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Assembly debates grilling of education and finance ministers



KUWAIT: Lawmakers are seen during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Two Kuwaiti MPs yesterday denied any link to a Bangladeshi lawmaker - allegedly the leader of a major residency trading and human trafficking network - currently held in the country for interrogation. Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh announced earlier this week that government officials and companies were involved in the scam, while social media reports published the names of the two lawmakers.

One MP said that he did not have any link to the Bangladeshi lawmaker and called on those who have any evidence to go to court. He insisted that he was among the first to crack down on visa traders. The lawmaker said such issues are normally raised to tarnish his image ahead of the election and on the eve of grilling debates in the National Assembly. A lawyer of the other MP also denied any involvement of the lawmaker, saying he will file lawsuits against all social media users who published the name of his client.

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Saudi faces hajj call as deaths top 1,000

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is expected to scale back or call off this year's hajj pilgrimage for the first time in its modern history, observers say, a perilous decision as coronavirus cases spike. Deaths surpassed 1,000 on Monday. Muslim nations are pressing Riyadh to give its much-delayed decision on whether the annual ritual will go ahead as scheduled in late July. But as the kingdom negotiates a call fraught with political and economic risks in a tinderbox region, time is running out to organize logistics for one of the world's largest mass gatherings.

A full-scale hajj, which last year drew about 2.5 million pilgrims, appears increasingly unlikely after authorities advised Muslims in late March to defer

preparations due to the fast-spreading disease. "It's a toss-up between holding a nominal hajj and scrapping it entirely," a South Asian official in contact with Saudi hajj authorities told AFP. A Saudi official told AFP: "The decision will soon be made and announced."

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, withdrew from the pilgrimage this month after pressing Riyadh for clarity, with a minister calling it a "very bitter and difficult decision". Malaysia, Senegal and Singapore followed suit with similar announcements. Many other countries with Muslim populations - from Egypt and Morocco to Turkey, Lebanon and Bulgaria - have said they are still awaiting Riyadh's decision.

In countries like France, faith leaders have urged Muslims to "postpone" their pilgrimage plans until next year due to the prevailing risks.

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Indian, Chinese troops in deadly border clash

NEW DELHI: Three Indian soldiers were killed in a violent face-off on the Chinese border, the Indian army said yesterday, following weeks of rising tensions and the deployment of thousands of extra troops from both sides. Brawls erupt regularly between the two nuclear-armed giants across their disputed 3,500-km frontier, but no one has been killed in decades.

But the Indian army said there were "casualties on both sides" in Monday's incident on the Himalayan frontier between China's Tibet and

India's region Ladakh, although Beijing made no mention of any - while laying the blame squarely on Delhi. But the editor-in-chief of China's Global Times newspaper said yesterday the Chinese military also suffered casualties.

"Based on what I know, Chinese side also suffered casualties in the Galwan Valley physical clash," Hu Xijin said in a tweet. He did not give further details. The Global Times is published by the People's Daily, the official newspaper of China's ruling Communist Party.

"A violent face-off took place yesterday (Monday) night with casualties on both sides. The loss of lives on the Indian side includes an officer and two soldiers," an Indian army spokesman said in a statement. "Senior military officials of the two sides are currently meeting at the venue to defuse the situation."

Continued on Page 16

First WhatsApp digital payments option launched

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Monday added a digital payments feature to its WhatsApp messaging service, starting in Brazil but with an eye to expanding around the world. WhatsApp users in Brazil can use the encrypted mobile messaging service to send money or make purchases, Facebook said in a blog post. It marked the first time the payments platform used at the leading social network was woven into WhatsApp.

People will be able to send money or make a purchase from a local business without leaving their chat, the company noted. "Payments on WhatsApp are beginning to roll out to people across Brazil beginning today and we look forward to bringing it to everyone as we go forward," the service said. Sending money or making payments is a free option for WhatsApp users, but businesses will be charged a processing fee on par with those charged for typically credit card transactions, according to the messaging service.

Facebook sees long-term, money-making potential in making its social network and messaging apps venues for businesses to engage in online conversations and transactions with customers. "The over 10 million small and micro businesses are the heartbeat of Brazil's communities," WhatsApp said. "It's become second nature to send a zap to a business to get questions answered." Digital payments on WhatsApp will be tied to credit or debit cards to start, and transactions will require special identification codes or fingerprint verification. — AFP

Egyptians in Qatar fly home amid embargo

DOHA: Egyptian workers stranded in Qatar in the coronavirus lockdown have flown home, a community group said Monday, in the first of 18 repatriation flights that have overcome restrictions under a regional boycott. The flight with 174 passengers on board left late on Sunday via neutral Oman to comply with Cairo's ban on direct air traffic from Qatar, Egyptian media reported.

It marks rare coordination between Doha and Cairo, which is part of a Saudi-led alliance of four Arab coun-

tries enforcing an embargo on Qatar. Riyadh, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, cut diplomatic ties with Doha in June 2017, shut their airspace to Qatari aircraft and severed trade and maritime links with the Gulf country. They accuse Qatar of supporting radical Islamists and being too close to Iran, charges denied by Doha.

"The first Egyptian evacuation flights took off from Qatar... the rest will come in succession," the Egyptian Association in Doha wrote on its Facebook page alongside an image of passengers on the first leg to Oman. Once in Muscat the group, who were among 300,000 Egyptians living in Qatar, then switched onto an Egyptian aircraft for the flight to Cairo.

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Idlib adopts Turkish lira; Turkey eyes Libya bases

IDLIB/ANKARA: Local authorities in northwest Syria are replacing the plummeting Syrian pound with the Turkish lira to shield their opposition-held region from economic collapse, an official said Monday. The Salvation Government - an administrative body linked to the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group which dominates the Idlib region - already started paying wages and salaries in Turkish lira last month, said Bassel Abdul Aziz, who heads its economy department.

He said it has "instructed commer-

cial traders and money exchange houses" to circulate low-denomination Turkish coins and banknotes to be used "for everyday transactions in liberated territories instead of the Syrian pound". At a money transfer office in the province on Sunday, an AFP correspondent saw bags of Turkish lira coins on the floor alongside boxes filled with banknotes.

In a statement on Friday, the United Nations said a "large" shipment of Turkish currency had reportedly

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DOHA: Women, wearing masks, pose for a selfie at the waterfront promenade on Monday as Qatar gradually lifts its COVID-19 lockdown. — AFP



SARMADA, Syria: An employee sorts Turkish lira banknotes at a bank in this town in northwestern Idlib province on June 14, 2020. — AFP

Local

National Assembly debates twin grillings



KUWAIT: The National Assembly yesterday debated two grillings - the first was against Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi for not ending the current school year due to the coronavirus pandemic. It was filed by MP Faisal Al-Kandari. The second was against Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan for violations allegedly committed in contracts signed during the coronavirus crisis, claims of losses in Kuwaiti investments, and failure to take proper actions against corruption cases and public debt. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

In my view

Behave, cooperate

By Abdellatif Sharaa

local@kuwaittimes.com

I was in sixth grade when the 1967 war broke out between Arab countries and Israel. When the situation began to return to normal and schools reopened, we were asked to gather in the playground, and as we always did in the morning, we stood in lines. Then officials started to hand each student two bags - one contained biscuits and the other sardine cans. Both were really heavy. When we reached home, we discovered that the biscuits were really tasty.

The next day we were asked to do the same but we were somewhat unruly, so teachers intervened and made us stand in lines. Things then went smoothly as the day before and we were very happy to get the same goodies as the day earlier. There were at least 1,500 students at the school then and despite that number, things were almost always organized and went on as planned day to day.

Scenes of people from various countries rushing to get food packages or other necessities in a way that can be only described as appalling are repeated every day. They clamber around trucks as if there is no tomorrow, afraid that the boxes will run out before their turn comes!

I tried to find a description of the scene but did not find a convincing one. Now we are in an unusual situation and must take all kinds of precautions to avoid illness, because one can stay hungry for a day or two, but will not remain alive if he couldn't breathe for less than five minutes.

One of the most interesting things is that selfishness existed very early in the mind and heart of man on earth. Who among us does not know about the story of Cain and Abel and its tragic end?

The only solution that can keep us living in relative peace and harmony is cooperation for mutual benefit. Cooperation is an excellent tool in which several individuals share in order to get a positive and effective result, and this cooperation must cover all aspects of life, be it political, economic, cultural, scientific and practical. This is a very effective way to strengthen the ethics of members of societies.

Cooperation brings respect between individuals and makes them help each other. In fact cooperation helps reduce poverty and unemployment in a society by investing more, and most importantly, it will do away with selfishness among the society's members.

Finally: Almighty Allah says in the Holy Quran: "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; Indeed Allah is severe in penalty." (5:2)

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 36,431 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Monday, in addition to 298 deaths. With the exception of 184 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 28,206 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 7,927 people receiving treatment and 23 quarantined.

Curfew

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

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

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

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

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

Earlier, Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Before that, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food

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

Precautions

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

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

Hotlines

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

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

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)

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

Medicine delivery

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

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

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

Mental health assistance

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

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

Local

Kuwait Cabinet mulls guidelines for second stage of reopening

Sports allowed to return to practice only with adherence to health requirements



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the meeting. — KUNA photos



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah attends the meeting.



Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh attends the meeting.

KUWAIT: The Cabinet held its weekly meeting, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, via teleconference on Monday, and urged the public to comply with health instructions to facilitate gradual return to normal life. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh stated that Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah outlined the health situation in the country amid the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including statistics on the numbers of cases, recoveries and deaths across the country.

The figures showed an increase in the number of recoveries by more than 75 percent compared to the increase of infection cases in some non-isolated areas. The Cabinet reiterated its call on nationals and residents to comply with health requirements in order to achieve the criteria enabling a move forward to the second phase of the restart plan.

Four decisions

Furthermore, ministers reviewed the precautionary and logistic services in relation to the nationwide efforts to combat the virus' spread, and decided the following: First: the Cabinet was briefed about the Foreign Ministry's request for the return to the country of diplomatic mission members and their families stranded abroad. Second: tasking the Public Authority for Manpower, in coordination with Interior Ministry, Foreign Ministry and Finance Ministry, to determine the costs pertaining to each expatriate worker, whose contracts ended, were found in violation of the residency law and those evacuated from the shelters, and ensuring the commitment of employers to pay the costs of their travel tickets. Third: the adoption of two brochures, including guidelines for the reopening and restart of activities in the second and third phases respectively. Fourth: the approval of the return to sports training and practice only, with the adherence to health requirements and daily deadlines, in accordance with the restart stages.

Anti-Corruption Authority

Separately, the Cabinet approved a decree and



Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah attends the meeting.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends the meeting.



Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan attends the meeting.

raised it to His Highness the Amir, appointing the president, vice president and board members of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority as follows: 1. Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim (president). 2. Nawaf Al-Mehmal (vice president). 3. Khaled Al-Khaled (member). 4. Mashael Al-Hajeri (member). 5. Husam Behbehani



(member). 6. Nawaf Al-Bader (member). 7. Abdulaziz Al-Mansour (member).

Also, the Cabinet examined the recommendations of the Public Services Committee, regarding the re-planning of traffic close to the southern entrance of the Ministries Complex building in Al-Mirqab, deciding the following: Instructing the Public Authority for

Housing Welfare, in coordination with relevant authorities, to swiftly implement urgent solutions to tackle the matter, informing the Cabinet of any obstacles that may hinder these plans.

The Cabinet also discussed the National Assembly sessions, scheduled yesterday and today, to discuss the grilling submitted to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Higher Education Saud Al-Harbi and the Minister of Finance Barrak Al-Sheetan and coronavirus developments. Ministers, in this regard, reviewed His Highness the Prime Minister's message to the National Assembly speaker on the need for government presence, at a minimum level, in order to secure the quorum necessary to hold the session. It also urged compliance with health requirements, like social distancing and the completion of health and safety measures ahead of the session.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah briefed ministers on his recent visit to Iraq, representing His Highness the Amir, which aimed to deliver a handwritten message to the newly-appointed Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi. The message focused on the close bond between the two neighbouring countries, means to promote and develop relations under various spec-

trums and several matters of mutual concern. Furthermore, the Cabinet mourned the loss of former finance minister and Amiri Diwan advisor Abdulrahman Al-Ateeqi, who passed away on Friday, recalling with appreciation his sincere efforts and contributions on the national scale in the various posts he held.

Terrorist attacks

In addition, the Cabinet strongly condemned a terrorist attack by the terrorist Houthi militias against the Saudi cities of Najran and Khamees Mushait. This terrorist attack, which targets Saudi Arabia's security, showed how the Houthis were relentlessly aborting every chance of peace in the region, Kuwait government said in a statement. The government said it supported Saudi Arabia's measures to preserve the Kingdom's security and stability. The government also condemned the terrorist attack in the Iraqi city of Diyala which killed and injured scores of security forces and innocent civilians. Kuwait rejects violent and terrorist acts which targets innocent civilians, and undermine security and stability, it said. Meanwhile, the government congratulated Moroccan King Mohammad VI for undergoing a successful surgery. — KUNA

News in brief

Amir congratulates Moroccan King

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday sent a cable to King Mohammad VI of Morocco. The cable enclosed His Highness congratulations and well wishes to the Moroccan monarch following a successful surgery. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah have sent similar cables to King Mohammad VI. — KUNA

Diwan mourns Sheikha

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan on Monday mourned Sheikha Haya Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Malik Al-Sabah, who passed away at 87 years old. The deceased was to be laid to rest yesterday morning, according to a Diwan statement. — KUNA

Co-op staff test positive

KUWAIT: Jabriya Co-operative Society announced that 20 of its employees tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Meanwhile, 33 employees tested positive for coronavirus at Subahiya Co-op Society. In the meantime, Al-Shaab Co-op Society announced that all 21 workers and five volunteers who were previously infected with coronavirus have recovered.

Sixteen flights

KUWAIT: Sixteen flights departed Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 2,420 passengers, according to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. They included eight flights to Egypt, four flights to India, one flight to Qatar, and three flights to Sudan.

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Ministers and MPs attend a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. —KUNA photo

Kuwait FM receives call from Kenya counterpart

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Monday received a video call from his Kenyan counterpart Raychelle Awuor Omamo. During the phone conversation, the Kenyan official elaborated on the latest developments of her country's bid for the 2021-2022 non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Both foreign ministers discussed the latest situation of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and cooperation between both friendly countries to mitigate its reflections. They underlined that concerted international efforts should be exerted to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and address its fallout, and to back the efforts of concerned international organizations in this regard. The two ministers also discussed bilateral relations between both friendly nations and ways of developing and promoting them in various fields, as well as the latest regional and international developments. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks with his Kenyan counterpart Raychelle Awuor Omamo via video call. —KUNA



Kenyan Foreign Minister Raychelle Awuor Omamo.

GCC chief, British Minister discuss economic partnership

RIYADH: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf discussed with British Minister of International Trade Ranil Jayawardena economic partnership between the two sides. The two men discussed in a virtual meeting Monday progress of partnership that was launched between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Britain in 2016 in Bahrain, a GCC statement said. They also discussed means of promoting economic and trade cooperation, and to prepare grounds for a free trade agreement following Brexit. Hajraf and Jayawardena discussed efforts to combat COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the GCC condemned the Houthi militias for launching booby-trapped drones against populated areas in southern Saudi Arabia on Monday. These terrorist attacks, which nonetheless take place at a time the world was focusing on curbing the coronavirus, aimed at destabilizing security of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, Hajraf said in a statement. The drone



RIYADH: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf holds talks with British Minister of International Trade Ranil Jayawardena. —KUNA

attacks, he added, were blatant violations of international laws which restricted attacks of civilians and civilian areas. He commended the Saudi airforce for intercepting and destroying the drones before reaching their targets. The GCC stands firmly with Saudi Arabia in all measure the Kingdom have been taking to preserve its security, stability and safety of the population, he said. Hajraf urged the international community to live up to its responsibility and make the Houthis stop their hostile acts. —KUNA

Kuwait oil price down to \$32.95 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil fell by seven cents to \$32.95 per barrel (pb) on Monday, compared with \$33.02 on Friday, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Globally, the price of Brent crude on Monday closed up by 99 cents or 2.4 percent to \$37.12 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate went up by \$86 or 2.4 percent to \$37.12 pb. —KUNA



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Local

Kuwait, Bahrain contact tracing apps among most dangerous for privacy: Amnesty

Gulf states urged to stop using apps in current form

KUWAIT: Kuwait, Bahrain and Norway have rolled out some of the most invasive COVID-19 contact tracing apps around the world, putting the privacy and security of hundreds of thousands of people at risk, an Amnesty International investigation reveals.

Amnesty's Security Lab reviewed contact tracing apps from Europe, Middle East and North Africa, including a detailed technical analysis of 11 apps in Algeria, Bahrain, France, Iceland, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Norway, Qatar, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates, some of which ranged from bad to dangerous for human rights. Bahrain's 'BeAware Bahrain', Kuwait's 'Shlonik' and Norway's 'Smittestopp' apps stood out as among the most alarming mass surveillance tools assessed by Amnesty, with all three actively carrying out live or near-live tracking of users' locations by frequently uploading GPS coordinates to a central server.

On Monday, the Norwegian government announced it would press pause on using its contact tracing app. The decision came just hours before Amnesty International published its analysis and after the organization shared its findings with the Norwegian authorities and the country's data protection agency on June 2. Amnesty International also met with the head of development for the 'Smittestopp' app on June 10.

"Bahrain, Kuwait and Norway have run roughshod over people's privacy, with highly invasive surveillance tools which go far beyond what is justified in efforts to tackle COVID-19," said Claudio Guarnieri, Head of Amnesty International's Security Lab.

"The Norwegian app was highly invasive and the decision to go back to the drawing board is the right one. We urge the Bahraini and Kuwaiti governments to also immediately halt the use of such intrusive apps in their current form. They are essentially broadcasting the locations of users to a government database in real time - this is unlikely to be necessary and proportionate in the context of a public health response.

Technology can play a useful role in contact tracing to contain COVID-19, but privacy must not be another casualty as governments rush to roll out apps."

Mass Surveillance Tools

Contact tracing apps in Bahrain, Kuwait and Norway follow an invasive centralized approach, posing a great threat to privacy. These systems capture location data through GPS and upload this to a central database, tracking the movements of users in real-time. Qatar's "EHTERAZ" app is capable of optionally activating live location tracking of all users or of specific individuals (at the time of writing it remains turned off).

Authorities in all these countries can easily link this sensitive personal information to an individual, as Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait require users to register with a national ID number, while Norway requires registration with a valid phone number.

Other apps assessed by the Security Lab such as Tunisia's "E7mi", also follow a centralized model, but instead of recording GPS coordinates, they use Bluetooth proximity scanning to monitor contact between users in real time. Qatar's "EHTERAZ" records and uploads Bluetooth contact between users' devices, along with the GPS coordinates of the encounter.

A major security vulnerability was identified in Qatar's EHTEAZ app, which exposed sensitive personal details of more than one million people. This was especially concerning as the app was made mandatory to use on May 22. The vulnerability was fixed after Amnesty alerted the authorities to the discovery at the end of May. The security flaw would have allowed cyber attackers to access highly sensitive personal information, including the name, national ID, health status and designated confinement location of users.

Tracing apps from countries such as France, Iceland and United Arab Emirates use a centralized

model, but information on contact between devices is uploaded only when users voluntarily decide to report themselves as symptomatic or at the request of the health authorities. Such voluntary and consensual uploads at least reduce the risk of mass surveillance, as data is not automatically uploaded. The centralized model of France's contact-tracing app combined with the lack of transparency over how data is stored raises questions as to whether the users' information could be deanonymized.

"Governments across the world need to press pause on rolling out flawed or excessively intrusive contact tracing apps that fail to protect human rights. If contact tracing apps are to play an effective part in combating COVID-19 people need to have confidence their privacy will be protected," said Claudio Guarnieri.

New forms of surveillance

Bahrain's app was even linked to a national television show called "Are You at Home?", which offered prizes to individuals who stayed at home during Ramadan. Using contact details gathered through the app, 10 phone numbers were randomly selected every day using a computer program, and those numbers were called live on air to check if the app users were at home. Those who were won a prize. Inclusion in the television program draw was initially mandatory until Bahrain's Information and eGovernment Authority added an option to its BeAware Bahrain app allowing users to 'opt out' of participating in the television competition. The Bahraini authorities have also published online sensitive personal information of suspected COVID-19 cases, including an individual's health status, nationality, age, gender and travel history.

Both the Bahraini and Kuwaiti apps can pair with a Bluetooth bracelet which is used to make sure the user remains in the vicinity of the phone, in order to enforce quarantine measures. The Kuwait app regularly checks the distance between the Bluetooth bracelet and the device, uploading location data every 10 minutes to a central server.

Location data and additional diagnostic information from the Bluetooth bracelet linked to the



BeAware Bahrain app is frequently sent to a central server. It is mandatory for all individuals registered for home quarantine to wear the bracelet and those who do not can face legal penalties under the Public Health Law No. 34 (2018), including imprisonment for at least 3 months and/or a fine of between BD1,000 and BD10,000 (approximately \$2,700, and \$27,000 respectively).

