaborate with other get-out-the-vote organizations, the newspaper reported, including When We All Vote and Fair Fight. The initiative comes as the US grapples with renewed anger over racism and police violence after the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man who was killed last month when a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

James had expressed his own anger on Instagram, posting Floyd's last words "I can't breathe."

The voting movement is not the Los Angeles Laker's first foray into politics. He appeared at a campaign event for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in 2016. —AFP

## Sports

# Lewandowski fires weary Bayern into German Cup final in double bid

## Bayern will face Bayer Leverkusen in the final on July 4

**MUNICH:** Bayern Munich remain on course for the double after the Bundesliga leaders squeezed past Eintracht Frankfurt 2-1 in Wednesday's German Cup semi-final behind closed doors, with both teams supporting the Black Lives Matter movement.

Bayern's early goal by Ivan Perisic was cancelled out by a second-half equaliser from Frankfurt's Danny da Costa, who had only been on for three minutes at the Allianz Arena.

However, Robert Lewandowski settled the matter with the winner 16 minutes from time to claim his 45th goal this season in all competitions. Bayern will face Bayer Leverkusen, who beat fourth-tier side Saarbruecken 3-0 on Tuesday, in the final at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on July 4. "We didn't always make the right decisions in the area, we should have been three or four up at half-time, which would've made our lives much easier," admitted Bayern's Thomas Mueller, whose chip set up Perisic's opening goal. "You could feel the tiredness from both teams in the second-half when it got close, the will was there and we defended well, especially against the long balls."

Hansi Flick-coached Bayern, who have a seven-point lead with four games left in the league, can wrap up an eighth consecutive Bundesliga title this weekend if they beat Borussia Moenchengladbach and second-placed Borussia Dortmund lose at strugglers Fortuna Duesseldorf. However, Bayern will be without both Lewandowski and Mueller, who are both suspended. "We need to rest up well and then go

again on Saturday, the programme is punishing for all teams, so there is no whinging, but the tiredness is greater than the joy of reaching the final," added Mueller. Eintracht wore playing shirts supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, while Bayern warmed up in T-shirts bearing the same anti-racism message.

It was the latest show of solidarity in German football following the death of George Floyd in the United States in late May.

Bayern routed Frankfurt 5-2 also at the Allianz Arena, when the sides met in the league just over a fortnight ago, and once again the hosts wasted no time asserting their authority.

Frankfurt midfielder Dominik Kohr cleared Mueller's header off the line with only six minutes gone. Eintracht had another let off two minutes later when Lewandowski, the league's top-scorer with 30 goals, was inches from converting a Mueller cross. However, Bayern took the lead when Mueller chipped the defence and Perisic powered his header past Frankfurt goalkeeper Kevin Trapp on 14 minutes.

The Germany goalkeeper had to pull off a point-blank save to deny Lewandowski moments later.

It stayed 1-0 at the break, but Bayern found themselves under pressure in the second-half. Frankfurt's shock 5-1 drubbing of Bayern last November led to the sacking of Niko Kovac, Flick's predecessor as head coach, and the visitors started to win more ball in midfield.

With 66 minutes gone, Frankfurt coach Adi Huetter boosted their attack with double substi-



**MUNICH:** Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (R) attempts to score past Frankfurt's German goalkeeper Kevin Trapp during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) semi-final football match FC Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt in Munich, southern Germany on June 10, 2020. — AFP

tutions bringing on Japan midfielder Daichi Kamada and Da Costa.

The move paid off almost immediately. Kamada managed to beat three defenders in the area before his speculative pass across goal found da Costa, who smashed his shot past Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer on 69 minutes.

It was no more than Frankfurt deserved, but

Bayern responded by moving up a gear. Canadian teenager Alphonso Davies beat the defence in the area and squared to Lewandowski who was waiting to fire home his 45th goal in 39 matches this season.

The referee checked for offside with VAR, but the goal stood and Bayern are into their 25th German Cup final. —AFP

## Silent night as La Liga restarts with Seville derby

**MADRID:** Sevilla and Real Betis is the game in Spain most defined by its fans and later tonight it will be a first glimpse of La Liga without them as the season resumes behind closed doors after three months away due to the coronavirus.

Fireworks, banners, plumes of smoke and crowds, delirious at the sight of a team bus, let alone a goal, the Seville derby is a fixture renowned for its intensity and cherished by its supporters.

There will be 110 games held in 39 days, with clubs playing every three days for five and a half weeks, but none for the rest of the season will be as much of a stark reminder of what is missing.

"We can't wait to return to competing," said Sevilla coach Julen Lopetegui on Wednesday. "In circumstances that three months ago were unimaginable but today it is

the reality and we have to adapt.

"The derby is going to be played and we all know what it means. We have to respond." At the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, where Sevilla had only lost two league games this season in front of their fans, the stands will be empty, except for officials and substitutes, who will be stretched out across rows to maintain social distancing.

For those watching on television at home, the stands can be full, with virtual faces planted in place of vacant seats and fake crowd noise, taken from the computer game FIFA, ebbing and flowing according to the action.

La Liga's hope is to pitch the restart as a celebration. "Volver es Ganar", has been the league's slogan, "To Return is to Win", and there is excitement around football's return, to go with the relief in recent weeks as the number of deaths and infections have fallen. —AFP

## US Soccer repeals anthem kneeling ban: Official

**LOS ANGELES:** The United States Soccer Federation said Wednesday it has scrapped a controversial policy banning players from kneeling during the national anthem. In a statement, US Soccer said the rule introduced in 2017 was wrong, and reflected a failure of the federation to address the concerns of black people and minorities.

The USSF rule mandating that players must "stand respectfully" during the national anthem was introduced three years ago.

It came after US women's team star Megan Rapinoe knelt during the anthem at a 2016 international in a gesture of solidarity with former NFL star Colin Kaepernick.

"It has become clear that this policy was wrong and detracted from the important message of Black Lives Matter," the USSF said Wednesday as it announced the rule had been

repealed.

"We have not done enough to listen - especially to our players - to understand and acknowledge the very real and meaningful experiences of Black and other minority communities in our country.

"We apologize to our players - especially our Black players - staff, fans, and all who support eradicating racism.

"Sports are a powerful platform for good, and we have not used our platform as effectively as we should have. We can do more on these specific issues and we will."

The USSF had faced mounting pressure to review the no-kneeling policy on the heels of nationwide protests which have swept through the United States following the death in police custody of unarmed black man George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. —AFP



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski plays the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) semi-final football match FC Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt in Munich, southern Germany. – AFP

## Lewandowski fires Bayern into German Cup final

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