Privacy and human rights by design

Contact tracing is an important component of effective pandemic response, and contact tracing apps have the potential to support this objective. However, in order to be human rights compliant, contact tracing apps must, among other things, build in privacy and data protection by design, meaning any data collected must be the minimum amount necessary, and securely stored. All data collection must be restricted to controlling the spread of COVID-19 and should not be used for any other purpose - including law enforcement, national security or immigration control. It must also not be made available to any third party or for commercial use. Any individual decision to download and use contact tracing apps must also be entirely voluntary. Any data collected must remain anonymous, including when combined with other data sets.

"Governments rolling out centralized contact tracing apps with real-time location tracking need to go back to the drawing board. There are better options available that balance the need to trace the spread of the disease without hoovering up sensitive personal information of millions of people," said Claudio Guarnieri. — Amnesty International

12 persons used fake chques to buy gloves, masks

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Criminal detectives busted a 12-man gang of various nationalities who gave pharmacies dud chques for purchases of gloves, masks and sterilizers. A security source said a pharmacy owner told police he accepted an offer from a person to sell him his stock of the gloves, sterilizers and masks, so he sent a representative who took the products to the clients and was handed a cheque. The pharmacy owner went to the bank to cash the cheque but it bounced, so he reported it to police. Detectives who worked on the case found out that it was not the first time such crime was committed. Further investigations revealed that there were 12 persons who resold the goods to supermarkets, and police were able to arrest three suspects, who confessed to committing the described crimes and led police to the rest, who were also detained and sent to concerned authorities.

Philippine Embassy introduces online passport renewal appointments as frustration mounts

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Online appointments for passport renewal were introduced by the Philippine Embassy in Kuwait recently to help Filipinos whose passports have expired or will expire soon. According to the embassy, this is a temporary measure as the world battles the coronavirus pandemic. The embassy's consular section is only handling passport matters, while other services are suspended until the situation normalizes.

During the lockdown, hundreds of Filipinos were unable to renew their passports as Kuwait implemented strict measures to counter the spread of the virus. Last month, Kuwait announced new rules to automatically extend the validity of expats' visas until the end of August. But visas of foreign residents cannot be renewed if passports are valid for less than a year.

"Me and my coworker insisted to come today without online appointments because we are helpless - we need to renew our visa. And in order for me to renew it, I should have more than one year of validity of my passport," said Janice, an applicant at the embassy on Monday. The passports of Janice

and her colleague will expire in mid-2021, but they have to renew them since their iqamas are expiring soon. "We waited for the online appointment for long, but the only slot available was at the end of 2021. We were furious why the system is like that," she said.

Janice was just one of many people at the embassy on Monday who were complaining and experiencing similar situations. A household service worker at the embassy also experienced difficulties in securing an online appointment. "Since they opened the online appointment at the embassy, we were trying to secure the date when we could come, but we couldn't, so I came to ask anyway. My visa expired in March and my passport has also expired. I hope they listen to us and add more personnel so they can accommodate more applicants," she said.

However, according to Vice Consul Charleson Hermosura, the situation is controlled by the ministry of health. "We need to follow the local protocols of the host government. They are very strict in implementing the five-phase plan because it's for our own good," he said. He explained the limited slots for the renewal of passports was due to the current circumstances and the precautionary meas-

ures undertaken by the embassy.

"Besides, we have limited staff now because some of the embassy staff are locked down in Hawally. We are trying to improve the services as much as possible. Perhaps after the lockdown we could increase the quota. But then again it depends on the interior ministry's decision," Hermosura added.

To apply for an appointment, one must visit the embassy website. "I advise Filipinos to stand by for the announcement of the opening of the Philippine Embassy appointment link for the renewal of their passports. As much as we want to serve all, but when we open the link, it is like a marketplace - first come, first serve. So we encourage you to frequently visit the embassy page to get the online appointment from Thursday afternoon to Saturday evening," he said.

At the embassy, applicants are not allowed to enter the premises and will be met outside the gate of the embassy in a holding area. "We call upon Filipinos to practice social distancing, proper hygiene and always clean hands with soap and sanitizers," he said. "We want all Filipinos to be safe and hopefully everything will be back to normal sooner rather than later," he said.



KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard Undersecretary Lt Gen Hesham Al-Refaie recently visited security checkpoints in Khaitan where KNG personnel regulate entrance and exit of vehicles in and out of the locked down area.



Bali's open-air burials endure despite COVID

Nepal arrests 3 men for quarantine rape



TAEZ: Yemeni workers use an excavator to dig graves at a specific plot for COVID-19 victims, at a cemetery in Yemen's third city of Ta'ez. —AFP

Global virus cases tops 8 million

Disease puts 1 in 5 globally at severe COVID risk: Study

NEW YORK: Global cases of the novel coronavirus reached over 8 million on Monday, as infections surge in Latin America and the United States and China grapple with fresh outbreaks. The United States still leads the world with the highest number of infections, about 2 million or 25% of all reported cases. However, the outbreak is growing fastest in Latin America, which now accounts for 21% of all cases, according to a Reuters tally. Brazil's COVID-19 cases and deaths have surged to make it the No.2 hot spot in the world. The first case was reported in China in early January and it took until early May to reach 4 million cases. It has taken just five weeks to double to 8 million cases, according to a Reuters tally. Global deaths stand at over 434,000 and have doubled in seven weeks. Although Brazil's official death toll from the pandemic has risen to nearly 44,000, the true impact is likely far greater than the data show, health experts said, citing a lack of widespread testing in Latin America's largest country.

In the United States, which has over 116,000 deaths, testing is still ramping up months after the start of the outbreak. After cases declined in much of the United States for weeks, many areas are now reporting record new cases and hospitalizations. Fears of a second wave in hard-hit states - or a failure to get a grip on the first wave in some others - have led health experts to plead with the public to wear masks, avoid large gatherings and maintain social distance. China is also grappling with a resurgence of the virus just as its economy is trying to recover from shutdowns earlier this year. After nearly two months with no new infections, the capital Beijing has seen a spike in cases linked to the biggest wholesale food market in Asia.

Severe COVID risk

An estimated 1.7 billion people - more than 20 percent of the world's population - risk becoming severely infected with COVID-19 due to underlying

health problems such as obesity and heart disease, analysis showed yesterday. The novel coronavirus, which has killed more than 420,000 people globally during the first wave of the pandemic, adversely affects patients suffering from co-morbidities. A team of experts from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine analyzed global data sets of illnesses including diabetes, lung disease and HIV used these to estimate how many people are at heightened risk of serious COVID-19 infection. They found that one in five people have at least one under-



Brazil becomes No 2 hot spot in the world

lying health problem putting them in greater danger.

While not all of those would go on to develop severe symptoms if infected, the researchers said around 4 percent of the global population - around 350 million) would likely get sick enough to require hospital treatment. "As countries move out of lockdown, governments are looking for ways to protect the most vulnerable from a virus that is still circulating," said Andrew Clark, who contributed to the study. "This might involve advising people with underlying conditions to adopt social distancing measures appropriate to their level of risk."

Clark said the findings could help governments make decisions on who receives a COVID-19 vaccine first when one becomes available. Consistent with other studies about COVID risk, the authors found

percent in France and Germany.

But between a third and a half of all news subscriptions go to just a few major media organisations, such as the New York Times, according to the annual Digital News Report by the Reuters Institute. Some readers, however, are also beginning to take out more than one subscription, paying for a local or specialist title in addition to a national news source, the study's authors said. But a large proportion of internet users say nothing could convince them to pay for online news, around 40 percent in the United States and 50 percent in Britain.

YouGov conducted the online surveys of 40 countries for the Reuters Institute in January, with 2,000 respondents in each. Further surveys were carried out in six countries in April to analyse the initial effects from COVID-19. The health crisis brought a revival of interest in television news - with the audi-



TEGUCIGALPA: Health workers carry the bodies of two victims of COVID-19 on trolleys outside an improvised tent mounted at the state Escuela Hospital in Tegucigalpa amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. Honduras has reported at least 323 deaths from COVID-19 so far. —AFP

that older people are in greater danger of getting seriously unwell from the virus. Less than 5 percent of people aged under 20 have an underlying risk factor, compared with two thirds of over 70s. Countries with younger populations have fewer people with at least one underlying condition, but risks vary globally, according to the analysis. Small island states such as Fiji and Mauritius have among the highest rates of diabetes - a known COVID-19 risk factor - on Earth, for example. And countries with the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS, such as eSwatini and Lesotho, also need to be vigilant, said authors of the research published in The Lancet. In Europe, more than 30 percent of people have one or more health conditions, it showed. Writing in a linked comment, Nina Schwalbe from Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, said the study showed "it is time to evolve from a one-size-fits-all approach to one that centres on those most at risk." —Agencies

ence rising five percent on average - establishing itself as the main source of information along with online media. Conversely, newspaper circulation was hard-hit by coronavirus lockdown measures. The survey found trust in news had fallen to its lowest level since the first report in 2012, with just 38 percent saying they trusted most news most of the time.

However, confidence in the news media varied considerably by country, ranging from 56 percent in Finland and Portugal to 23 percent in France and 21 percent in South Korea. In Hong Kong, which has been hit by months of sometimes violent street protests against an extradition law, trust in the news fell 16 points to 30 percent over the year. Chile, which has had regular demonstrations against inequality, saw trust in the media fall 15 percent while in Britain, where society has been polarised by issues such as Brexit, it was down 12 points. —AFP

Ramaphosa condemns surge in femicides in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: President Cyril Ramaphosa on Monday condemned as "barbaric" and "acts of inhumanity" a surge of femicides since South Africa eased anti-coronavirus stay-at-home measures. Murders of women have spiralled since the start of June, when lockdown restrictions were loosened allowing for more movement of people, according to the police. Speaking at a ruling African National Congress virtual meeting, Ramaphosa said gender-based violence "continues to plague our country and we have been saddened by the continuous and recurring news of men attacking and killing women in the past few weeks."

"Men continue to kill women in the most horrific and barbaric fashion" he said, warning "it must end". In a weekly newsletter earlier, he described the attacks as "acts of inhumanity". One of the most gruesome attacks was that of an eight-months pregnant woman whose stabbed body was found hanging from a tree in Roodepoort, a western suburb of Johannesburg. Five days later, the body of another young woman was found on Friday dumped under a tree in Soweto.

Police have reported several other cases of femicide across the country in recent days. The reasons for the sudden increase are being investigated. Police Minister Bheki Cele has said that an overall rise in crime was caused by the lifting of a ban on the sale of alcohol. On Saturday Ramaphosa referred to the past week as "a dark and shameful week for us as a nation". "We note with disgust that at a time when the country is facing the gravest of threats from the pandemic, violent men are taking advantage of the eased restrictions on movement to attack women and children," he said in a statement.

Ramaphosa called on young men to become even more active in fighting gender-based violence as he spoke on the eve of the 44th anniversary of the June 16 Soweto massacre of black school children by the apartheid regime. Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi joined calls to end femicide saying "enough is enough". "Let's be the generation of men to break this attack on women," he said to his half-a-million Instagram followers. South Africa is ranked among countries with one of the highest levels of intimate partner violence in the world. A woman is killed every three hours in South Africa, according to police statistics - a rate five times the world average. Around one in two are murdered by men with whom they had a close relationship. —AFP

Online news wins subscribers around world but trust low

PARIS: Increasing numbers of readers are paying for online news around the world even if the level of trust in the media in general remains very low, according to a report published yesterday. Around 20 percent of Americans questioned said they subscribed to an online news provider (up four points over the previous year) and 42 percent of Norwegians (up eight points), along with 13 percent of the Dutch (up three points), compared with 10

International

'Dying of hunger': Zimbabwe street vendors hit by COVID clampdown

Authorities demolish thousands of illegally built structures

HARARE: Martha Kahari was already struggling to make ends meet after Zimbabwe's coronavirus lockdown forced her to stop selling second-hand clothes and tomatoes at the side of the road in the capital Harare. Then the council came to tear down her stall. Since April, local authorities in Zimbabwe's major cities have demolished thousands of illegally built structures that vendors like Kahari use to sell their wares, in what authorities have said is an effort to legitimize informal trade in the city. With her stall destroyed, the 40-year-old disabled mother of two has given up hope of being able to afford rent or pay back the money she borrowed to buy the stock she planned to sell once the lockdown was lifted. "If I don't settle the loan soon, they will come and take my goods," she said.

"Because I've been deprived of income, I have to live in one room at my in-laws' with my two children and my property. We have no money for food and no one is helping us." Vendors and informal workers' groups in Zimbabwe say that city officials, with the support of the national government, are exploiting the lockdown to destroy makeshift shops and market stalls while their owners are observing stay-at-home orders. Oliver Chidawu, minister of state for Harare, and the city's mayor Herbert Gomba said in a joint statement in April that they had "noted with concern the anxiety that has gripped players in the informal sector" since the demolitions began.

The aim of the operation was to remove illegal businesses and ensure that cities are "clean, orderly and well-managed" while also making sure councils don't lose out on potential revenue, they said. Crackdowns on informal traders, who make up more than three-quarters of the country's population, according to the Informal Economy Traders Association, are a

“No money for food, no one is helping us”

frequent occurrence in Zimbabwe. The last major wave of demolitions happened early last year, when about 2,500 stalls were torn down in Harare and Chitungwiza, a town about 30km south of the capital.

Samuel Wadzai, executive director of the Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation (VISET), a union based in Harare, said the current operation has destroyed the livelihoods of more than 3

million vendors. Having already gone without income since the southern African nation went into lockdown on March 30, many vendors lost essential stock and prized possessions when their stalls were destroyed, Wadzai said. "Our members lost merchandise and property worth millions of dollars in the nationwide blitz," he said. Vendors' rights advocates note that with Zimbabwe in the grips of an economic crisis that has seen soaring food prices and food shortages, vendors have spent any savings they had on feeding their families. Now they will have no place to work from and no way to buy new stock once the lockdown is lifted, Wadzai said.

Hawking from home

To survive, some vendors have turned to social media to ask for money and food donations, while others are hawking from their homes. Bidnock Kunaka, 55, had two stalls - one in Kuwadzana suburb where he lives and another in central Harare - from which he sold various commodities, ranging from fruits and vegetables to hardware. Because he was home observing lockdown rules, he learned about the demolitions from media reports and fellow vendors.

When he finally had the chance to check on his stall in Kuwadzana, he found only the shell left. Vendors were given no warnings that the demolitions were coming, Kunaka said. "I can't put food on the table now. The cash I had set aside to stock the busi-

ness, we have exhausted on food and other household needs," said the father of four. Without that working capital, Kunaka, who became a vendor in 2016 after losing his job as a factory worker, said it will be impossible to restart his business after the lockdown. Instead, he has turned a portion of the land at his house into a market garden, where he is growing carrots, onions and leaf greens. "I'm hoping from the garden I will manage to generate income to feed the family and to start vending again," he said.

Designated spaces

Wadzai at VISET said the criminalization of vendors and the demolition of their stalls goes against the state's responsibility to promote small businesses. City officials have promised to accommodate vendors in approved spaces that will be designated for use by market vendors once the lockdown is lifted. "The city of Harare and other local authorities are already in the process of identifying and preparing alternate workplaces for informal traders," Chidawu and Gomba said in their joint statement. But Wadzai said the committees deciding how to allocate and use those spaces had not reached out to any vendors or informal workers' unions for their input. "It is not fair for the authorities to take advantage of COVID-19 lockdown to attack the livelihoods of people and without any consultation," he said over the phone. —Reuters

'Guardians not warriors': US mayor orders police reforms

ATLANTA: The mayor of Atlanta ordered immediate police reforms on Monday after the fatal shooting of a black man by a white police officer in the US city sparked further outrage over the deaths of African-Americans at the hands of law enforcement. "Our police officers are to be guardians and not warriors in our communities," Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms told a press conference. Bottoms described Friday night's police shooting of 27-year-old Rayshard Brooks as a "murder" and said it "didn't have to end that way." "It angered me and it saddened me beyond words," the mayor said. Brooks's death came two-and-a-half weeks after the death of George Floyd, a black man killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis. Floyd's May 25 death ignited a wave of protests for racial justice and police reform across the United States. It also triggered a national soul-searching of the country's checkered past regarding racism.

President Donald Trump is due to sign an executive order Tuesday to encourage "best practices" among the police, but the move will likely fall short of calls for a fundamental shake-up of the service. Bottoms outlined reforms to standard operating procedures including use of deadly force policies and a "duty to intervene" if an officer sees misconduct by another policeman. "This is the beginning of a great deal of work that lies ahead of us," she said. "It is clear that we do



ATLANTA: A man stands on a table on a patio railing outside a burned Wendy's restaurant on the third day, following Rayshard Brooks shooting death by police in the restaurant parking lot in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

not have another day, another minute, another hour to waste."

The mayor's address came after thousands of demonstrators marched on the Georgia state capitol in Atlanta to protest Brooks's death. Georgia prosecutors said they were weighing bringing charges against the policeman who shot Brooks in a Wendy's parking lot. "If that shot was fired for some reason other than to save that officer's life or to prevent injury to him or others, then that shooting is not justified under the law," Fulton County district attorney Paul Howard said. The officer, Garrett Rolfe, was dismissed from the force, and Atlanta's police chief resigned within hours of the shooting.

'They need to be put away'

Trump described the Atlanta incident as "very disturbing." "It's about law and order

but it's about justice also, and it's about safety," he said ahead of unveiling the executive order on police standards. Trump has condemned Floyd's death but has rejected accusations of systemic racism in the police force.

Tomika Miller, Brooks's wife, told "CBS This Morning" that Rolfe and the other officer who was on the scene should go to jail. "If it was my husband who shot them, he would be in jail," Miller said. "They need to be put away." Brooks was shot while running away after a scuffle with the two officers, which was caught on video. The autopsy report said he died of two gunshot wounds in the back. Thousands of demonstrators chanting "Black lives matter" took part in the march on the capitol, where the Georgia legislature was holding its first session since the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

After Floyd death, police face calls on screening recruits

MINNEAPOLIS: As he watched the video of George Floyd's dying moments, martial arts instructor Andre Balian recognized the white police officer kneeling on the black man's neck for nearly nine minutes. "There's no perceivable way that he could not know what kind of damage he was either doing or capable of doing in that situation," Balian said of Derek Chauvin, the now ex-officer who has been charged with murdering Floyd in Minneapolis.

"A knee on someone's neck that's on the ground could be like a killing blow if it's applied with a harsh amount of force." "He knew what he was doing and that it was wrong, and they better not let him off the hook for it," said Balian, who still teaches at the Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu Association where he encountered Chauvin two decades ago. Chauvin, who spent 19 years on the Minneapolis force before being sacked over Floyd's killing, racked up 17 complaints during his career, including one when he yanked a woman from her car for a minor speeding offense.

While Balian was shocked to watch the video of Floyd's death on May 25, he recalled his unease about Chauvin as a student, describing him as a "jerk" who would stand with arms folded and glare at those around him. James Butcher, an expert in psychological screening exams for aspiring police officers, said anyone capable of such



ATLANTA: People gather for a civil rights National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) protest march in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

violence should never have been recruited in the first place. "It's very difficult to believe that someone who was supposed to be screened for mental health issues or mental health problems would engage in that extensive physical abuse against another person," Butcher told AFP.

Personality disorders

An emeritus professor at the University of Minnesota, Butcher's work for 40 years has focused on a standardized psychological test that assesses personality traits and mental problems. Called the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), it is used internationally to weed out unfit police applicants, although not all departments use it. "If he was given the MMPI, in all likelihood he would have shown up on the MMPI as having personality problems, personality disorders, antisocial features, and

so forth," Butcher said. "It's very apparent that there was some problem with detecting the personality disorders that were showing up in his behavior."

One of the three other officers who were fired and charged over Floyd's death, Tou Thao, was the subject of six complaints in seven years. One prompted a lawsuit alleging excessive force during the arrest of a suspect whose teeth were smashed, although the case was settled out of court. The Minneapolis force also faced questions over its screening of recruits after another of its officers shot dead an Australian-American woman, Justine Ruszczyk Damond, in 2017. During his murder trial, prosecutors said Mohamed Noor's pre-employment screening predicted that he would have difficulty with stressful police work as he was impatient over minor infractions and disliked interacting with people. —AFP

North Korea blows up liaison office

SEOUL: North Korea blew up an inter-Korean liaison office on its side of the border yesterday, after days of increasingly virulent rhetoric from Pyongyang. The demolition came after Kim Yo Jong - the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un - said at the weekend the "useless north-south joint liaison office" would soon be seen "completely collapsed". South Korean television pictures showed smoke rising from a long-shuttered industrial zone just across the border in Kaesong, where the office was set up less than two years ago.

Analysts say Pyongyang may be seeking to manufacture a crisis to increase pressure on Seoul while nuclear negotiations with Washington are at a standstill. Seoul's presidential Blue House called an emergency meeting of the National Security Council, Yonhap said. The liaison office was opened in September 2018, days before the South's President Moon Jae-in flew to Pyongyang for his third summit with Kim, and around 20 officials from each side were stationed at the office during subsequent months.

But inter-Korean relations soured following the collapse of the Hanoi summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in February last year over sanctions relief and what the North would be willing to give up in return. Operations at the office were suspended in January because of the coronavirus pandemic. And since early June, North Korea has issued a series of vitriolic condemnations of the South over activists sending anti-Pyongyang

leaflets over the border — something defectors do on a regular basis.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said yesterday the liaison office's destruction was in line with "the mindset of the enraged people to surely force human scum and those who have sheltered the scum to pay dearly for their crimes". Last week Pyongyang announced it was severing all official communication links with Seoul. "North Korea has started a provocation cycle with stages of escalation," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, calling the destruction of the office "a symbolic blow to inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation". "The Kim regime is also signaling the United States won't have the luxury of keeping North Korea on the back-burner for the remainder of the year," he added.

Relations soured

Since Pyongyang condemned the leaflet launches - usually attached to hot air balloons or floated in bottles — the Unification ministry has filed a police complaint against two defector groups and warned of a "thorough crackdown" against activists. On Monday, the left-leaning Moon urged the North not to "close the window of dialogue".

The two Koreas remain technically at war after Korean War hostilities ended with an armistice in 1953 that was never replaced with a peace treaty. Last week the North criticized Trump in a stinging denunciation of the US on the second anniversary of the Singapore summit, with its foreign minister Ri Son Gwon accusing Washington of seeking regime change. US diplomats insist that they believe Kim promised in Singapore to give up his nuclear arsenal, something Pyongyang has taken no steps to do. The North is under multiple international sanctions over its banned weapons programs. — AFP

US to resume executions July after 17 years

WASHINGTON: The United States will resume federal executions on July 13, after a 17-year stay, the Justice Department said Monday. There have been just three federal execution since the death penalty was reinstated by the US government in 1988. Attorney General Bill Barr announced a year ago he intended to resume the use of the death penalty for federal crimes. Five convicted murderers were scheduled to undergo lethal injections in December 2019 and January of this year at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana.

But at the last minute, the US Supreme Court refused to lift a stay on federal executions, saying that - "in light of what is at stake" - the block on executions should be reviewed by an appeals court. In April, an appeals court in Washington approved the use of pentobarbital for lethal injections, and Barr ordered that new execution dates be set for four of the five convicts. "We owe it to the victims of these horrific crimes," Barr said in a statement.

Following his order, the Bureau of Prisons scheduled the executions to take place between July 13 and August 28. Among the four is Daniel Lewis Lee, an avowed white supremacist, who was sentenced to death for the 1996 murder of a family of three, including an eight-year-old girl. The mother of one of his victims, Earlene Peterson, opposes Lee's execution due to her religious convictions and appealed to US President Donald Trump to grant Lee clemency. "I can't see how executing Daniel Lee will honor my daughter in any way," Peterson said in a video posted online. "In fact, kind of like it dirties her name because she wouldn't want it and I don't want it."

Trump, who is a fervent advocate of the death penalty and has even said it should be applied against drug dealers, did not grant her appeal. According to opinion polls, support for the death penalty has declined in recent years and is down to around 54 percent from 80 percent in the early 1990s. Only a handful of states, mainly in the US south, still carry out executions. Twenty-two people were executed in 2019. Most crimes in the United States are heard in state courts, but some are handled by federal prosecutors, such as hate crimes, some particularly heinous crimes or those that take place on military installations or Native American reservations. — AFP

International

Beijing virus situation 'extremely severe' as 27 new cases reported

New cluster sparks a huge trace-and-test program

BEIJING: The coronavirus situation in China's capital is "extremely severe", a city official warned yesterday, as 27 new infections were reported from Beijing where a new cluster has sparked a huge trace-and-test program. The COVID-19 resurgence - believed to have started at the sprawling Xinfadi wholesale food market in the capital - has sparked alarm as China had largely brought its outbreak under control through mass testing and lockdowns imposed earlier in the year. The new cases took the number of confirmed infections in Beijing over the past five days to 106, as authorities locked down almost 30 communities in the city and tested tens of thousands of people. "The epidemic situation in the capital is extremely severe," Beijing city spokesman Xu Hejian warned at a press conference.

The World Health Organization had already expressed concern about the cluster, pointing to Beijing's size and connectivity. Officials in the capital have said they will test stall owners and managers at all of the city's food markets, restaurants and government canteens. Beijing's coronavirus testing capacity has been expanded to 90,000 a day, according to China's official news agency Xinhua. Yesterday, the capital's transport commission banned taxi- and ride-hailing services from driving out of the city, Xinhua reported, in another move to try and contain the new outbreak. All indoor sports and entertainment venues in Bei-

jing were ordered to shut on Monday, and some other cities across China warned they would quarantine those arriving from the capital. The National Health Commission also reported four new domestic infections in Hebei province, which surrounds Beijing, and a case reported in southwestern Sichuan province was linked to the Beijing cluster. Authorities were also racing to track people from Beijing who had travelled to other parts of China, and those who visited the capital have been encouraged to get tested. Beijing spokesman Xu said: "High-risk people who have left Beijing must inform local authorities immediately."

Market inspections

Authorities shut down another market yesterday - Tiantaohonglian in the central Xicheng district - after one employee there was diagnosed with COVID-19, state broadcaster CCTV reported. Seven residential estates surrounding that market were also locked down. In total, Beijing officials said yesterday they have disinfected 276 agricultural markets, closed 11 markets, and disinfected more than 33,000 food and beverage businesses in a bid to stamp out the new cluster.

Officials had warned Sunday that since May 30, 200,000 people had visited the Xinfadi market - the original site of the new outbreak. More than 8,000 workers from Xinfadi have been tested and sent to centralized quarantine facilities. Until this recent out-

COVID-19 resurgence triggers alarm



India's overwhelmed health workers brace for monsoon

MUMBAI: With hospitals already severely stretched, coronavirus-hit India is now bracing for the monsoon and its deadly annual onslaught of mosquito-borne illnesses, with an overwhelmed army of public health workers the only defense. Every year illnesses such as dengue fever and malaria infect more than half a million people and kill hundreds in India as the monsoon brings much-needed rain but also devastation and disease. With more than three decades of experience as a doctor in India's chronically underfunded public healthcare system, Vidya Thakur - medical superintendent at Mumbai's Rajawadi Hospital - is used to managing "heavy burdens". But now, she says, "COVID-19 has left us helpless... and the monsoon will make things even more difficult".

Every bit of space at the 580-bed state-run hospital where she works is already devoted to dealing with the pandemic. Beds crowd corridors, storage rooms function as wards and staff are overworked. At Mumbai's massive Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital, better known as Sion, undergraduates have been drafted into service, medical resident Shariva Ranadive said. Many experienced doctors and nurses are staying on the sidelines because they are vulnerable to the virus due to their age or pre-existing conditions such as diabetes. "Everyone is working constantly... we are overwhelmed," Thakur told AFP.

And now with the monsoon having arrived in Mumbai on its months-long journey northwards, she is readying for the usual rush of seasonal ailments. A particular problem is that many seasonal illnesses have symptoms that are virtually indistinguishable from coronavirus, such as fever, breathing difficulties and loss of appetite. This means more testing, more isolation beds and more protective equipment will be needed to ensure that patients are diagnosed correctly and not exposed to coronavirus too. "We will need to treat everyone as if they were a COVID-19 patient," said Thakur. "Every precaution will have to be taken."

Delayed efforts, double shifts

Healthcare workers are not the only ones battling exhaustion. A months-long lockdown to prevent the epidemic from spreading left Mumbai with an acute shortage of sanitation workers. Thousands of public health workers who fumigate neighborhoods to kill disease-carrying mosquitoes had to delay those crucial efforts for two months to focus on sanitation instead. "Many of our men are doing double shifts, working 14 hours straight," said Rajan Naringrekar, the head of the city's insecticide department.

With nearly 60,000 infections, Mumbai accounts for around a fifth of India's coronavirus cases. As teams fumigated a slum and cleared out stagnant water - a potent breeding ground for mosquitoes - from sagging tarpaulin roofs, storage bins and bottles, Naringrekar told AFP many of them were afraid of contracting the virus. The risks will increase exponentially with the rains, with workers required to inspect homes and offices in case of a dengue outbreak. "We are obviously worried but we have to do our job and take as many precautions as we can," he said, pointing to the gloves and masks worn by the workers. — AFP

Bali's open-air burials endure despite COVID

TRUNYAN: For centuries Bali's Trunyanese people have left their dead to decompose in the open, the bodies placed in bamboo cages until only the skeletons remain. It is a ritual they haven't given up - even as the COVID-19 pandemic upends burial practices worldwide with religious leaders in protective gear, cemetery workers in hazmat suits, and mourners banned or unable to comfort each other because of social-distancing rules.

Across Indonesia funeral workers are now required to wear protective equipment and bodies are laid to rest quickly, all in a bid to prevent the spread of the deadly respiratory disease. But in Bali local officials claim the novel coronavirus, which has infected at least eight million and killed more than 430,000 globally, has yet to reach the remote north east where the Trunyan live. "The funeral process remains the same but now we have to wear masks," explained village head Wayan Arjuna. Tourists are temporarily banned from visiting for fear of them bringing in the disease, he adds.

"We're afraid of getting COVID-19," said Arjuna, but added there was no suggestion of stopping the open-air burial process. Unlike many in the rest of Hindu-majority Bali, the Trunyanese - who fuse animist beliefs and traditional village customs with their own interpretation of Hinduism - do not bury or cremate their dead. Instead they let nature take its course as the corpses decay in the open, believing it to be a way to keep a link with the deceased. "This makes us feel connected to our loved ones," Arjuna said. "Like when my grandmother died, I felt like she was close", he added.

Skull Island

It is a short boat ride to their open-air cemetery from tiny Trunyan village, overlooked by volcano Mount Batur and a sprawling Hindu temple carved out

Nepal arrests 3 men for quarantine rape

KATHMANDU: Police in Nepal arrested three men on suspicion of gang raping a woman quarantined alone in an empty school, a case that has added to public anger over unsafe conditions for thousands of migrant workers forced into confinement over the coronavirus. Nepal requires those arriving from abroad to spend 14 days in quarantine to prevent the spread of the disease. But activists say the converted schools and other buildings used for the purpose are often unsafe, putting tens of thousands of migrant workers at risk.

Police fired water cannons, charged with batons and lobbed teargas shells to break up protests in Kathmandu last week demanding better quarantine facilities. In the latest case, police said the 31-year-old woman, a migrant worker returning home from India's tech hub of Bengaluru, was attacked after she was left alone in the quarantine center in Lamkichuha, a village 430 km (230 miles) southwest of capital Kathmandu.

The men forced their way into her room, Superintendent of Police Anup Shumsher JB Rana said by phone from Kailali district, where the quarantine center is located. "We have arrested one health worker and two volunteers looking after the quarantine (center) after the woman complained that she was gang raped by them," Rana said, adding that police were investigating the case. The woman, whom police did not name, was now with her family, Rana added. On Sunday, about 150 locals protested near the quarantine center demanding action against the three men.



BEIJING: People wearing face masks queue for swab tests, for those who are living or visited the Xinfadi Market, in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

break, most of China's cases in recent months were nationals returning home as the pandemic spread to other countries. China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention said Monday that the virus strain found in the Beijing outbreak was a "major epidemic strain in the European countries".

While the virus was detected on chopping boards used to handle imported salmon at Xinfadi, "it does not clearly or definitely indicate it's from imported seafood", Wu Zunyou, the body's chief epidemiolo-

gist, said in an interview with state broadcaster CCTV. "Ever since new cases suddenly emerged in Beijing, we have tried to figure out the reasons for the outbreak since there were no COVID-19 cases found over the past two months," Wu Zunyou said. "We came up with several possibilities, and the most likely one is that the carrier of the novel coronavirus comes from outside China or other parts of China and brought it here." Yesterday, another eight imported cases were reported. — AFP



TRUNYAN: Photo shows skulls at a cemetery where Bali's Trunyanese people hold open-air burials - before restrictions were implemented due to the COVID-19 coronavirus - near the village of Trunyan in Bangli Regency. — AFP

of volcanic rock. There are 11 cages for the corpses - placed close to a fragrant banyan tree that hides the putrid smell of death, locals say. In one cage, a recently deceased woman could almost have been mistaken for someone sleeping, but her waxy greying complexion revealed the truth. Nearby, a flesh-less foot poked out of clothing left on the bodies, while a skeletal jaw lay agape in another cage. "I used to be a little scared working here, but it's been so long now that I'm used to it," said veteran guide Wayan Sukarmin, who was spent 20 years showing people the custom on what outsiders have dubbed "Skull Island".

When AFP visited in February before the World Health Organization declared a pandemic and travel restrictions were put in place, signs warned visitors to wear appropriate clothing and refrain from using bad language. Rubber sandals, cigarette packages, toothpaste tubes and pots and pans were scattered around the site, along with baskets filled with coins and crumpled money - all left by mourners for dead relatives to use in the afterlife. "Locals won't take anything because it belongs to the dead. That's our belief," Sukarmin said.

"I don't know what the consequences would be if you took something but I believe in karma," he added.

Millennia-old custom

If the cages become full then older corpses are moved to an open ossuary, to make way for new ones. Then when there is no flesh left, the skulls of the long dead are placed upon a stone altar, until they too crumble back into nature. Nearby, there is a second cemetery for the unmarried and children, while a third location is for those who died unnatural deaths like murder or passed away from acute illness. The Bali Aga - or mountain people - who live in these isolated villages, claim to be descendants of the original Balinese and the main temple in Trunyan village dates back to the 10th century according to historical records. The origin of the custom of open-air burials is subject to debate. One legend has it that the area's early inhabitants fought over the prized Banyan tree, so to keep the peace, leaders decided to place the dead there, believing the smell from the corpses would make the spot less attractive. — AFP

Armenia's virus battle crippled by disinformation

YEREVAN: Marina Khachatryan is not the only person in ex-Soviet Armenia who believes the coronavirus is a government conspiracy. But her large following online means her skepticism has a wide, potentially even dangerous reach. The unemployed surgeon runs the Facebook page of a local group critical of the government's health policies, where thousands of followers are treated to a regular dose of false claims about the pandemic.

"(The authorities) want to use their own people as experimental animals to test a vaccine," said Khachatryan, who also believes the virus was created in a laboratory. The Armenian government has come under fire for responding too slowly to the pandemic, which has seen the country's prime minister infected, quarantine rules ignored and hospitals overwhelmed. But critics also say authorities are failing to stamp out viral disinformation like Khachatryan's posts that fuel the pandemic and undermine lockdown rules.

"Quarantine didn't work in Armenia," virologist Nuneh Bakunts told AFP, because people believed disinformation online and didn't "take the threat seriously." Claims that the virus is a global conspiracy led by the US business magnate Bill Gates and that 5G telecommunication technology is being used to spread the infection are commonplace in the country. A recent investigation by the UK-based website openDemocracy found that controversial local news portal Medmedia.am was spreading "incredibly dangerous" virus disinformation.

One article described vaccines currently being developed as "biological weapons" and warned Armenians against participating in vaccination programs. The post was viewed at least 131,000 times and had 28,000 Facebook likes - a huge number for a country of just three million people. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who announced on his birthday on June 1 that he had tested positive for the virus, has admitted failings in his government's response to the crisis. He conceded earlier this month that overwhelmed hospitals can no longer cope with the number of coronavirus patients and that people are dying due to a lack of intensive care beds. — AFP



KATHMANDU: A protester holds a placard during a demonstration against the government's handling of the fight against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Kathmandu. — AFP

Reuters was not able to contact the men. A local police official, Gyanendra Bahadur Pandey, said they did not have lawyers yet. The government says it is committed to improving facilities. Nepal reported 6,211 cases coronavirus and 19 deaths as of Monday. — Reuters

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11 Addressing funding constraints could revive projects in Kuwait



LONDON: Shoppers walk past signs asking people to adhere to the British government's current social distancing guidelines and stay two meters (2M) apart, as they pass re-opened shops, originally made to close down during the COVID-19 lockdown in Covent Garden in London.—Reuters

More than 600,000 lose work in UK

COVID hits jobs market, unemployment rate holds at 3.9%

LONDON: The number of people on British company payrolls fell by more than 600,000 in April and May as the coronavirus lockdown hit the labor market, and vacancies plunged by the most on record, official data showed yesterday.

The jobless rate unexpectedly held at 3.9 percent over the three months to April - despite a record slump in overall economic output during that period - as firms turned to the government's job retention scheme to keep employees on their books. Economists polled by Reuters had mostly expected a rise in the unemployment rate to 4.7 percent.

"The furlough scheme continues to hold off the bulk of job losses, but unemployment is likely to surge in the months ahead," Tej Parikh, chief economist at the Institute of Directors, said.

The furlough scheme is due to run until the end of October although employers have to make contributions to the cost of paying their temporarily laid-off workers



Vacancies fall by most on record

from August. Many companies have already announced permanent layoffs of workers. On Monday, building materials firm Travis Perkins said it would cut about 9 percent of its workforce, or 2,500 jobs. Airlines have shed more than 15,000 jobs in Britain.

Britain's job market was strong before the coronavirus hit, and the ONS said many of those who lost their jobs in April were not actively looking for work and so counted as 'inactive' rather than unemployed.

In a more up-to-date sign of how the coronavirus lockdown is affecting the labor market, experimental figures, based on tax data, showed the number of people on company payrolls fell by 612,000 in April and May. In May alone, it was 163,000 lower than in April when the biggest job losses occurred. That left the number of paid employees 2.1 percent lower than in March, the ONS said.

There was also a big drop in job vacancies which showed their largest quarterly fall since the ONS began measuring them in 2001, with a slide of 342,000 to 476,000. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, under pressure to ease the slump in the economy, has ordered a review of Britain's two-meter social distancing rule which many employers say is stopping them from getting back up to speed. Johnson and finance minister Rishi Sunak are also reportedly considering increasing a tax incentive for small firms to hire workers, and suspending social security payments by employers.

The ONS said the number of hours worked per week

dropped by the biggest amount on record, falling to 959.9 million in the three months to April from 1.041 billion in the three months to March, reflecting the scale of the jobs furlough scheme which covers about 9 million jobs. A measure of the number of people claiming Universal Credit, a benefit for people out of work or on low incomes, rose by a larger than expected 528,900 in May to 2.8 million, more than double the number in March.

The ONS has said the claimant count almost certainly overstates the rise in unemployment because it includes people who are in work but are entitled to support. A fall in pay growth reflected how workers on the government's job retention scheme are only entitled to receive 80 percent of their former pay, up to 2,500 pounds a month.

The ONS said workers' total pay growth of 1.0 percent was the weakest since September 2014. Regular pay, excluding bonuses, grew by 1.7 percent, the weakest since January 2015. — Reuters

Qatar Airways to cut foreign pilots' pay

DOHA: Qatar Airways will slash some pilots' salaries and make others redundant to offset the revenue collapse caused by the novel coronavirus travel crisis, it said in a memo seen by AFP Monday.

The Gulf airline, which flew to more than 170 destinations with 234 aircraft as of March, has been hit by airport closures and travel bans imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 disease. The International Air Transport Association warned in April that air traffic in the Middle East and North Africa would plummet by more than half this year.

Qatar Airways' most senior pilots "will be subjected to a 25 percent reduction" in salaries, chief flight operations officer Jassim Al-Haroon wrote to pilots in a memo dated June 4. "In the upcoming weeks many of our captains, senior first officers, first officers and cadet pilots will be made redundant," Haroon wrote, without specifying how many would be let go.

More junior pilots will face an immediate 15 percent cut to their salaries, although the measures will not be applied to the airline's Qatari pilots, the memo added. The airline warned cabin crew at the start of May that they faced "substantial" job losses.

"It's very gloomy. Communication hasn't been clear—we don't know if this will be the last reduction or if there will be more," said one pilot, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Without a union, they can do what they want to our contracts." At the worst point of the novel coronavirus travel crisis, the airline had to slash its passenger services to just 35 destinations. It has since begun

to resume some mothballed routes. The economy of super-wealthy gas exporter Qatar has been buffeted by the global economic downturn and associated energy price collapse caused by the pandemic. Doha-based sports broadcaster BeIN will shed around 100 jobs and cut some salaries in response to the virus downturn and the fallout from piracy of its output,

according to sources with knowledge of the matter.

"We have started a limited redundancy program in relation to our Middle East and North Africa business—which will be as limited as possible, while securing our long-term future," BeIN said in a statement, adding that further details could not be provided as consultations were ongoing. — AFP



LONDON: A Qatar Airways flight comes in to land at Heathrow airport in west London.—AFP

UAE says low oil price unsustainable

DUBAI: UAE Energy Minister Suheil Al-Mazrouei said on Monday current low oil and gas prices are unsustainable and warned that if they last longer, it could lead to energy shocks. Mazrouei said that "very good signs" of rising demand for oil have been seen in China and India, two of the world's biggest crude consumers, and to some degree in Europe. "This environment of low oil and gas prices, I don't think it's sustainable," the minister said in a virtual interview hosted by the US-UAE Business Council.

Mazrouei said that if low oil prices persist for a long period, some of the current high-cost producers will drop out leaving a supply gap, pushing prices higher. "We need someone to fill in that gap, otherwise we are going to have shocks in... prices and the last thing we want is to have shocks," he said.

"We need to have stability and to have a reasonable and fair price."

Brent crude crashed to multi-year lows under \$20 a barrel and WTI (for May delivery) sank into negative territory in April for the first time in history as demand slumped due to coronavirus lockdowns and a global supply glut. The two benchmarks have recovered to around \$40 a barrel after the OPEC+ producers alliance agreed to record production cuts of 9.7 million barrels per day in April, effective for two months starting May. — AFP

Business

'Dying of hunger': Zimbabwe street vendors hit by COVID clampdown

Crackdown destroys livelihoods of more than 3 million vendors

HARARE: Martha Kahari was already struggling to make ends meet after Zimbabwe's coronavirus lockdown forced her to stop selling second-hand clothes and tomatoes at the side of the road in the capital Harare. Then the council came to tear down her stall. Since April, local authorities in Zimbabwe's major cities have demolished thousands of illegally built structures that vendors like Kahari use to sell their wares, in what authorities have said is an effort to legitimize informal trade in the city.



Informal traders pushed into starvation

With her stall destroyed, the 40-year-old disabled mother of two has given up hope of being able to afford rent or pay back the money she borrowed to buy the stock she planned to sell once the lockdown was lifted. "If I don't settle the loan soon, they will come and take my goods," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Because I've been deprived of income, I have to live in one room at my in-laws' with my two children and my property. We have no money for food and no one is helping us."

Vendors and informal workers' groups in Zimbabwe say that city officials, with the support of the national government, are exploiting the lockdown to destroy makeshift shops and market stalls while their owners are observing stay-at-home orders. Oliver Chidawu, minister of state for Harare, and the city's mayor Herbert Gomba said in a joint statement in April that they had "noted with concern the anxiety that has gripped players in the informal sector" since the demolitions began.

The aim of the operation was to remove illegal businesses and ensure that cities are "clean, orderly and well-managed" while also making sure councils don't lose out on potential revenue, they said. Crackdowns on informal traders, who make up more than three-quarters of the country's population, according to the Informal Economy Traders Association, are a frequent occurrence in Zimbabwe. The last major wave of demolitions happened early last year, when about 2,500 stalls

were torn down in Harare and Chitungwiza, a town about 30km (19 miles) south of the capital.

Samuel Wadzai, executive director of the Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation (VISET), a union based in Harare, said the current operation has destroyed the livelihoods of more than 3 million vendors. Having already gone without income since the southern African nation went into lockdown on March 30, many vendors lost essential stock and prized possessions when their stalls were destroyed, Wadzai said.

"Our members lost merchandise and property worth millions of dollars in the nationwide blitz," he said. Vendors' rights advocates note that with Zimbabwe in the grips of an economic crisis that has seen soaring food prices and food shortages, vendors have spent any savings they had on feeding their families. Now they will have no place to work from and no way to buy new stock once the lockdown is lifted, Wadzai said.

Hawking from home

To survive, some vendors have turned to social media to ask for money and food donations, while others are hawking from their homes. Bidnock Kunaka, 55, had two stalls - one in Kuwadzana suburb where he lives and another in central Harare - from which he sold various commodities, ranging from fruits and vegetables to hardware. Because he was home observing lockdown rules, he learned about the demolitions from media reports and fellow vendors.

When he finally had the chance to check on his stall in Kuwadzana, he found only the shell left. Vendors were given no warnings that the demolitions were coming, Kunaka said. "I can't put food on the table now. The cash I had set aside to stock the business, we have exhausted on food and other household needs," said the father of four.

Without that working capital, Kunaka, who became a vendor in 2016 after losing his job as a factory worker, said it will be impossible to restart his business after the lockdown. Instead, he has turned a portion of the land at his house into a market garden, where he is growing carrots, onions and leaf greens. "I'm hoping from the garden I will manage to generate income to feed the family and to start vending again," he said.

Designated spaces

Wadzai at VISET said the criminalization of vendors and the demolition of their stalls goes against the state's

orders were imposed to stop the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus. Sales in April fell 16.4 percent after tumbling 8.3 percent in March. The US economy dropped into recession in February as the viral outbreak brought a record-long expansion to an abrupt end. Employment fell by about 22 million in March and April, but payrolls rose unexpectedly in May by just over 2.5 million, supporting the thesis that consumer spending may be recovering and that the worst of the downturn may have passed.

"Given the bounce in job growth in May and the fact that some state economies started to re-open in the second half of the month, it's reasonable to expect that spending partially rebounded in May," NatWest economists Michelle Girard and Kevin Cummins wrote in a note to clients.

The likely sales rebound was probably led by strong auto sales as the relaxing of lockdowns across the country allowed car dealership showrooms to reopen. May's sales rate climbed above 12 million vehicles per year after dropping below 9 million in April, according to Wards Intelligence. Gasoline prices also have stabilized, which likely helped support a retail sales recovery last month. Excluding gas and autos, sales had dropped 16.2 percent in April. —Reuters

US to report record rise in retail sales

WASHINGTON: US retail sales likely experienced a record rise in May as 2.5 million Americans went back to work, although any rebound will retrace only a fraction of the historic drops in March and April amid the coronavirus lockdowns.

The monthly report, due to be released by the Commerce Department later, is expected to show overall receipts at U.S. retailers jumped 8.0 percent last month, according to a Reuters poll of economists. That would exceed the previous record increase of 6.7 percent in October 2001 as Americans resumed spending following what was then a record pullback in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

While certainly an eye-catching bounce, it would retrace only about a quarter of the sales drop registered in the record back-to-back declines in the two previous months when widespread stay-at-home



TOKYO: A pedestrian stands next to an electronic quotation board displaying closing numbers of the Tokyo Stock Exchange share prices in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Stocks jump on Fed support, easing fears

TOKYO/HONG KONG: Asian shares rallied and the dollar fell yesterday as risk appetite was bolstered by the formal start of the Federal Reserve's corporate bond buying program, and earlier worries about a second wave of coronavirus infections eased.

Improving sentiment also pushed up Wall Street futures with e-Minis for the S&P 500 rising 1.6 percent following a late US stocks rally on Monday. Treasury yields rose and the yield curve steepened.

The Fed said it will start purchasing corporate bonds on Tuesday in the secondary market, one of several emergency facilities launched in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. flood of liquidity in the form of fiscal and economic stimulus, along with uneven but steady re-openings of state and local economies, sparked a sharp rally in the stock market since its late-March trough.

"Equities were overbought and corrected lower,

but the S&P 500 has bounced off support because of the Fed," said Shane Oliver, head of investment strategy and chief economist at AMP Capital Investors in Sydney.

"The markets will continue to go higher as long as economies continue to reopen and as long as the number of coronavirus cases is not large enough to stop the reopening." The investor sentiment was also boosted by a Bloomberg News report that the Trump administration is preparing a nearly \$1 trillion infrastructure proposal as part of its push to spur the world's largest economy back to life.

European markets were also set for a strong opening with pan-region EuroSTOXX 50 futures rising nearly 3.0 percent, German DAX futures gaining 3.1 percent and FTSE futures trading up 2.6 percent by 0534 GMT.

Sentiment in Asia was also helped by data showing there were 27 new coronavirus cases in Beijing, down from 36 new cases the previous day. But some analysts were not convinced about the strength of the gaining momentum. "With pricing across the risk spectrum now rich, we expect further gains to be more selective, differentiated and volatile...on fears of a COVID-19 second wave and concerns about their extended valuations," Barclays analysts wrote in a research note yesterday. —Reuters



LAGOS: Nigeria, a major oil producer, aims to end a costly fuel subsidy system which has provided a lucrative source of funds for corrupt officials and businessmen. — AFP

responsibility to promote small businesses. City officials have promised to accommodate vendors in approved spaces that will be designated for use by market vendors once the lockdown is lifted.

"The city of Harare and other local authorities are already in the process of identifying and preparing alternate workplaces for informal traders," Chidawu and Gomba said in their joint statement. But Wadzai said the committees deciding how to allocate and use those spaces had not reached out to any vendors or informal workers' unions for their input. "It is not fair for the authorities to take advantage of COVID-19 lockdown to attack the livelihoods of people and without any consultation," he said over the phone.

'Vendors are dying'

While the Zimbabwean government has begun easing some lockdown measures to allow commerce and industry to slowly restart, the informal sector is still prohibited from operating. Simon Masanga, the permanent secretary for social welfare, said in May the government began distributing 180 Zimbabwean dollars (\$7.20) per month to more than 2,000 people who had been affected by the

lockdown and the clampdown on vendors.

The goal is to scale up to 1 million beneficiaries, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, adding that registering vendors for financial aid was a slow process due to lockdown measures. Vendors' rights groups like the Informal Economy Traders Association have described the payments as "paltry", saying they barely cover a family's most basic needs.

A family of five in Zimbabwe needs about 7,500 Zimbabwean dollars (about \$300) per month to cover their basic needs, according to figures reported by Zimstat, the national statistics agency, in April. "We are not saying this money is enough to meet basic requirements, but it will go a long way in assisting someone who does not have any money in their pocket," Masanga said in response to the criticisms. If the government wants to help vendors recover from both the impacts of the pandemic and the loss of their stalls, it should ease the informal trading sector out of lockdown and put a rush on aid payments, Wadzai said.

"The government needs to speedily disburse funds to cushion those vulnerable," he said. "It's taking too long. Vendors are literally dying of hunger." — Reuters



In this file photo, shopping carts sit in the parking lot of a Walmart store in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

Walmart ties up with Shopify

WASHINGTON: Walmart said Monday it was teaming up with e-commerce platform Shopify to expand its online marketplace in a ramped-up challenge to Amazon for third-party sellers. The deal allows the estimated one million US businesses using Shopify's platform to sell on Walmart.com without any listing fees.

"As we launch this integration with Shopify, we are focused on US-based small and medium businesses whose assortment complements ours and have a track record of exceeding customers' expectations," said Jeff Clementz, vice president of Walmart Marketplace.

"We're excited to be able offer customers an expanded assortment while also giving small businesses access to the surging traffic on Walmart.com."

The move could boost Walmart's efforts to compete with Amazon, whose own marketplace of third-party sellers makes up more than half of the sales of the e-commerce leader. It also comes with Amazon facing antitrust scrutiny in the US and other markets over allegations that it improperly used data from third-party sellers to boost sales of its own products. Shopify said the deal was the first time Walmart has partnered with a commerce platform allowing small to medium-sized businesses to sell through its online marketplace. "Shopify's new Walmart channel will enable our merchants to get their products in front of these high-intent, loyal buyers from one of the world's largest retailers, helping them expand their reach and drive sales," said a statement from the Canadian-based firm. —AFP

WhatsApp launches first digital payments option

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Monday added a digital payments feature to its WhatsApp messaging service, starting in Brazil but with an eye to expanding around the world. WhatsApp users in Brazil can use the encrypted mobile messaging service to send money or make purchases, Facebook said in a blog post.

It marked the first time the payments platform used at the leading social network was woven into WhatsApp.

People will be able to send money or make a purchase from a local business without leaving their chat, the company noted. "Payments on WhatsApp are beginning to roll out to people across Brazil beginning

Tata Motors reports \$1.3bn loss

MUMBAI: India's Tata Motors Monday reported a loss of \$1.3 billion for the first three months of this year as sales in its key markets of China and Europe were hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Mumbai-headquartered firm had just returned to the black in the previous quarter amid Chinese demand for its British luxury brands Jaguar and Land Rover.

The 98.94 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion) net loss for the January-March quarter followed a net profit of 11.17 billion rupees for the same period last year. "The auto industry faced strong headwinds in FY20 amidst a slowing economy due to multiple factors... all leading to weak consumer sentiments and subdued demand across segments," Tata Motors chief executive Guenter Butschek said in a statement.

"Disruption in the supply chain induced by the pandemic and the nationwide lockdown in mid-March 2020 added to the problems." The company forecast a weak April-June—the first quarter of the 2021 financial year—which coincided with widespread virus lockdowns across its Europe, UK and Chinese markets.

But it expects a gradual recovery of sales and improved cash flows for rest of the financial year.

Shares of Tata Motors closed almost five percent lower on the Bombay Stock Exchange Sensex Index ahead of the earnings result. — AFP



MUMBAI: The Tata Motors logo and signage is seen on the engine grille of a truck at a parking lot in Mumbai on Monday. — AFP

today and we look forward to bringing it to everyone as we go forward," the service said.

Sending money or making payments is a free option for WhatsApp users, but businesses will be charged a processing fee on par with those charged for typically credit card transactions, according to the messaging service. Facebook sees long-term, money-making potential in making its social network and messaging apps venues for businesses to engage in online conversations and transactions with customers.

"The over 10 million small and micro businesses are the heartbeat of Brazil's communities," WhatsApp said. "It's become second nature to send a zap to a business to get questions answered."

Digital payments on WhatsApp will be tied to credit or debit cards to start, and transactions will require special identification codes or fingerprint verification. WhatsApp is encrypted end-to-end, and is the most popular mobile messaging app in the world with more than 1.5 billion monthly users around the world, according to market tracker Statista. — AFP

Business

Insight Report by Gulf Bank Economic Research Unit

Addressing funding constraints could revive projects in Kuwait

Dual shock of COVID-19 and low oil prices

The unexpected turn of events in 2020 that include the spread of COVID-19 and an oil price war has meant that the global economy is facing a sudden economic downturn. As this double blow has hit Kuwait, staging an economic recovery would require two key measures, a massive economic stimulus for the short term and economic diversification in the long term.

Economic stimulus to absorb short-term pain

Kuwait's sizeable financial buffers, low debt to GDP ratio and well-capitalized banking underpin its financial resilience and highlights its capability to provide the necessary intervention. Kuwait Investment Authority's (KIA) assets and central bank's reserves total to about 435 percent of Kuwait's GDP. Revival of economic growth needs a strong and well thought out stimulus package that includes supportive measures such as moratoriums on debt payments, wage support for the unemployed, subsidies to increase consumption and credit to SMEs would be required in the near term. So far, Kuwait's cabinet has approved a bill to increase the budget of ministries and governmental departments by KD 500 million (\$1.6 billion) for the 2020/21 fiscal year. Other measures include the setup of a temporary fund that will allow contributions from companies, individuals and institutions where the Kuwaiti banks initiated a KD 10 million fund to support the economy. Kuwaiti banks have suspended the charges and commissions levied on POS, ATM and online banking transactions and extended collection of due payments. Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) will be providing liquidity to commercial banks during the period. The Central Bank also has kept the discount rates at a record low of 1.5 percent. The loan to value ratio for properties has also been increased.

The shortfall in oil revenues would translate to a large budget deficit. S&P has forecasted the general government deficit to exceed 10 percent of GDP in 2020. However, at a wartime-like scenario like now, drawing from the General Reserve Fund (GRF), which is estimated to be around 50 percent of GDP would be required. According to the IMF, after compulsory transfers to the Future Generations Fund (FGF) and excluding investment income, financing needs would cumulatively be KD 57 billion (\$189 billion) over the next six years. At this rate, if GRF's assets could be exhausted soon. Therefore, the passage of Kuwait's revised debt law must be fast-tracked so that future budgetary requirements could be plugged through external borrowings.

Economic diversification the long-term solution

The current economic situation highlights a long-known problem for Kuwait, which has been its over-dependence on oil for its revenue. The problem started to exacerbate after the oil price crash in 2014-15, having a massive toll on revenues. Likewise, in the current scenario when oil is trading at historically low prices and high volatility, the impact on Kuwait's balances is expected to be very high.

Likewise, the pace of reforms to develop the non-oil sector must also be accelerated. Capital expenditure on infrastructure projects, improvement of the business environment, better regulatory framework and favorable policies for the development of the private sector will aid the growth of non-oil sector. With oil prices remaining in uncertain territory, efforts must be fast tracked to diversify the sources of revenue away from oil for a sustainable future.

Capital expenditure on projects is key

Kuwait has slowly adopted austerity measures such as reducing subsidies on fuel and electricity and rationalized their spending. However, their total expenditure is still highly skewed towards current expenditure in the form of wages, transfers and subsidies. Capital expenditure has not been ramped up at the necessary pace and new project awards have been slow. Even among GCC countries, Kuwait has one of the lowest capital expenditure to total expenditure ratio at 12.3 percent in 2019.

Falling project awards

Kuwait awarded a mere KD 1.15 billion of major project contracts in 2019, a 31 percent fall from 2018 levels. This will be the fourth year in a row that Kuwait's project spending has fallen, and the value of awards will just be 13 percent of the level of awards seen in 2015. The lack of investment spending in Kuwait has made it very difficult for businesses to operate in the projects market. The problem has been

partly due to the fall in government revenue.

High current expenditure requirements and the fall in oil revenue have seen the project awards fall gradually. The first quarter of 2020 showed promise, however, the outbreak of COVID-19 is expected to defer project awards further.

Kuwait projects landscape – current status

Project awards in the fourth quarter of 2019 declined to KD 183 million, 45 percent lower than what was witnessed in the previous quarter. However, the value of project awards increased sharply in the first quarter of 2020 to KD 587 million, driven by the power and water sector, which accounted for about 81 percent of the total awards in the quarter.

Total projects that have been planned and unawarded stands at KD 62 billion. These projects include partly delayed ones in 2019. However, considering the current macroeconomic scenario, they are highly likely to be delayed further. Construction, transport and power projects account for the majority of unawarded projects at 38 percent, 32 percent and 14 percent respectively.

Disruptions Due to pandemic

The COVID-19 outbreak is likely to cause several disruptions to the project workflow and subsequent cost overrun. As contractors would not be able to keep their workforce fully mobilized, they would not be able to make significant progress in the work onsite. As contract workers are majorly migrants from different parts of the world, travel bans, screening and restrictions would affect labor supply. As the pandemic peaks at different periods in different countries, restriction on movement could be extended in certain countries even after activity recovers in Kuwait. These factors could affect workflow and extend the deadlines for completion. In a worst-case, there could be closure of project sites as well. Some of the materials required for infrastructure projects are sometimes pre-fabricated and imported from subcontractors. Raw materials are also imported from different locations.

Funding challenges and solutions

Delays in the realization of infrastructure projects pose large potential socio-economic costs, and Kuwait's infrastructure investments are lagging. While there is a consensus on infrastructure bottlenecks, the underlying reasons for the lack of infrastructure finance is something worth looking into, given the abundant funds available in domestic and world markets and a low interest rates environment.

Delayed project payments

One of the biggest obstacles in financing of projects are the delayed payments of contractors by the government, which negatively affects the dates of delivery of different stages of projects and eventually the level of achievement in the long run. There is also a lack of coordination among the government officials to facilitate procedures and eliminate bureaucracy. In order to deal with these imbalances, several governmental agencies have reached an agreement with the Ministry of Finance to form a flexible mechanism for spending their budget for the current projects and reduce the operational roadblocks in due to delayed payment. Especially with the outbreak of COVID-19, the government must focus on accelerating payment to project contractors to reduce delays in completion.

The Kuwaiti government is very much aware of these issues and has undertaken several necessary steps to promote a healthy projects market. As highlighted in the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2020, Kuwait made dealing with construction permits easier by streamlining its permitting process, integrating additional authorities to its electronic permitting platform, enhancing inter-agency communication and reducing the time to obtain a construction permit.

Imbalances in supply of finance

The cumulative investment requirements for infrastructure development in the GCC region from 2019-2023 is about \$1.6 trillion, including large mega projects such as Neom, Al-Hareer City, Qiddiya, Amala, South Sabah Al-Ahmad residential city and others. This is 65 percent higher than the total invested in the last five years from 2014-2018. The issue therefore, is not whether to invest in more and better-quality infrastructure, but rather how to find the funding to do so. Governments in the region do not have sufficient funds to meet swelling infrastructure demand, and this puts the focus on their ability to draw private investment to bridge the funding gap. It is esti-

ated that private investment to the tune of USD 400 billion will be needed over the next five years to plug the funding gap.

In Kuwait, as of the end of 2018, \$60 billion worth of projects related to Kuwait Vision 2035 had been executed, with an additional \$100 billion to be invested in future. Currently, there are 2,296 active projects, valued at a total of KD 138.5 billion in Kuwait.

Falling credit allocation to construction sector

Commercial banks in Kuwait are the largest providers of funds for large-scale, capital-intensive projects, often accounting for as much as 50 percent of the overall project funds and up to 100 percent during pre-completion. Growth in credit to the construction sector saw a major dip in 2016 but saw signs of recovery in 2018. However, the construction sector credit growth rate has been on the decline throughout 2019. Moreover, a shortage of long-term financing since the 2008 crisis has choked the investment-backed growth of companies around the world, hampering the ability of credit-worthy projects to borrow successfully.

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has made available KD 5 billion for additional lending from local banks as part of its economic stimulus package in response to COVID-19. The package includes easing lending conditions previously set for lending. Credit risk weight for SMEs was reduced from 75 percent to 25 percent. The package also increases the maximum financing for residential real estate developments to the value of the property or the cost of development.

Active intervention from the government and regulatory relaxations would be required to save existing projects from closure and help in the recovery of project activity.

Basel III norms on project financing

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) approved the application of the Basel III capital adequacy standards to Kuwaiti banks in the year 2014. According to the Basel III guidelines, project finance exposures will be risk-weighted at 130 percent during the pre-operational phase and 100 percent during the operational phase. Project finance exposures in the operational phase, which are deemed high quality, will be risk weighted at 80 percent. Therefore, as the project moves from pre-initiation to operational phase, banks following Basel III norms will be able to lower the risk of the project. This is done to protect the interest of banks so that they capture the appropriate amount of risk for the project at each stage and keep the necessary capital buffers.

The rise of green financing

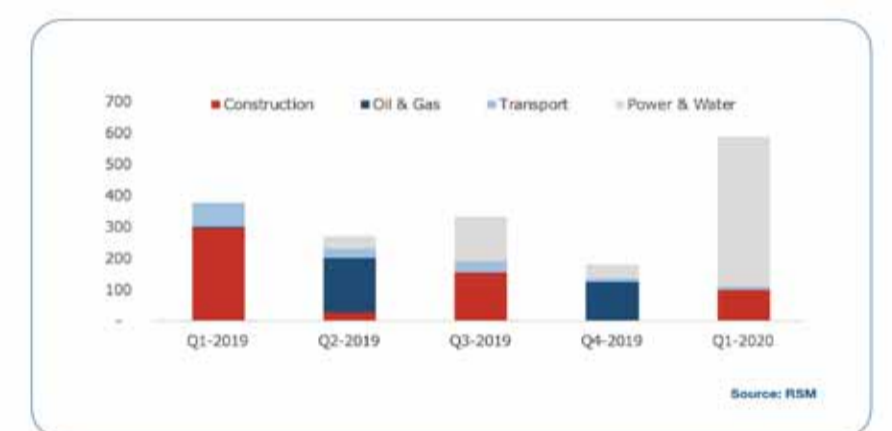
Green bonds have increasingly become popular instruments among investors in recent years, with issuances scaling new highs as investor focus has started shifting towards sustainable investing. The outbreak of COVID-19 has spurred ESG investing, with green financing likely to gain more emphasis in future. Rising climate awareness, the need for strong environmental regulations, and demand for infrastructure projects in Kuwait will likely support the development of the green finance market. Global investor appetite for green bonds has been growing with the market absorbing the current instruments and showing signs of wanting more. Issuers have also been happy to tap the markets, coming out with repeat issuances. In line with the pick-up in Green bonds, there is a high likelihood that Green Sukuk could emerge to become a successful instrument in the future. Despite the market size being minuscule when compared to Green bonds and the fact that issuances have predominantly been coming from select markets like Malaysia and Indonesia, there is still a lot of potential for the instrument.

The need for sovereign long-term yield curve

A number of GCC corporates have been active in the debt markets, especially in the recent past. Considering the surge in corporate and sovereign issuances and the need for development of domestic debt market, many have been advocating for the need to establish a domestic sovereign yield curve, which can be used as a benchmark to support the development of a vibrant debt market. In the absence of any sovereign benchmark yield curve in the GCC region, businesses are forced to borrow debt at a high premium than what their risk may warrant.

Promoting public private partnerships

Public Private Partnership (PPP) are emerging as the preferred path to bring private investors in to fund major projects,

Kuwait Capital Expenditure and Annual Project Awards (KD billion)**Kuwait Project Awards by Sector (KD millions)**

reducing the fiscal burden on governments, and perhaps as importantly, bringing private sector expertise and efficiency to the table. Making greater use of the PPP model in infrastructure delivery will help reduce public financing pressures, while also promoting development. The Government of Kuwait has embarked on an ambitious PPP program, which promotes collaboration between the public and private sectors to develop quality infrastructure and services for Kuwaiti citizens.

PPP will be a key tool for the government to achieve the objectives of Kuwait Vision 2035. With COVID-19 outspread taking its toll on the economy in the near term, it becomes imperative for the government to take necessary steps to protect existing PPP projects and build confidence among prospective participants by showing an intent that the government is willing to be supportive during tough economic conditions.

PPPs are expected to face revenue generation challenges in addition to difficulties in running day-to-day operations due to the weakening of the economy. The government's willingness to provide liquidity to the financial sector will bode well for PPP participants, as they would be able to receive support in the short and medium term.

Keeping the supply chain intact by making periodic payments would ensure that once demand picks up, the project could return to its sustainable self. Projects that are of national importance must receive a government bailout, keeping national interests in mind. A clear timeline or the duration up to which there would be government support should be established based on how the crisis progresses and should be clearly communicated to all participants. If proper mitigation of damages in the near term is carried out, it would boost PPP activity in the medium to long term.

In PPPs, private parties are largely responsible for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of an infrastructure asset, implying that they are assuming bulk of the development, finance, construction and market risks associated with the project. Governments should make this entire exercise as seamless as possible for investors, and iron out any regulatory and legal issues that can affect the performance of the asset. The Government has established a clear regulatory framework for implementing PPP projects, constituting a reference point for all stakeholders, the laws and regulations establishes high levels of transparency and certainty throughout the PPP process – both key to the success of a PPP program. The New PPP Law creates a greater degree of certainty, reliability and flexibility for foreign contractors, investors and lenders that participate in PPP projects in Kuwait.

The Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) serves as the main body responsible for PPP projects implementation.

KAPP aims to utilize private sector skills and expertise to maximize value for money and service quality. KAPP is currently in the process of initiating several high-impact projects in the power, water/wastewater, education, health, transportation, communications, real estate, and solid waste management sectors.

Recommendations

The current phase where the economy is facing a slowdown is a critical stage where government intervention is greatly required. Supportive measures are required from both short and long-term perspectives.

- Providing stimulus to the non-oil sectors will help in mitigating the risks caused by COVID-19 and also aid in achieving economic diversification. Funding infrastructure projects through greater capital expenditure will have a positive impact on Kuwait's diversification objectives.

- Most projects are financed by using a combination of equity (in the form of cash and/or Equity Bridge/Shareholder Loans) and debt (bank loans, bonds etc.) on a limited recourse or project finance basis. Banks will remain important financiers, particularly in the early stages of new projects. However, boosting infrastructure financing will require broadening of the potential group of investors and a broader mix of financial instruments.

- Pension funds, insurance companies and other long-term institutional investors have very large and growing long-term liabilities and need long-term assets in their portfolio, very little of which is allocated to infrastructure. Alternative financing, in the form of infrastructure investment funds and bonds, can also help to tap into some of the vast resources of international capital markets.

- Rising climate awareness, strong environmental policies and regulations, and demand for green and infrastructure projects in the region will likely support the development of the green finance market. This is likely to comprise of a diverse combination of conventional green bonds and green sukuk, which could lower the cost of capital and help provide the massive amounts of funding for projects in the pipeline.

- Improvements in dealing with delays in payments, an ambitious PPP program, and improvements in construction permits and property registration are steps in the right direction by the government to revive the projects market.

Summary

- The outbreak of COVID-19 and the drastic fall in oil prices have dealt a dual blow to Kuwait's economy, stalling all forms of activity. With oil markets in uncertain territory, the need for Kuwait to stimulate economic growth and diversify away from oil has never been greater. Providing an economic stimulus to revive growth in the short term and abiding by the objectives to diversify the economy in the long term are necessary actions that need to be taken up by the government.

- Achieving economic diversification and reviving growth requires capital expenditure on projects. Shrinkage of government revenue will

pose challenges, necessitating the need to look for funding solutions.

- Project market in Kuwait witnessed an uptick in the first quarter of 2020, before the outbreak of COVID-19 brought the country to a halt. However, on an overall level, project awards in Kuwait have been sluggish since 2015, falling in value every year. With the pandemic causing major dislocations in supply chain, further disruptions are expected in the projects space in the near term.

- Major impediment to infrastructure investment have surfaced in the form of falling project awards, delayed payments to contractors,

private sector supply imbalances, falling credit allocation to construction sector and the lack of a sovereign yield curve.

- Public Private Partnerships are emerging as the preferred path to bring private investors in to fund major projects, reducing the fiscal burden on governments, and perhaps as importantly, bringing private sector expertise and efficiency to the table. Furthermore, boosting infrastructure finance will also require the broadening of the potential group of investors and the tapping of the vast financial resources of capital markets. This, in turn, necessitates a broader mix of financial instruments.

A world redrawn: Worry about climate not COVID, says James 'Gaia' Lovelock

PARIS: James Lovelock — founder of the Gaia theory and, arguably, the field of Earth system science — thinks the world has lost perspective in responding to the new coronavirus, and should focus on a far more formidable foe: global warming. "My impression is that we have overreacted almost everywhere to the pandemic," he told AFP by phone from his home in southern England, where he has been in lockdown with his wife.

Lovelock, who will be 101 next month, has had the disconcerting habit in his 75-year career of being right about important things. "Disconcerting" because his ideas have often been at odds with conventional wisdom, ahead of their time or, in the case of climate change, unbearably grim.

In the early 1960s, for example, when NASA was determined to find life on Mars, Lovelock — under contract at the Jet Propulsion Lab in California — told his employers there almost certainly wasn't any, and then designed the experiment to prove it. When he announced a decade later that Earth is best understood as a single, self-regulating super-organism, the notion was at first ridiculed by his peers. (It was also embraced by the Mother Earth crowd, which annoyed the hard-nosed empiricist even more.)

By the 1990s, however, the complex interplay of all life forms with the water, air and rocks around them — Earth's geo-bio-chemical balancing act — was

accepted as self-evident. "Lovelock was certainly a visionary in changing our understanding of how life shapes the Earth," commented Tim Lenton, director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter.

Note of optimism

"Whether or not you accept his Gaia hypothesis — and many don't — his work has transformed our view of what we now call the 'Earth system' and the central role of life in maintaining habitable conditions on Earth." Lovelock — who worked in the virus department of Britain's National Institute for Medical Research from the end of World War II to 1957 — puts the global COVID-19 response into the context of earlier viral outbreaks.

"The flu pandemics were worse in terms of deaths, and no such reaction took place then," he said, adding that he barely recalled the 1957 Asian flu, which left more than a million dead worldwide. Another flu outbreak in 1968 was just as deadly. The new coronavirus has claimed more than 430,000 lives to date.

With his trademark flare for provocation, Lovelock said the current pandemic could even be seen as beneficial, in a cruel Darwinian kind of way. "It mainly kills off my age group — the oldies — and there are too many of us anyway," he said. "At the same time, it is relatively harmless to the young."

The far bigger threat to humanity in

the early 21st century is global warming, Lovelock insisted. "Climate change is more dangerous to life on Earth than almost any conceivable disease," he said. "If we don't do something about it, we will find ourselves removed from the planet."

Buying time

With his 2006 book "The Revenge of Gaia" and its 2009 sequel "The Vanishing Face of Gaia", Lovelock became known as a prophet of climate doom, though he later walked back his most dire predictions, at least in terms of how quickly they might befall us. But an uncharacteristic note of optimism has since crept into his analysis.

"I don't think humanity will simply go back to loading the atmosphere with CO2," he said, noting the sharp drop-off in emissions caused by economic slowdown. But if the glimmer of hope he offers will be welcomed by many climate activists who had written him off as a climate Cassandra, his solutions probably won't.

Even if humanity knows the causes of climate change, Lovelock doubts we can switch from dirty to clean energy quickly enough to avoid a scenario in which Earth itself — via melting permafrost, the shrinking Arctic ice cap — begin to drive global warming as well. To buy time, he argues, we need to turn to technology.

"Many different ways to keep Earth cool have been suggested. One idea I find attractive is a sunshade in heliocen-



James Lovelock, scientist and author best known for the Gaia hypothesis. Photograph taken in 2005 by Bruno Comby of Association of Environmentalists For Nuclear Energy.

tric orbit" — essentially a giant sun umbrella in space. Being cooped up in his home on England's south shore has been something of a strain for his wife, but Lovelock admits that he has rather enjoyed the COVID lockdown. "I grew up as an only child hardly meeting any-

one — it isn't any great hardship for me," he said.

"We had a long period of unusually beautiful weather, sunny and warm, and there were not people," he said, clearly delighted. "From my point of view, that is maximally desirable." — AFP

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Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

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email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com **Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228** Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

BOLLYWOOD STARS ATTEND RAJPUT'S FUNERAL AS DEATH SPARKS MENTAL HEALTH DEBATE



Bollywood actress Pooja Chopra arrives to attend the funeral of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput in Mumbai.

Bollywood stars joined family members for the funeral Monday of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, whose death aged 34 has sent shock waves through the Indian film industry and rekindled a national debate about mental health. Rajput was found dead on Sunday in his Mumbai apartment, with police saying he took his own life. A star of hits on the big and small screen, Rajput died just days after the shock death of his former manager, Disha Salian.

Those attending the funeral included Shradha Kapoor, who starred with Rajput in his last movie release, "Chhichhore", which dealt with societal pressure and mental health. Others, including actress Kriti Sanon and producer Ekta Kapoor, joined Rajput's family in heavy monsoon rain to pay their last respects as his body was cremated according to Hindu rituals. The young actor's death has sparked emotional discussion on social media about mental health, with stars including Deepika Padukone and Anushka Sharma posting messages about the importance of seek-

ing help. Padukone, who has previously shared her struggle with depression, tweeted with the hashtag #YouAreNotAlone.

"As a person who has had lived experience with mental illness, I cannot stress enough about the importance of reaching out," tweeted Padukone. "Talk. Communicate. Express. Seek help. Remember, you are not alone. We are in this together. And most importantly, there is hope." Sharma, the actress wife of Indian national cricket team captain Virat Kohli, also tweeted condolences. She too had previously opened up about struggling with anxiety. "Sushant, you were too young and brilliant to have gone so soon. I'm so sad and upset knowing that we lived in an environment that could not help you through any troubles you may have had."

Born in the eastern state of Bihar, Rajput quit engineering studies to pursue a career in acting and dance. He got his big break in 2013 with "Kai Po Che", a film about cricket, love, and politics that won acclaim at the Berlin film festival. He

was lauded for his portrayal of Indian cricket hero Mahendra Singh Dhoni in the 2016 hit "M S Dhoni: The Untold Story". He told AFP about the emotional rollercoaster he experienced while filming the movie, which also showed the heartbreak suffered by the ex-skipper when his former girlfriend died.

"It was very difficult because, after we did the preparation, in my head I was him and everything that was happening was actually affecting me," he said. His most recent films were the comedy-drama "Chhichhore", and action movie "Drive"—both released last year. He had been working on a string of projects, including a Hindi remake of the Hollywood romance "The Fault in Our Stars", titled "Dil Bechara" ("Poor Heart"). Bollywood is still struggling to come to terms with the loss of two luminaries, Irrfan Khan and Rishi Kapoor, who died in April after long illnesses. —AFP



Bollywood actor Rajkumar Rao (left) and producer, director Dinesh Vijan (right) attend the funeral of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, in Mumbai.—AFP photos

Aboriginal Australian musicians find new fans in virus shutdown

Aboriginal musician Andrew Gurruwiwi usually performs for a few hundred people in Australia's remote far north. But during the virus shutdown his audience has swelled to nearly 120,000 around the world. Gurruwiwi's eponymous band is the breakout success of a series of concerts being broadcast online while the coronavirus pandemic has seen Australia's indigenous communities tightly sealed off from the rest of the country over health concerns. "East Arnhem Live" featured Gurruwiwi performing a 20-minute set against a backdrop of exposed red-and-white bluffs and the setting sun. "All this coronavirus that's been happening here (means) no shows, no music, no anything," the artist told AFP, adding the shows were launched to "make people happy".

Musicians around the world have migrated online after COVID-19 forced venues to close. But organisers in Arnhem Land say the response to virtual performances from the isolated corner of Australia's Northern Territory has far surpassed expectations, reaching tens of thousands of fans weekly who otherwise may never have engaged with the local Yolngu culture. "It was sort of hard to comprehend that we could... get so many hits and so many people into it. And we've had pretty solid numbers the whole way through," Yolngu Radio's Nicholas O'Riley said. "It's incredible to watch when we do the livestream on the Saturday nights, and people commenting on where they're watching from, from right around the world and from all around Australia." Viewers from Spain to Canberra have posted comments.

Boosting exposure, and incomes

O'Riley said East Arnhem Live was originally designed as a four-concert series to help keep the local 10,000-strong community digitally connected during the pandemic, but was later expanded to nine events as the shutdown dragged on. Gurruwiwi's band

sings in both English and their native Yolngu, which he says offers an opportunity to spread messages about his people's suffering at the hands of colonisers to younger Aboriginal people still learning the history as well as new audiences from as far afield as France, Germany, and the United States. "To me, some balanda (outsiders) don't understand... (what) Yolngu has been going through all those years ago," he said. "So the world wants to know about our story, we share our story and knowledge about (the) Yolngu people from Arnhem Land."

The Andrew Gurruwiwi Band is one of eight acts that has played the concert series to date—the finale this Saturday features internationally successful band Yothu Yindi—with the performances not only offering exposure but also an income stream after local festivals were cancelled. Close-ups of the artists playing are interspersed with drone footage of sparkling green-blue seas meeting white sand beaches and craggy red cliffs topped with thickets of trees—doubling as a tourism campaign for the picturesque region. Local tourism officer Ryley Heap said he hoped the concerts would attract a new wave of visitors once travel resumes. "The region in general is quite unknown, and as unknown as it is, it's also untouched—it's pristine here, it's absolutely spectacular," he said.

"We certainly would like to showcase it more, and we have done that through the performances, so hopefully there is a flow-on effect." Gurruwiwi has post-lockdown plans of his own, hoping to eventually perform live in front of crowds as big as his digital following. "100,000 would be (the) best. I'd like to make a concert somewhere, with thousands (of) people to watch and listen to my music, just give them understanding of my story." —AFP



This handout photo shows Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi performing online at Banubanu Beach on Bremer Island in the Northern Territory.—AFP photos



This handout photo shows Aboriginal musicians Djakapurra Munyarrayun (left) and Malngay Yunupingu (right) performing online at Bawaka Homeland in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.



This handout photo shows Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi performing online at Banubanu Beach on Bremer Island in the Northern Territory.



This handout photo shows Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi performing online at Banubanu Beach on Bremer Island in the Northern Territory.

Beyonce urges charges against police in Breonna Taylor death

Beyonce made an impassioned appeal for justice Monday in the case of Breonna Taylor, the African American woman shot dead by plainclothes police as she slept at home, calling for criminal charges against the officers involved. In an open letter, the singer noted that all the police involved in the March 13 shooting death remain on the Louisville, Kentucky force. "Three months have passed—and zero arrests have been made, and no officers have been fired," she wrote to the state's attorney general, Daniel Cameron.

The police involved—Jonathan Mattingly, Myles Cosgrove and Brett Hankison—"must be held accountable," she said. She called on Cameron to use the power of his office "to bring justice to Breonna Taylor, and demonstrate the value of a black woman's life." Besides criminal charges against the officers, she urged Cameron to conduct a transparent investigation and to probe the Louisville police department's response to the killing. Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician, was in bed asleep shortly after midnight when police executing a "no knock" warrant burst into her apartment in search of two suspected drug dealers.

Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, reacted by opening fire, setting off the exchange of gunfire that ended in Taylor's death. The officers say they announced themselves and knocked sev-



In this file photo US singer/songwriter Beyonce arrives for the world premiere of Disney's "The Lion King" at the Dolby theatre in Hollywood. —AFP

eral times before using a battering ram to enter the apartment. A search turned up no drugs, and the two suspects who were the target were already in custody. Anger spilling into the streets over the deaths of African Americans at the hands of police has become a full-blown crisis in the United States, propelling massive protests and demands for deep changes in law enforcement. —AFP

Pandemic pushes Japan geisha to get online

Japanese geisha "Chacha" sits on her knees with her fingertips neatly placed on the wooden floor, gracefully bowing to an audience sitting not in front of her but miles away, watching online. Beneath spotlights, the graceful 32-year-old geisha performs a traditional dance, moving like a butterfly and artfully unfolding and fluttering her fan. The audience would usually be a group of older, wealthy men, watching appreciatively inside a traditional parlour lined with woven tatami mats. But today, Chacha's audience is looking back at her from a computer screen, and ranges from a young woman with a glass of drink in her hand to a family with several curious children. "How have you been at home?" asks Chacha, addressing her audience. "I was playing 'Animal Crossing' all the time during the state of emergency!" she added. While Japan has been spared the worst of the coronavirus outbreak, a state of emergency was declared during a spike in cases and the pandemic has nixed most forms of nightlife, including geisha parties.

Despite Western misconceptions, geishas are not prostitutes, but rather

entertainers and raconteurs highly skilled in traditional Japanese dance, musical instruments and games. Almost everything in the repertoire of these performers—from singing and dancing in small enclosed spaces, to entertaining customers with witty conversation and delicately pouring sake in a customer's cup—is at odds with the social distancing rules of the coronavirus pandemic.

'Meet Geisha'

That has been devastating for geisha like Chacha, who has seen her salary evaporate and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of government stimulus funds. "Usually we are very busy in April, May and June," she told AFP. "But this year, we have no parties, zero." That's where the online service has come in. It grew from a project called "Meet Geisha"—initially conceived as a way to bring groups of tourists to see geisha perform on stage in a more relaxed and less intimidating environment. Launched last year by an IT firm, it was supposed to capitalise on an influx of tourists, including those coming for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.—AFP



This picture shows geisha "Chacha", who asked to be identified by a pseudonym, dancing during an online drinking party with clients by "Meet Geisha" in Hakone in Kanagawa Prefecture.—AFP photos



This picture shows geisha "Chacha" (pictured on screen), rehearsing for an online drinking party with clients by "Meet Geisha" in Hakone in Kanagawa Prefecture.—AFP photos

Oscars postponed by two months due to pandemic



In this file photo, a general view of the 92nd annual Oscars preparation on the red carpet at Hollywood & Highland, in Hollywood, California.—AFP

Next year's Oscars have been postponed by eight weeks to April 25 after the coronavirus pandemic shuttered movie theaters and wreaked havoc on Hollywood's release calendar, the Academy said Monday. With many studio blockbusters and indie arthouse movies forced to push back their release dates until theaters reopen, the cut-off date for Oscar-eligible films has also been extended by two months, to the end of February. "Our hope, in extending the eligibility period and our Awards date, is to provide the flexibility filmmakers need to finish and release their films without being penalized for something beyond anyone's control," said Academy president David Rubin and CEO Dawn Hudson in a statement. The movie industry's biggest night

was originally scheduled for February 28, 2021. Monday's move was prompted by concerns that a field consisting only of films released in 2020 would not be as broad or competitive as in previous years. Most US movie theaters remain closed, and film productions have ground to a halt, with fears mounting of a second wave of COVID-19 cases. Productions slowly restarting in the coming weeks as lockdown restrictions ease will now have two extra months to finish without having to sacrifice their Oscar hopes. The delay also boosts hopes that the 93rd Academy Awards can remain a live, star-studded ceremony, rather than shifting to a "virtual" presentation.—AFP



A photograph shows the sunset in the town of Oia in the island of Santorini as the country prepares for the return of tourists to Greece from around 30 countries by air, sea and land.—AFP photos



A view of the town of Fyra in the island of Santorini.

Fear and impatience as Santorini awaits return of mass tourism

Spectacular sunsets over its ancient volcanic crater make the Greek island of Santorini a magnet for tourists. With the first post-lockdown groups of overseas visitors due to return on Monday, the island is torn between impatience to get back to business and fear of an upsurge in coronavirus cases. In the quiet alleys of Fira, the island's capital, time is passing by to the rhythm of church bells—a reminder of the vanishing hours that separate the town from a flood of tourists. “We’re desperate about tourists, we need them and we want them. If we don’t have the people, how will we survive,” says Michalis Drosos, who works in a souvenir shop in Fira. The tourist season officially reopens on Monday in Greece after three months of restrictions that have halted large-scale tourism, a sector that makes up a quarter of Greece’s economic output.

Santorini airport will not reopen to international flights until July 1, like all regional airports in Greece. But travellers from around 30 countries will once again be welcomed at the airports of Thessaloniki and Athens, and will be able to travel on to the islands. “We are restarting the country’s most important production engine and we are putting an end to the anguish of 700,000 workers in the tourism sector,” Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis said in Santorini. However, some of those 700,000 are still concerned about the coronavirus pandemic—which has so far largely spared Greece with only 183 deaths.

‘On edge’

“Everyone’s scared, maybe we’ll catch the coronavirus,” says Orestis Papoulias, manager of a beach bar on the black sand beach of Perissa. “As soon as the tourists arrive, we’ll get new cases,” says Canadian Stephane Saat, who has spent 12 years as a tourist guide in Santorini. “If they tell us that there are too many cases, we’ll have to close down again, but what do we do? We don’t have any money left and we’re on edge.”

For similar reasons, the manager of the Mylos Hotel Panos Kontoulis is hesitant about reopening: “Things change all the time, every day, we have to keep all the guests and all employees safe.” The procedures for protection against the coronavirus put a heavy burden on hotels, says George Roussos. Each hotel must have a doctor per hotel, a room for possible quarantines and a local hospital capable of carrying out tests. But he is philosophical about the measures: “You have no choice, it’s a matter of health.”

Restaurateur Evangelos Gidaropoulos is among those who believe Greece’s record of handling the virus—with far fewer cases than other nations in southern Europe—will stand it in good stead. “I believe generally that people around the world will recognise that and prefer to come to Greece,” he says. Bearing out his theory, Chinese tourist Max Han reflects that the government has “very good control” over the virus as he wanders the famous blue domes and spectacular cliffs of Oia. “I feel very, very safe here,” he says. “That is why I chose to travel to Santorini and next week I am going to Crete. No problem for me to worry about the virus.”—AFP



A woman sits with her dog as she looks at the sunset in the town of Oia in the island of Santorini.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis chose Santorini to inaugurate the season with great pomp on Saturday, inviting tourists to marvel at the “stunning sunset” that has made the island famous. “We are incredibly lucky to be here without any other tourists,” says Cedric Delourme, a Frenchman who came with his family, one of the few tourists walking around the island. The Gallini Hotel is expecting a group of Americans on Monday, but manager George Roussos says he is “never sure” because “something can happen at the last minute”. The Americans arrive via Athens after a stopover in Germany.



A woman prepares her souvenir shop in the island of Santorini.



People walk in the empty alleys in the town of Fyra in the island of Santorini.



People walk in the empty alleys in the town of Fyra in the island of Santorini.

Giant tortoise Diego, a hero to his species, is home

Diego the giant Galapagos tortoise whose tireless efforts are credited with almost single-handedly saving his once-threatened species, was put out to pasture Monday on his native island after decades of breeding in captivity, Ecuador’s environment minister said. Diego was shipped out from the Galapagos National Park’s breeding program on Santa Cruz to remote and uninhabited Espanola. “We are closing an important chapter” in the management of the park, said the minister Paulo Proano on Twitter, adding that 25 tortoises including the prolific Diego, “are going back home after decades of reproducing in captivity and saving their species from

extinction.” Espanola welcomed them “with open arms,” he said.

Before being taken back by boat to Espanola, the 100-year-old Diego and the other tortoises had to undergo a quarantine period to avoid them carrying seeds from plants that are not native to the island. Diego weighs about 80 kilograms (175 pounds), is nearly 90 centimetres (35 inches) long and 1.5 meters (five feet) tall, if he really stretches his legs and neck. Diego’s contribution to the program on Santa Cruz Island was particularly noteworthy, with park rangers believing him responsible for being the patriarch of at least 40 percent of the 2,000-tortoise population.—AFP



In this file photo Diego, a tortoise of the endangered Chelonoidis hoodensis subspecies from Espanola Island, is seen in a breeding centre at the Galapagos National Park on Santa Cruz Island in the Galapagos archipelago.—AFP

US streetwear star Williams takes over at French label Givenchy

The American streetwear designer Matthew M. Williams was named Monday as the new head of aristocratic French fashion house Givenchy. The 34-year-old creator is the second US streetwear star to be given the reins of a major French luxury label, after his friend Virgil Abloh, who designs Louis Vuitton menswear. Like Abloh, Chicago-born Williams first worked with the rapper Kanye West before going out on his own with his 1017 ALYX 9SM brand.

Based in Italy, where Williams now lives, it has become so hot it got a name check alongside Nike in Canadian singer Drake’s new song “Toosie Side”. “It’s been my lifelong dream to be in this position, and it is really surreal that it is finally here,” Williams said in a post on Instagram. “I have worked every day for 15 years towards this single goal. “At the same time, it’s bitter-sweet because we are living in unprecedented times and I just hope in some way I can bring hope and with my community create positive change for the industry and for the world,” he added. Williams has previously said that he owes everything to Kanye West, who is married to Kim Kardashian.

Kanye West is his mentor

“He is the person that gave me my first break. I created a suit jacket for him to wear to the Grammys when I was 21. He then asked me how much I got paid, to which I replied, ‘Nothing.’ And he said, ‘Okay, I’m going to give you double nothing to come work with me.’ “The next day I was on a

plane with him to Japan. He’s been an amazing friend and mentor,” Williams said. The designer later founded the cult music and fashion collective Been Trill with West, Abloh and fellow US streetwear sensation Preston Heron.

Their most notorious creation was a set of laces bearing the legend “F**k Off” that cost \$100. Sidney Toledano, of LVMH, the French fashion giant of which Givenchy is a part, said it had “watched Williams grow into a great talent. “I believe his singular vision of modernity will be a great opportunity for Givenchy to write its new chapter.”



The name of Williams’ own brand comes from his daughter Alyx (pronounced “a-leeks”) and his own date of birth, October 17.

‘Something that deserves to exist’

As well as his street cred, Williams has eco credentials from his belief that clothes should be made to last a lifetime. “There are too many clothes on this Earth. If I am going to take the responsibility of making clothing, I need to make something that deserves to exist,” he told GQ magazine. The American replaces the British designer Clare Waight Keller, who stepped down in April after three years at the fabled, but until her arrival rather faded house. Her biggest coup was making the wedding dress for Meghan Markle when she married Britain’s Prince Harry in 2018.

Waight Keller, 49, also created a menswear range for the label that was once the favourite of Audrey Hepburn as well as bringing it back into the Paris haute couture ranks. Williams, however, will only design Givenchy’s men’s and women’s collections, which is sure to spark speculation that the brand is withdrawing from the elite Paris shows. His first Givenchy show will be in Paris in October.—AFP

The American streetwear designer Matthew M. Williams.

Landmines spell silent threat in Libyan former war zone

TRIPOLI: The smell of gunpowder still lingered in the battle-scarred south of Libya's capital when Hicham Suleiman, a teacher in his 50s, cautiously returned to his home. He left his car some 400 m from his house and continued on foot, anxious about booby traps hidden by retreating forces, like the one that days earlier had killed his neighbor. Only the sound of Suleiman's footsteps broke the silence in the Tripoli outer suburb of Al-Khalla, which until several weeks ago had been a battlefield for more than one year.

When Hicham reached his property, he found the garden gate blown away by a shell and the house half-destroyed, a sight he said left him heartbroken. "It's not just because of my destroyed house, but the way the war has transformed my neighborhood," he said. "It's as if a huge meteorite hit it."

Oil-rich Libya has been torn by years of violence, drawing in tribal militias, jihadists and mercenaries, since the 2011 toppling and killing of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in a Western-backed uprising. The latest escalation started on April 4, 2019, when strongman Khalifa Haftar, a former Gaddafi loyalist and onetime CIA asset, attacked Tripoli, the seat of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

Hundreds died and some 200,000 people were displaced by the onslaught of Haftar forces backed by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russian mercenary forces. But then the GNA, with stepped-up support from Turkey, pushed back the would-be invaders and launched a lightning counter-offensive that has reclaimed all of northwestern Libya. The United Nations last week voiced "horror" over reports that eight mass graves had been discovered in Tarhuna, formerly the main rear base of Haftar forces southeast of Tripoli.

The scale of destruction is staggering in Al-Khalla – a strategic crossroads south of Tripoli – but many families want their homes back nonetheless, to stop drifting from shelter to shelter. "I put all my savings and 10 years of my life into building this house," Hicham, the teacher, said with sorrow, as he leafed through one of the few books that had not been burned or torn apart. He vowed to rebuild his house, telling AFP he could no longer afford to rent temporary accommodation for his family of five.

But amid the abandoned homes, a new and insidious danger lurks: Anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that have been laid in houses, gardens and along roads. They have been hidden in kitchen pantries and toilet cisterns, under roof tiles and construction materials, often with two or three devices stacked atop one another to make de-mining almost impossible.

Libyan ordnance clearance experts have marked high-risk areas with signs and wall inscriptions, but the warnings have come too late for many. More than 30 people have been killed and 60 injured by mines, most of them civilians, said the health ministry in Tripoli.

The UN Mission in Libya on May 26 "strongly condemned" any use of anti-personnel mines against civilians and denounced the "deliberate targeting" of non-combatants. Anti-personnel mines are banned by an international treaty, although major powers including China, Russia and the United States have not signed it. The GNA has accused pro-Haftar forces of having "mined the houses before leaving them" and asked for international assistance to clear them.

A team of Turkish deminers who arrived in Tripoli last week have joined the clearance effort under a broader military cooperation agreement signed late



TRIPOLI: A Turkish deminer searches for landmines in the Salah al-Din area south of the Libyan capital on Monday. — AFP

between the GNA and Ankara. Pro-Haftar forces have not commented on accusations they are responsible, but unauthenticated videos on social networks have shown pro-Haftar fighters preparing explosive devices in a house in Salaheddine district.

General Ahmad Bayou, head of the explosives clearance team at the GNA interior ministry, charged that pro-Haftar forces had used various methods to conceal the mines. The unit's men had dismantled mines and recovered remnants of ammunition from five hectares (12 acres) of land. "It is difficult to know

the extent of the areas south of Tripoli where very dangerous and very new mines, of types unknown in Libya, have been laid," Bayou said. For the time being, the GNA has suspended the return of families to their homes in uncleared areas.

Meanwhile fighting has continued elsewhere, despite ceasefire calls by the US, EU and other foreign powers. The resurgent GNA has vowed to push on for Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown and the last major settlement before the traditional boundary between western Libya and Haftar's stronghold in the east. — AFP

Idlib adopts Turkish lira...

Continued from Page 1

entered Idlib on June 11. Syria's economy has been battered by nine years of war compounded by a financial crisis in neighboring Lebanon, which had served as a conduit to bring dollars into government-held areas. The value of the Syrian pound has plummeted in recent days on the informal market, sending prices skyrocketing, shuttering shops and sparking rare anti-government protests in the country's regime-held south.

At one point last week, the pound sank to 3,000 to the dollar, more than four times the official rate of around 700, and 60 times its pre-2011 rate. The spike comes ahead of the introduction of new US sanctions from June 17, and after the sudden fall from grace of tycoon and cousin of the president, Rami Makhlof, that has left other top businessmen on edge.

"The Syrian pound will continue to circulate in liberated areas but its use will be reduced to a minimum," the local official said. Under the new measures, the Salvation Government last week set the price for a loaf of bread at two Turkish lira (less than

\$1). An AFP correspondent said that gas stations on Sunday started to list their prices in Turkish lira.

Idlib is held by jihadist and rebel groups, many of them backed by Turkey, one of the main foreign protagonists in Syria's war. Ankara has deployed forces in several military posts it established in Idlib as part of a 2018 deal with regime ally Moscow. Turkey also controls a stretch of territory along its border in neighboring Aleppo province following a series of military offensives since 2016. In these areas, the lira is already being used as the main currency instead of the Syrian pound in a sign of Ankara's growing influence.

Meanwhile, Turkey and Libya's internationally recognized government are discussing possible Turkish use of two military bases in the North African country, a Turkish source said on Monday, with a view to a lasting Turkish presence in the south Mediterranean. No final decisions have been made over possible Turkish military use of the Misrata naval base and the Al-Watiya air base, which was recently recaptured by the Turkish-backed Government of National Accord (GNA).

A more permanent air and naval presence in Libya could reinforce Turkey's growing influence in the region, including in Syria, and boost its claims to offshore oil and gas resources. Turkey has also flagged possible energy and construction deals with Tripoli once the fighting ends.

The GNA has in recent months driven back

Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) – supported by Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and France – turning the tide on a 14-month conflict that has displaced an estimated 200,000 people. While all sides say they want a truce, heavy clashes have emerged near the LNA-held coastal city of Sirte, which is close to major energy export terminals on the Mediterranean seaboard.

Russia and Turkey postponed high-level talks on Libya, scheduled for Sunday in Istanbul, due to discord over the GNA's push to retake Sirte, another Turkish official said. "Turkey using Al-Watiya ... is on the agenda," said the first source, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It could also be possible for the Misrata naval base to be used by Turkey."

Turkey has a military base in Qatar and in 2017 added troops there amid a row between Doha on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on the other. Ankara threw its support behind the government in Tripoli last year after the GNA signed a maritime demarcation accord that it says gives Turkish drilling rights near Crete, but that is opposed by Greece, Cyprus, Israel and the European Union.

A Libyan naval base in particular would "institutionalize" Turkey's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and give it leverage over Arab and European adversaries, said Galip Dalay, Fellow at Robert Bosch Academy.

Russia's foreign ministry said on Sunday it was

pursuing a "prompt ceasefire" and that Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov would reschedule the meeting that was set for Sunday with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu. "A result was supposed to come out (of the meetings), but that stage could not be reached. There are issues where the two countries are on opposing sides," the second Turkish official told Reuters. "One of the main issues for the postponement of the Lavrov visit is the (GNA's) plan for an operation into Sirte...which has emerged as a target."

The Kremlin did not comment on the postponement. Cavusoglu said on Monday it was unrelated to any issues on "core principles". The United Nations said last week the warring sides had begun new ceasefire talks in Libya after GNA forces, helped by Turkey, repelled a protracted LNA assault on the capital Tripoli.

Sirte, about halfway between GNA-held Tripoli and LNA-held Benghazi, is the closest city to Libya's main energy export terminals. Haftar's forces seized the city in January and the conflict's new frontline has emerged just to the west. "Russia wants Turkey and the GNA to halt military operations, particularly not attacking Sirte, Jufra and the oil crescent - and Ankara has rebuffed this demand," said Dalay. "If Turkish-Russian talks don't bear fruit, we might then see escalation both in Libya and in Syria's Idlib region", where Ankara and Moscow also back opposing sides, he said. — Agencies

Saudi faces hajj call as deaths...

Continued from Page 1

The hajj, a must for able-bodied Muslims at least once in their lifetime, represents a major potential source of contagion as it packs millions of pilgrims into congested religious sites. But any decision to limit or cancel the event risks annoying Muslim hardliners for whom religion trumps health concerns.

It could also trigger renewed scrutiny of the Saudi custodianship of Islam's holiest sites – the kingdom's most powerful source of political legitimacy. A series of deadly disasters over the years, including a 2015 stampede that killed up to 2,300 worshippers, has prompted criticism of the kingdom's management of the hajj.

"Saudi Arabia is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea," Umar Karim, a visiting fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London, told AFP. "The delay in announcing its decision shows it understands the political consequences of cancelling the hajj or reducing its scale."

The kingdom is "buying time" as it treads cautiously, the South Asian official said. "At the last minute if Saudi says 'we are ready to do a full hajj', (logistically) many countries will not be in a position" to participate, he said. Amid an ongoing suspension of international flights, a reduced hajj with only local residents is a likely scenario, the official added.

A decision to cancel the hajj would be a first since the kingdom was founded in 1932. Saudi

Arabia managed to hold the pilgrimage during previous outbreaks of Ebola and MERS. But it is struggling to contain the virus amid a serious spike in daily cases and deaths since authorities began easing a nationwide lockdown in late May. In Saudi hospitals, sources say intensive care beds are fast filling up and a growing number of health workers are contracting the virus as the total number of cases has topped 130,000.

To counter the spike, authorities this month tightened lockdown restrictions in the city of Jeddah, gateway to the pilgrimage city of Makkah. "The hajj is the most important spiritual journey in the life of any Muslim, but if Saudi Arabia proceeds in this scenario it will not only exert pressure on its own health system," said Yasmine Farouk from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "It could also be widely held responsible for fanning the pandemic."

A cancelled or watered-down hajj would represent a major loss of revenue for the kingdom, which is already reeling from the twin shocks of the virus-induced slowdown and a plunge in oil prices. The smaller year-round umrah pilgrimage was already suspended in March. Together, they add \$12 billion to the Saudi economy every year, according to government figures.

A negative decision would likely disappoint millions of Muslim pilgrims around the world who often invest their life savings and endure long waiting lists to make the trip. "I can't help but be heartbroken – I've been waiting for years," Indonesian civil servant Ria Taurisnawati, 37, told AFP as she sobbed. "All my preparations were done, the clothes were ready and I got the necessary vaccination. But God has another plan." — AFP

of all commercial licenses or contracts in his name registered at the two ministries.

Meanwhile, the Assembly was to debate two grillings yesterday. The first is against Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi for not ending the current school year due to the coronavirus pandemic. It was filed by MP Faisal Al-Kandari. The second is against Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan for violations allegedly committed in contracts signed during the coronavirus crisis, claims of losses in Kuwaiti investments, and failure to take proper actions against corruption cases and public debt.

Sheetan has denied any wrongdoing and also denied rumors that he has resigned to avoid the grilling. The grilling could lead to no-confidence motions against the ministers, both of which will be voted on in the Assembly after eight days. To pass, they need the support of 25 elected MPs, as ministers are not allowed to vote on no-confidence motions.

Egyptians in Qatar fly home...

Continued from Page 1

Thousands of Qatar's majority-expatriate workforce have lost their jobs as a result of a downturn caused by coronavirus disruption. Many have been unable to travel home on normal commercial flights which have been disrupted as countries have imposed restrictions on arrivals to contain the virus.

India has so far operated 33 special charter flights to repatriate almost 6,000 of its citizens stranded in Qatar, according to Delhi. The news site of Egypt's state-run Al-Ahram newspaper reported that the 174-strong group had arrived in Cairo with passengers required to quarantine at home for 14 days. Last week Cairo's emigration ministry said 18 flights would bring back home 3,000 Egyptians stuck in Qatar.

Sunday's flight followed a rare street protest on May 31 by stranded Egyptians brandishing passports outside

their country's unoccupied embassy. Walid Abdo, a 26-year-old Egyptian graphic designer, said after the protest that he had "been living in Qatar without work since March 15". "I lost my job due to the coronavirus crisis," along with more than 200 others from his company, he said. He told AFP that "almost 700 people" who had been employed by security firms "have been terminated and want to return" home. "There are families without a breadwinner here. We cannot (easily) return to Egypt because of the severing of ties and the absence of direct flights."

As global recession looms, Qatar's energy production, hospitality and aviation have been particularly hard hit, with top employers like Qatar Airways and Qatar Petroleum warning of major redundancies. A Qatar Airways memo seen by AFP on Monday said the company will slash the salaries of some of its pilots and make others redundant to offset the revenue collapse caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Doha-based sports broadcaster BeIN will also shed around 100 jobs and cut some salaries in response to the virus downturn and the fallout from piracy of its output, sources with knowledge of the matter said. — AFP

the two sides would "continue the military and diplomatic engagements to resolve the situation and to ensure peace and tranquility in the border areas". However, Indian sources and news reports suggested that Chinese troops remained in parts of the Galwan Valley and of the northern shore of the Pangong Tso lake that it occupied in recent weeks.

India and China have never even agreed on how long their "Line of Actual Control" frontier is, and each side uses different frontier proposals made by Britain to China in the 19th century to back their claims. India gives a figure of 3,500 km. China does not give a number, but state media says the border should be just 2,000 km when China's claims in Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and other regions are taken into account.

Relations between China and India have long been prickly. They fought a brief war in 1962 in which China took territory from India. Further deadly clashes followed in 1967, but the last shot fired in anger was in 1975. In 2017 there was a 72-day showdown after Chinese forces moved into the disputed Doklam plateau on the China-India-Bhutan border. After that India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese leader Xi Jinping sought to ease tensions at summits.

Alice Wells, the top US State Department official for South Asia, said last month that China was seeking to upset the regional balance and had to be "resisted". US President Donald Trump also offered to mediate, but both countries sidestepped the offer. — Agencies

2 lawmakers deny any link to...

Continued from Page 1

Social media reports meanwhile published more details about the activities of the Bangladeshi suspect, who has been operating a large network that sold visas at high rates to Bangladeshis. Some sites claimed he had gifted close to 100 influential people with luxury cars and paid bribes worth millions of dinars, in addition to being a main stakeholder in companies with Kuwaiti partners.

MP Mohammad Hayef sent questions to the ministers of commerce and justice asking for any licenses in the name of the Bangladeshi MP. He demanded copies

Stars

Daily SuDoku								
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9	7		5					8
2				1				9
			6			1		
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hard

Yesterday's Solution								
1	8	7	3	4	6	9	2	5
9	5	2	7	8	1	6	3	4
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7	2	1	6	5	8	3	4	9
8	6	9	4	1	3	5	7	2
4	7	6	1	3	9	2	5	8
3	9	8	5	7	2	4	6	1
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very hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

There's a great day ahead of you, Aries. You'll be blessed with the ability to solve problems, and others will come looking for you today. You'll listen, understand, and express empathy. You'll be wise enough to find solutions to any issues they present to you. After a day like this, you might ask yourself if you shouldn't work as a therapist.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, you are worried that some of the people close to your heart might change. You have been watching and paying attention to subtle signs and changes for quite some time now. Today you will feel like a guide, and you will help those who might need you. You will be able to show them the way and help them to fulfill their needs.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Do you feel like your life hasn't changed a bit over the past few weeks? You feel that certain things need to change but you do nothing but sit there. Today, Taurus, there will be a lot of influences that could incite you to be a little more foolhardy. You don't usually like to take risks, but if you do it, you'll be greatly satisfied.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You've always been a loner, Scorpio. You tend to act on your own and you don't trust outside help. Over the last few weeks, however, you've managed to find people who have accepted you the way you are. It's as if you've found a refuge where you can escape reality. But you'll find that if you open your heart to others, there will be additional places of refuge.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

There is a fire burning deep inside of you, Gemini. It gives you a lot of power and energy. People around you are receptive to this energy. Today a lot of your friends will thrive on your fire and be in the best of moods because of it. Don't try to hide your energy. If you do, it may disappear, or it could even burn you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You've always felt the need to create, Sagittarius. The simplest tasks can fulfill this need. You're even happy if you sketch on a small piece of paper. Over the last month or so you've been finishing a project close to your heart. Don't be afraid to show it off to your friends. People will be thrilled by your work. You deserve to feel proud of what you've achieved.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Enthusiasm and energy will be your allies today, Cancer. Something different is in the air and inciting you to move forward. You will make decisions and go in new directions for your own good and for the good of the people around you. Your dynamism will have a beneficial impact on your family. This newfound strength will give you a great boost.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Some people around you might think that you have never really matured, Capricorn, that you still have the mind of a child. It might not seem obvious at first, but your lighthearted attitude is also a sign of great wisdom. As with those who have truly committed to long-term romances, you will find out that you'll never lose your lightheartedness.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You're organized and rigorous, Leo. You plan everything. But with today's energy, you'll be inclined to let the day go by without keeping to a tight schedule. After all, not every day has to be a workday. You can worry easily, but don't let this get you down. Follow the people around you. They'll teach you to see the world differently. You'll even think about new ways to organize your life.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

If you analyze your life, you'll see that it has completely changed over the past twelve months, Aquarius. You've matured as an individual and your actions have been beneficial to yourself and those around you. Try to make changes as often as you can. Don't stop now. You need to feel that your life is evolving all the time. There is no time to rest.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

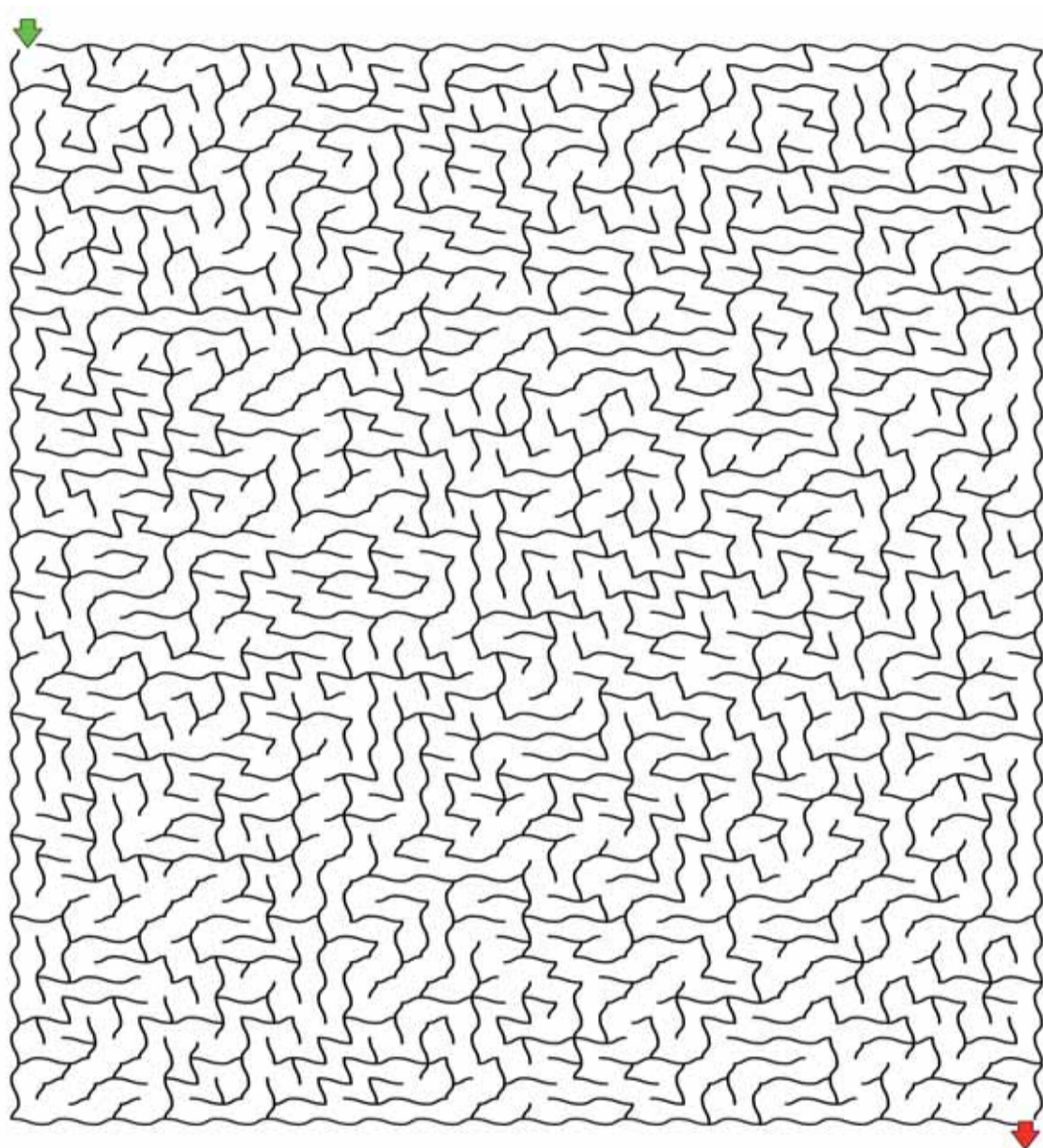
A lot of people around you might think that you are a strong individual, Virgo. For example, you stand up against wrongs in the established social order. You can also be a very constructive person. You try to improve the world around you. Today, Virgo, you'll have all the time you like to meditate about the changes this world needs.



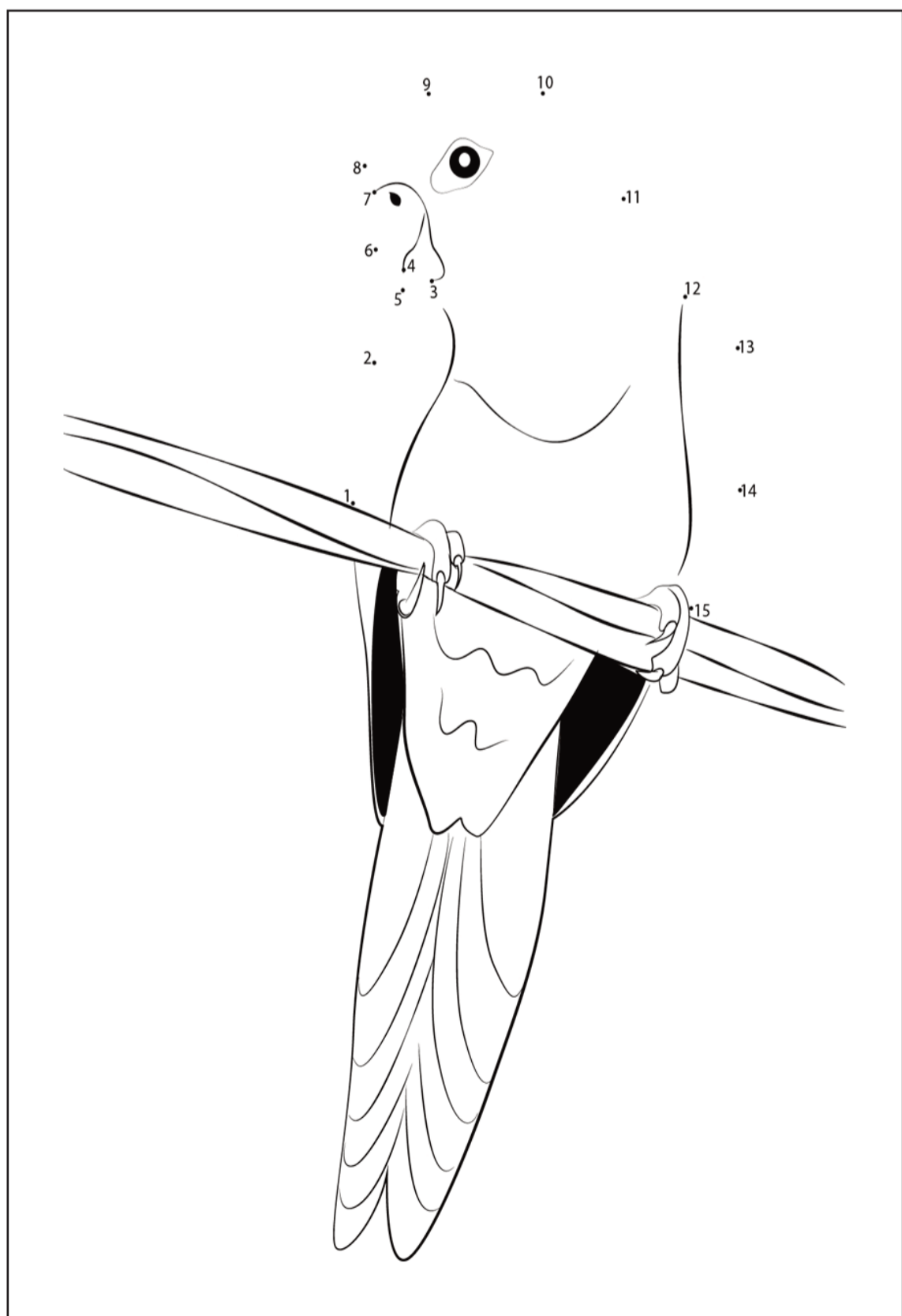
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You may be a little bit disappointed to find out that the people you think so highly of are in fact mere reflections of your own personality. The planetary alignment is trying to teach you to believe in yourself. You just lack confidence. After all, if they're admirable people, it's probably because they have great qualities - and you have them, too. Surprises are just around the corner.

Find the way



Join the dots

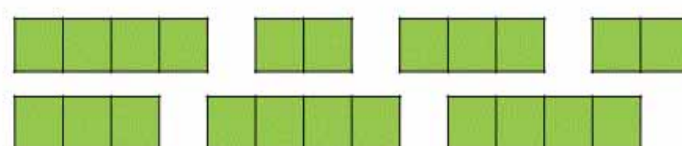


Word Scramble

Baseball Word Scramble

Unscramble the words, then use the highlighted letters to form the phrase below. Watch out: the phrase is scrambled too!

- pabsiltl
- drlwo siense
- gvoel
- ornegdru
- aodidnm
- lpbneul
- dnmou
- gtoudu
- ttreab
- allb
- lakw
- mhoe nur



(Sung during the seventh inning.)



Sports

Photo of the Day



LOS ANGELES: Ksenia Maricheva performs during the practice session in Los Angeles, USA. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

PGA Championship to go ahead without fans, report

LOS ANGELES: The PGA Championship will be held in August but without fans, after California health officials on Monday gave the green light to the first major championship of 2020, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The tournament scheduled for August 6-9 in San Francisco had hoped to attract up to 40,000 fans a day at Harding Park golf course but that was before the USPGA Tour was shutdown because of the coronavirus outbreak. The PGA Championship, which is run by the PGA of America, was originally scheduled to take place in May. Harding Park last held a PGA event in 2015 and has never hosted a major championship. Construction on grandstands were already underway when the Tour was shutdown in March at the Players Championship.

Brooks Koepka will defend his title at Harding Park, where he'll look to become the first player to win three straight PGA Championships since Walter Hagen won four in a row from 1924-27. The PGA cancelled 11 tournaments and revised its remaining schedule, finally resuming last week with no spectators at the Charles Schwab Challenge. Daniel Berger parred the first extra hole to beat Collin Morikawa in a playoff as the Tour made a muted return from the pandemic in Fort Worth, Texas. The next four events of the restart will also be played without spectators.

The first tournament to have fans will be The Memorial, July 16-19 in Dublin, Ohio. Officials are planning for up to 8,000 fans per day at Muirfield Village.

After the Charles Schwab, the PGA Tour will feature the RBC Heritage (June 18-21) in Hilton Head, South Carolina; the Travelers Championship (June 25-28) in Cromwell, Connecticut; and the Rocket Mortgage Classic (July 2-5) in Detroit, Michigan. The US Open is rescheduled for September 17-20 in New York. —AFP

Not fade away: Trailblazing Venus Williams still dreaming at 40

Seven Grand Slam singles titles, four Olympic gold medals

LOS ANGELES: When Venus Williams first stepped onto a tennis court in Oakland for her professional debut in 1994, the Rolling Stones were playing a concert next door at a neighbouring stadium. Twenty-six years later, Williams, like Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, is in no mood to simply fade away.

The trailblazing American star celebrates her 40th birthday today with the tennis season on pause amid the coronavirus crisis which has decimated the calendar. The former world number one, however, says there is no prospect of her quietly drawing a line under a career which has yielded seven Grand Slam singles titles, four Olympic gold medals and dozens of tournament wins.

So, despite the march of time and a recent record of futility — her last singles title came in a WTA Tour event in Taiwan in 2016 — Williams won't be hanging up her racquet just yet.

"You always have to have dreams, so I keep having them," Williams told the Tennis Majors website in an interview earlier this month, revealing that she still wants to challenge for the French and Australian Opens, the two Grand Slams that have eluded her.

"I would like to win Roland Garros. I was not far from it. The same goes for the Australian Open: I was unlucky, I always

missed it a little," Williams said. Dreams of completing a career "Golden Slam" are likely to remain elusive though.

While sister Serena has kept pocketing Grand Slams regularly, it is 12 years since Venus won her last Slam, when she triumphed at the 2008 Wimbledon Championships.

And Venus though knows that the clock



We'll see how I feel

is ticking. "I probably won't be playing as long as what I have already played," she says. "We'll see how I feel. I still love winning as much, but when it's over, it's over."

HIGHS AND LOWS

Williams has never been big on admitting defeat however, a hallmark of her early days under the tutelage of father Richard Williams, who drummed into his daughters the maxim that "the ball is never

out" — an exhortation to chase down every ball.

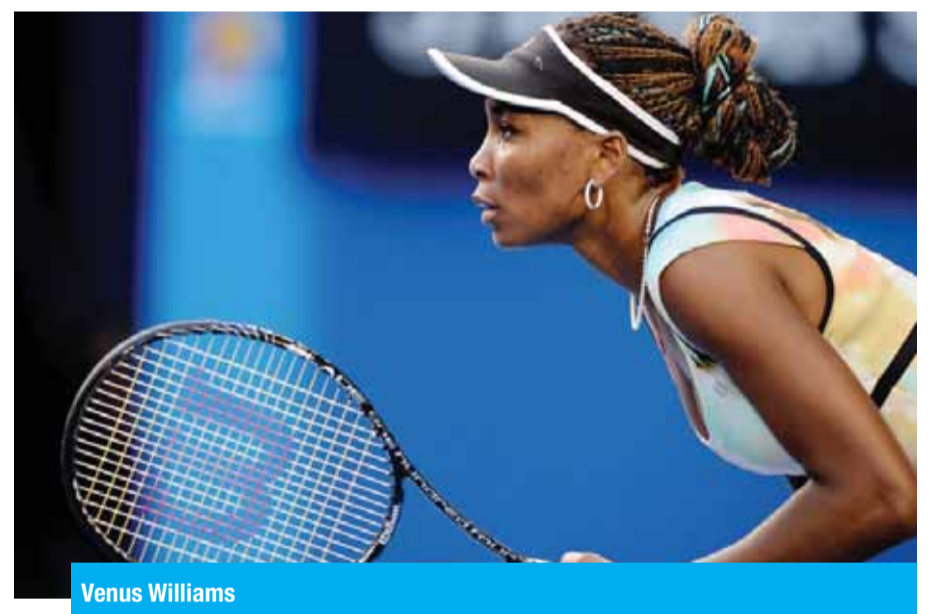
When Williams does finally call it quits, tennis will bid farewell to one of the greatest players in its history. And even though advances in sports science are increasingly stretching the boundaries of longevity for modern athletes, few players today are likely to match her achievement of a professional career that has spanned four different decades.

By now the broad brushstrokes of Williams career are part of tennis lore: the upbringing in the gritty Los Angeles suburb of Compton, the rivalry with younger sister Serena, who has 23 Grand Slam titles to Venus's seven, the successful comeback after being diagnosed with Sjogren's syndrome, an auto-immune disease whose symptoms include joint pain and fatigue.

"I've had great moments, I've been on the top, I've been on the bottom, I've been down and out — I've done it all and I've been equally as happy during all of it," Williams says.

The final years of Williams career have coincided with the emergence of a young crop of African-American tennis players, including Sloane Stephens, Madison Keys, Taylor Townsend and Coco Gauff.

Former US professional turned broadcaster Pam Shriver believes



Venus Williams

Williams has helped African-American women "to feel there's a pathway for them to the top of the tennis world." In recent weeks, Williams has spoken out about the tumultuous protests which erupted in the wake of the killing of unarmed black man George Floyd by police in Minneapolis on May 25.

Williams wrote in a long Instagram post that Floyd's death and other inci-

idents had shown that "racism that still pervades America." "This just scratches the surface of the hideous face of racism in America," she said. "Speaking up about racism in the past was unpopular. It was shunned. No one believed you. 'Until you have walked in these shoes, as an African American, it is impossible to understand the challenges you face in the country, in this world.'" — AFP

'Extremely difficult' to stage London Marathon: Foster

LONDON: Former British long-distance runner Brendan Foster has said it will be "extremely difficult" to stage this year's London Marathon amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Foster is the founder of the Great North Run and Monday saw this year's edition of that race, due to take place on September 13, cancelled as a result of COVID-19.

A decision on whether this year's London Marathon — already postponed from April to October — is expected on Sunday.

"Mass participation events in the form that ours takes, and the London Marathon takes, are clearly going to be extremely difficult to hold and it's going to be up to us to find a formula for the future," said Foster.

He added it would have been impossible to make the race virus secure amid the UK's current two-metre social distancing regulations, as it would have meant a start line that "would have stretched from Newcastle to Berwick".

Foster is now looking to the 2021 edition, saying: It's in our DNA to run, and to run in groups. We have been doing it for two million years, so there's no way that a pandemic like this is going to blow away man's endeavour in terms of running, and running together." — AFP

2021 Dakar Rally plunges offroad stars down Saudi Arabian Dunes

RIYADH: The planet's toughest test of motorsports endurance returns to Saudi Arabia in the New Year as a brand-new Dakar Rally route will push committed petrolheads to the limit over diverse landscapes. Here is all you need to know:

After four decades of desert action in Africa and South America, a stunning debut in the Arabian Peninsula earlier this year saw the Dakar capture the imagination of adventurous rally fans the world over once again. In January 2021, the world's toughest rally is heading back to Saudi Arabia for another fortnight of exhilarating offroad action.

The Dakar convoy will start their 2021 odyssey on the shores of the Red Sea as they depart Jeddah on January 3. Competitors will spend the following two weeks navigating their way through Saudi Arabia's expansive deserts. A well earned Rest Day will come in the ancient city of Ha'il at the midway point on January 9.

A hero's reception awaits those who manage to meet every challenge and cross the finish line back in Jeddah on January 15. The winners of each category (Car, Bike, Truck, Quad and UTV) will be celebrated on the podium, but everyone who completes the Dakar has the right to be satisfied at overcoming the toughest test of endurance.

As well as a new route for 2021, further innovations will be added to the mix to increase the sporting challenges of the event while always prioritising participant safety. Handing out the roadbook of a stage just 10 minutes before racing starts will bring navigation



skills to the fore. Also among the new regulations are strict rules governing tyres. No tyre changes will be allowed in the car category during the marathon stage while each motorbike will be granted a total of six rear tyres for the entire rally.

To ensure competitors remain as safe as possible there will be audible warnings ahead of danger zones. Furthermore, certain hazardous sections will be categorised as "slow zones" where the speed limit will be set at 90kph. Airbag vests will now be mandatory and subject to inspection by race officials during technical scrutineering.

Dakar Rally director David Castera said: "[During the 2020 Dakar] stage after stage, and often multiple times within the same stage, the majestic landscapes of the region left us dazzled and in awe. However, Saudi Arabia only revealed a tiny part of its mysteries, leaving plenty of surprises in store for the next edition in January 2021."

Also new in 2021 will be Dakar Classic, a parallel



contest for vintage vehicles that will use the same start and finish points. In a nod to the unique heritage of the rally, memorable machines from the past such as the Renault 20, Lada Niva, Toyota Celica, Land Rover Defender and Porsche 959 are expected on the start line of the inaugural race.

Sports

Key UEFA meeting to decide on way forward for suspended Champions League

Football in most countries is being played behind closed doors

PARIS: As football around Europe returns after a long suspension, UEFA is set to announce the format for the latter stages of the Champions League at a key meeting today which will also raise the thorny issue of the postponed, pan-continental Euro 2020.

The Champions League was frozen in mid-March before the last-16 stage had been completed, as the sport ground to a halt when the coronavirus pandemic began to take hold.

Initially, European football's governing body had hoped to finish its flagship competition — along with the Europa League and women's Champions League — by the end of June.

It soon became clear that such an outcome was overly optimistic, and during the peak of the pandemic in Europe any prospect of finishing the season at all looked slim.

Nevertheless, UEFA has for some time been working on a way of completing its season in August, which looks feasible as leagues restart and the European death toll from Covid-19 slows.

With that in mind, the Executive Committee meeting, to be held by videoconference, is set to approve the idea of a "Final Eight" in Lisbon, as widely reported by media across Europe in recent days.

That would mean finding a way to play out the four remaining last 16, second legs before bringing together all the quarter-finalists in Portugal's capital for a series of one-off games to crown the European champions. According to reports, the final would be on August 23.

In the current context, grouping all teams together

in one place and reducing travel is the wisest solution, although it remains to be seen how many fans, if any, could attend.

Football in most countries is being played behind closed doors, yet UEFA's meeting comes in the same week many EU member states — Portugal among them — opened up once again to foreign visitors.

The final was scheduled to be played in Istanbul on May 30 and only last week Turkey's Sports Minister, Mehmet Kasapoglu, expressed confidence that the city would not lose out.

"I have no doubt it will take place in the best way in Turkey. We're confident that we will receive good news on June 17," he said. However, last month the New York Times reported that Istanbul could instead be awarded a future final, when it is safe for fans to travel in large numbers.



Overly optimistic

FEWER HOSTS FOR EURO 2020?

Gdansk in Poland was slated to host the Europa League final but that competition also looks set to finish in a watered down "Final Eight" format.

German newspaper Bild reported last week that the closing stages would be switched to the region around the western city of Cologne.

A similar format could be brought in for the women's Champions League, the final of which was due to be played in Vienna. UEFA's announcements will have a knock-on effect on when next season can start around Europe. Everything could be derailed by a second wave of coronavirus infections.

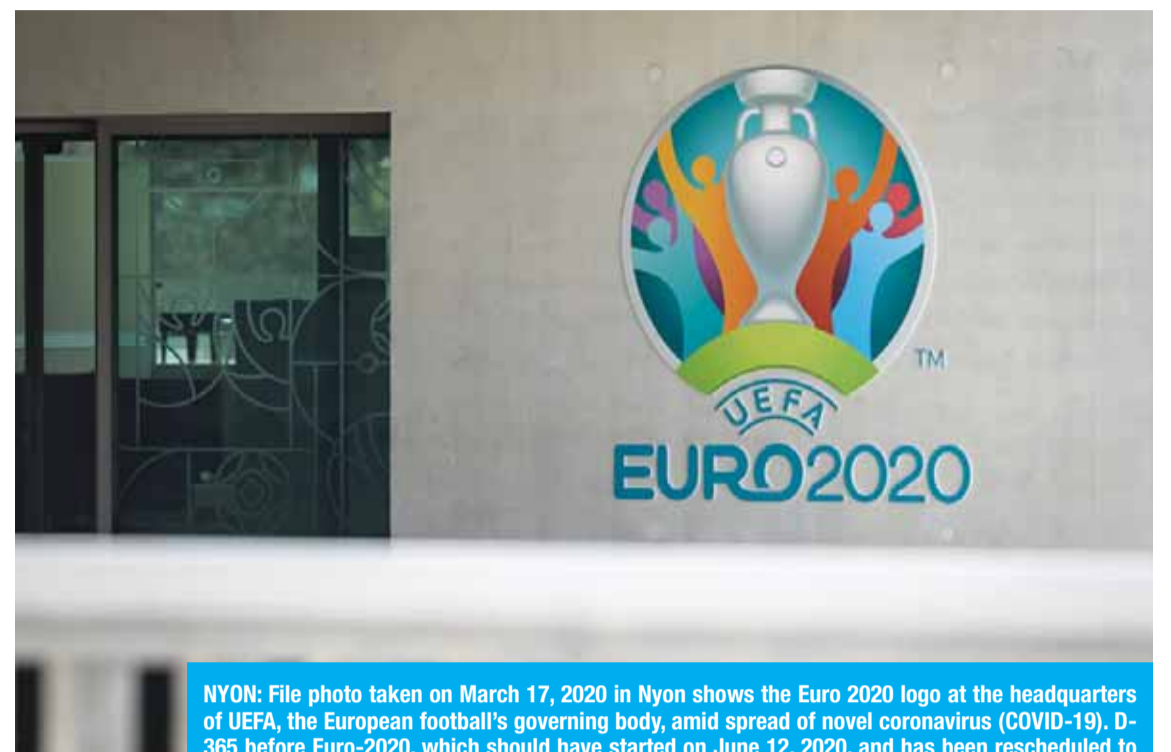
Euro 2020 was meant to be in full swing by now, but postponing the tournament by 12 months was

Norwich City, Bournemouth, Watford and Burnley all revealing positive results.

The screening, with results available within 48 hours, has been a major factor in the return of the Premier League, whose global appeal is exemplified by its huge following in Asia. "We're very proud to be able to do this role," co-founder and CEO Danny Yeung told AFP at the company's office-and-laboratory complex in Hong Kong.

"I think our entire team will feel very proud when the Premier League comes back to action." The Premier League contract was a departure for the Hong Kong firm, whose core business is carrying out DNA tests for consumers keen to know their health risks for diseases such as cancer.

Discussions began about two months ago, after the pandemic had halted professional sport worldwide and as competitions searched for ways to restart safely. Prenetics/Circle DNA is now in talks with other major competitions, including Spain's La Liga. Covid-19 looks likely to linger as a hazard



NYON: File photo taken on March 17, 2020 in Nyon shows the Euro 2020 logo at the headquarters of UEFA, the European football's governing body, amid spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). D-365 before Euro-2020, which should have started on June 12, 2020, and has been rescheduled to 2021 after UEFA postponing the European Championship due to the novel coronavirus. —AFP

for professional sport until a vaccine is available.

"Right now we are talking to all the major sports associations," said Yeung. "These are your rugbys, your crickets, racing, et cetera. So you name it, I think we're speaking to a lot of these major organizations."

Yeung's company is also offering individual tests to people in Hong Kong on a not-for-profit basis, charging HK\$985 (\$127) a time. "For us, we're treating COVID-19 not really from a profit perspective, but because we do have the responsibility to do something for COVID," he said.

"And certainly if the community gets back a little bit to normal, it's better for everyone involved — the community, our employees and our future business. "Ultimately we feel that if we are to fight COVID it's not one company that can do this," Yeung added.

"It needs to be a collaboration between the public and private sector and multiple companies need to pull together to have a solution." —AFP

could be reduced.

In an interview with beIN Sports, he admitted to having "some issues" with three unnamed cities. "In principle, we will do it in 12 cities. But if not, we are ready to do it in 10, nine or eight," he said.

That could leave some hosts — just like Istanbul — less than happy, making this week's meeting a potentially delicate diplomatic operation for UEFA to go along with all the logistical challenges. —AFP

Hong Kong firm puts Premier League on road to recovery

HONG KONG: The thousands of coronavirus tests that have enabled the Premier League to return this week have an unlikely source — a little-known start-up in Hong Kong. Prenetics/Circle DNA is playing a key role in rebooting the world's most popular football league after landing a £4 million (\$5 million) contract to screen its players and staff.

The company has set up stations at each of the Premier League's 20 clubs, carrying out testing twice a week — using partner laboratories in Britain — in the run-up to today's return to play. So far, 8,687 deep-throat and nasal swab tests have turned up 16 cases, with Tottenham Hotspur,

Cricket Australia chief resigns

SYDNEY: Cricket Australia chief executive Kevin Roberts resigned yesterday after the troubled organisation's board demanded a leadership "reset" as anger simmers over its handling of the coronavirus crisis.

Roberts' departure makes him the third Australian sporting chief to fall on his sword during the pandemic, after Rugby Australia's Raelene Castle and the National Rugby League's Todd Greenberg.

CA chairman Earl Eddings said T20 World Cup chief Nick Hockley would take over from Roberts on an interim basis while an international search was conducted for a permanent replacement.

"Kevin feels, and the board agrees, that now's the right time for new leadership at Cricket Australia to reset the organisation to bounce back from COVID-19," Eddings told reporters.

CA admits T20 WCup plans 'unrealistic'

SYDNEY: Staging the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia this year is "unrealistic" in the midst of a global coronavirus pandemic, Cricket Australia (CA) chairman Earl Eddings admitted yesterday.

The tournament is scheduled to take place from October 18 to November 15, and officials have previously said they are planning for it to proceed on those dates.

But with many global borders still shut due to virus-related travel restrictions, Eddings conceded that was looking increasingly unlikely.

"While it hasn't been formally called off this year, or postponed, trying to get 16 countries into Australia in

Eddings refused to detail why Roberts was heading for the exit barely halfway through his three-year contract.

However, former Australian wicket-keeper Ian Healy said Roberts had lost the confidence of those involved in the game by over-reacting to the financial risks posed by the virus.

"He's led a panic, a very premature panic, on the pandemic for no great reason and no reason he's been able to explain transparently to the states and the players," Healy told Melbourne's SEN radio.

Roberts laid off most of Cricket Australia's staff and tried to slash budgets to state bodies and players, arguing revenues would be hit hard by the virus.

However, there was widespread pushback after it became clear that most of Australia's home season, including a lucrative Test series against India, was likely to go ahead.

The 47-year-old, a former opening batsman for New South Wales, was never a popular figure after spearheading CA's failed move in 2017 to cut player payments.

The highlights of his short tenure

of up to 10,000 into sports stadiums from next month.

But strict international border restrictions remain in place and there are also limits on domestic movement between states, creating an added headache for an event where forty-five matches are split between seven cities.

Eddings said India's Test tour in December-January appeared set to go ahead, with the tourists willing to undergo quarantine to enter Australia.

"We've had a lot of very positive chats with India, they're very keen to tour," he said. "Now it's a matter of how we get over the hurdles with COVID-19 for them to come into the country."

However, the T20 World Cup, involving 15 visiting teams and support staff, presents a far greater logistical challenge. The most likely scenario appears to be rescheduling the tournament until next year, but it will depend on the status of the pandemic

'POSITIVE CHATS'

Australia has so far enjoyed success containing the virus, allowing it to ease restrictions, including letting crowds



MELBOURNE: File photo taken on October 3, 2018 shows Cricket Australia's CEO Kevin Roberts speaking during a press conference after being appointed to the top position in Melbourne. Roberts resigned on June 16, 2020 after the troubled organisation's board demanded a leadership "reset" as anger simmers over its handling of the coronavirus crisis. —AFP

were hosting the women's T20 World Cup, won by Australia in March, and reintegrating disgraced leaders Steve Smith and David Warner into the men's Test team after the ball-tampering scandal in 2018.

"He's worked tirelessly to steady the ship and rebuild cricket's standing in the community," Eddings said. CA said a restructuring plan for all levels of cricket in Australia would be released this week. —AFP

and finding a spot in cricket's crowded calendar. Postponing the World Cup could have a knock-on effect for the Indian Premier League, which was supposed to begin in March but has been repeatedly pushed back.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India is desperate to salvage the world's richest T20 tournament, even if that means taking it overseas or playing in empty stands.

While the BCCI has earmarked a September-October window for the event, delaying the T20 World Cup would open up an attractive slot.

The ICC last week said the situation regarding the T20 World Cup and coronavirus was rapidly evolving but insisted "planning for delivery of the events in the scheduled window is ongoing".

"The health and well-being of everyone involved is our priority and other considerations fall out from that," ICC chief executive Manu Sawhney said. —AFP

Sarri targets first Juventus trophy against Napoli

MILAN: Maurizio Sarri takes on his former club Napoli in today's Italian Cup final looking for his first trophy as Juventus coach days before Serie A resumes after a three-month shutdown.

Juventus are chasing a record-extending 14th Italian Cup against five-time winners Napoli in Rome, after the Turin giants' four-year cup-winning streak was ended last season.

Sarri took over at Juventus one year ago after a season with Chelsea during which the Premier League side won the Europa League. Before that the 61-year-old spent three seasons with Napoli, battling Juventus for the title, before falling out with club owner Aurelio De Laurentiis.

Sarri claimed he only found out he had been sacked and replaced by Carlo Ancelotti when he switched on the television. De Laurentiis blasted his former coach on Monday.

"He (Sarri) betrayed me, he left with the vulgar excuse of money, forced me to change, and still had a two-year contract," De Laurentiis told Corriere dello Sport.

Sarri's return to Napoli's Stadio San Paolo ended in a 2-1 league defeat in January. But the former Chelsea manager will have another chance for just the second trophy of his 30-year coaching career at an empty Stadio Olimpico.

A win would help the eight-time defending Serie A champions set the tone when the title battle resumes next week, with Lazio just one point behind in second place.

RONALDO V MERTENS

Juventus striker Gonzalo Higuain, who helped Napoli to their last Italian Cup triumph in 2014 and was Serie A's top-scorer with 36 goals under Sarri in the 2015-2016 season, remains a doubt for the Turin side with a thigh injury.

Cristiano Ronaldo, who missed a penalty in Friday's semi-final second leg against AC Milan, will start up front for Juventus, while Napoli winger Dries Mertens is fresh from breaking the club's all-time scoring record with a last-four goal against Inter Milan.

Ronaldo, who has scored 25 goals this season, can lift a 30th career trophy in Rome. "The missed penalty was unfortunate," said Sarri. "It will take a little patience."

"The players have been on their sofas for weeks, and so getting them back to complete physical and mental efficiency is not simple or automatic."

Napoli are sixth in Serie A, and chasing their first trophy since 2014, after a difficult start to the season with Gennaro Gattuso replacing Ancelotti in December.

The last time the two teams met in a final was the Italian Super Cup in December 2014, with Napoli coming out on top. Napoli and Juventus last met in an Italian Cup final eight years ago, with the southerners winning 2-0 at the Stadio Olimpico for their first major trophy in 22 years. —AFP

18 Not fade away: Trailblazing Venus Williams still dreaming at 40



19 Key UEFA meeting to decide on way forward for suspended Champions League



19 Cricket Australia chief resigns



NFL chief encourages clubs to sign Kaepernick



SANTA CLARA: File photo taken on October 23, 2016, Colin Kaepernick (C) and Eric Reid (R) of the San Francisco 49ers kneel in protest during the national anthem prior to their NFL game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said Monday he would welcome exiled quarterback Colin Kaepernick back into the league in any capacity, including as a player.

Goodell told ESPN.com that he encourages teams to sign the 32-year-old former San Francisco 49ers player and invited Kaepernick's input on racial and social programs that are being run by the league.

"If he wants to resume his career in the NFL, then obviously it's gonna take a team to make that decision," Goodell said. "But I welcome that, support a club making that decision, and encourage them to do that. If his efforts are not on the field but continuing to work in this space, we welcome him to that table and to help us, guide us, help us make better decisions about the kinds of things that need to be done in the communities."

"We have invited him in before, and we want to make sure that everybody's welcome at that table, and trying to help us deal with some very complex, difficult issues, that have been around for a long time."

"But I hope we're at a point now where everybody's committed to making long-term, sustainable change." Goodell admitted earlier this month that the league was wrong to silence player protests as it responded to calls from a group of players to issue an explicit condemnation of racism.

In an earlier video message posted on social media, Goodell said the league would now support peaceful protests from players in future.

But asked about President Donald Trump's recent tweet which indicated Goodell might be too soft on players who in Trump's view disrespect the flag, Goodell dodged the question. "I can't answer that," he said.

Asked what his relationship with Trump is like, Goodell would only say, "He recognizes the input of sports and that we can be part

of a wave to bring some normalcy to our communities." Kaepernick filed a grievance with the NFL in 2017 alleging the owners conspired to keep him out of the league after he sparked a kneeling campaign to protest treatment of blacks in America. In February 2019, he settled for an undisclosed amount of money.

That same month multiple US media outlets reported Kaepernick was in talks with the Alliance of American Football about a job but wanted a guaranteed \$20 million per season. At the time quarterbacks were making an average of \$250,000 a year.

Last November, Kaepernick balked at an NFL-arranged workout for all 32 teams and instead decided at the last minute to stage his own on an Atlanta-area high school field which was attended by scouts from eight teams. Kaepernick has not played in the NFL in four years.

In 12 games with the San Francisco 49ers in 2016, he completed 59.2 percent of his passes, threw 16 touchdowns and four interceptions.

A second-round draft pick in 2011, Kaepernick started 58 games over six seasons with the 49ers and passed for 12,271 yards with 72 touchdowns and 30 interceptions.

During the 2012 season, he led San Francisco to Super Bowl XLVII, a 34-31 loss to the Baltimore Ravens. Goodell also reacted to on Monday to reports in the US media that some players on the Houston Texans and Dallas Cowboys have tested positive for COVID-19.

"Positive tests are going to happen," Goodell said. "The issue is, can we obviously prevent as many of those from happening, but in addition, treat them quickly, isolate them and prevent them from directly impacting our player personnel."

"So none of those players were in the facilities. All of those players, fortunately, have had either mild symptoms or are asymptomatic." — AFP

Qatar virtually unveils World Cup venue

DOHA: Qatar inaugurated its latest new World Cup stadium on Monday not with a sold-out football fixture, but with a socially-distanced tribute to the workers on the frontline of the fight against coronavirus. Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra musicians sporting masks and gloves surrounded by candles played a soaring orchestral piece on the turf of the new Education City Stadium in a clip broadcast to mark the stadium's opening.

It was interspersed with images of medical professionals and other frontline workers who made their

way through the 40,000-capacity ground, which was shown with eerily empty stands, to applause from the Qatar national team.

"This is all a message of hope. And really, a big thank you to frontline workers around the world," Nasser al-Khater, the chief executive of the 2022 World Cup, said after the inauguration.

"It's a small token of appreciation to them." Education City is the second of the seven stadiums being built from scratch for the 2022 tournament to be inaugurated.

It had been due to host the semi-final of the Club World Cup on December 18, but its opening was postponed because of delays to certification. It has yet to host a public fixture.

In April, coronavirus cases were confirmed in workers at three of the stadiums under construction, highlighting the difficulty of preventing the virus' spread among labourers living and working in close proximity. Nasser insisted that "more than 80 per-

cent" of the infrastructure required for 2022 was now complete. Hassan al-Thawadi, the secretary general of the Qatari organisation charged with delivering the tournament, said finishing the stadium amid the pandemic had been "a big challenge".

"But we managed to overcome it," he said. "We were able to maintain the continuity of work in a positive way, but at the same time ensure a safe and healthy environment for everyone."

Alongside the musical tribute, a pyrotechnic show both inside and outside the stadium was used to mark its completion.

In a video message for the opening, FIFA president Gianni Infantino paid tribute to those "who are still fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic". "The new stadium in Education City reminds us that football will return," he said.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani used his clip to honour "the teams working on the frontline". "We truly believe in better days to come,

the days when we will enjoy watching the stars of the game together," he said. The Education City ground, named for the surrounding university and research campuses, will host fixtures through to the quarter-finals. After the tournament, half of its 40,000 seats will be donated to build stadiums in developing countries. The organisers of the first World Cup to be staged in the Middle East faced fresh questions last week over the treatment of foreign labourers working on tournament projects.

Rights group Amnesty revealed that around a hundred sub-contractors at the flagship Al-Bayt stadium had not been paid wages for up to seven months. Authorities banned the sub-contractor, which was recently sold to new owners, from all World Cup projects.

Two and a half years before the World Cup kicks off, Qatar has already launched the brand new 40,000-capacity Al-Janoub stadium and the refurbished Khalifa International ground. — AFP



Support peaceful protests