



7 Top US prosecutor who probed Trump allies fired



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10 Women bear the brunt of virus fallout in workplace



20 Arsenal stunned by Brighton, Wolves closing on top four



MoH launches random virus testing in residential areas

Lockdowns end in Hawally, Khaitan • MPs welcome probe into airport project

Two suicides in Kuwait over the weekend

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A Filipino man was found hanged inside his apartment in Nugra after the haris of the building called police after the man had not emerged from his flat for more than three days. The haris said the deceased had been depressed lately. No other details were immediately available.

Over the weekend, another Asian man killed himself in Mangaf by

throwing himself down his building's airshaft. He was reportedly facing financial difficulties. Firemen had to break down a wall to retrieve his corpse. Additionally, a Nepali resident threatened to kill himself by jumping from the second floor of his building in Mahboula. The man was calmed down and rescued. He will be referred to the authorities. Attempting to commit suicide is a crime in Kuwait.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry said yesterday it will start random field testing for the coronavirus by sending teams to homes selected randomly in different residential areas. The ministry said in a statement the house visits will be from 5 pm to 11 pm daily and will cover all residential areas where expats and citizens reside. It asked people to demand the identification of the teams and cooperate with them.

The campaign comes after a steep rise in the number of cases reported in the country, especially among Kuwaitis, mainly in Jahra and Ahmadi governorates alongside Farwaniya governorate. The

unexpected spread of the disease among citizens led the government on Thursday to delay moving into the second of a five-phase plan to gradually return to normal life.

The government said it will assess the situation and take an appropriate decision based on the new developments. The number of cases relatively dropped in the past two days but still remained high among Kuwaitis. But the government decided to ease curfew hours from 7 pm to 5 am daily and also decided to lift the total lockdowns of Hawally and Khaitan following a drop in numbers. Both decisions became effective early yesterday.

MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei yesterday

welcomed a decision by Minister of Public Works Rana Al-Fares to form a fact-finding committee to investigate the reasons for the delay in the new airport project and find out those responsible for the delay. The lawmaker said that officials in the ministry have provided false facts about the progress of construction in the airport project in a bid to protect a former public works minister who resigned following a grilling.

MP Khalil Al-Saleh described the move as a step in the right direction, but said specialized people must be included. He called for announcing the outcome of the probe quickly and holding those responsible to account.

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Trump holds fiery rally but crowd smaller

TULSA: US President Donald Trump returned Saturday to one of his favorite spots - a campaign rally stage - defying the pandemic and attacking Democratic rivals at an event with crowds far smaller than promised. Gathering his political faithful for a much-hyped rally in Oklahoma, his first in three months, the Republican president sought to reinvigorate his flagging campaign in the face of a crushing health and economic crisis as well as protests against racial injustice that have swept the nation in recent weeks.

Trump all but claimed victory over the pandemic that has killed some 120,000 Americans - "I have done a phenomenal job with it!" he insisted - even as six members of his own Tulsa advance team test-

ed positive for COVID-19. The event - which the White House promised would be flooded with up to 100,000 people, but actually did not fill the 19,000-seat arena where Trump spoke - has emerged as a flashpoint in the pandemic era.

But Trump was more interested in reviving his political fortunes after several bruising weeks that saw continued economic woes tied to the pandemic, nationwide protests over racial injustice, the toppling of Confederate and other statues and critics including former aides savaging his performance. "The silent majority is stronger than ever before," Trump said in a rowdy, freewheeling speech in which he blasted his 2020 election rival, Democrat Joe Biden, as a "helpless puppet of the radical left". "Five months from now we're going to defeat 'sleepy' Joe Biden," he said.

Many rally-goers wore red "Make America Great Again" hats or T-shirts, but very few wore masks and there was little social distancing, even though coronavirus cases have recently been skyrocketing in Oklahoma.

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TULSA: US President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at the BOK Center on Saturday. —AFP

Sisi warns of direct Libya intervention

CAIRO: Egypt's president warned Saturday that advances by Turkey-backed Libyan forces on the Libyan city of Sirte could prompt an Egyptian military intervention in the neighboring country in support of Cairo's ally Khalifa Haftar. Meanwhile, Ankara has urged forces led by the eastern-based Haftar to withdraw from the strategic city for a ceasefire agreement to be reached.

The UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli has made major military gains against Haftar's forces recently thanks to increased support from its backer Turkey. The key city of Sirte, which lies some 450 km east of the capital, is under the control of Haftar's forces, who last year launched a recently aborted attempt to seize control of western Libya.

In a televised address, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said Sirte is a "red line" for Egypt, citing the need to protect its porous border as grounds for "direct intervention" in Libya. "If the Libyan people asked us to intervene, it is a signal to the world that Egypt and Libya share ... common interests, security and stability," Sisi said on Saturday.

The GNA denounced Sisi's warning, saying any intervention would be a threat to Libya's security. "We strongly reject what was said by Al-Sisi and consider it a continuation of the war"

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'Ring of fire' solar eclipse thrills gazers

NAIROBI: Sky watchers along a narrow band from west Africa to the Arabian Peninsula, India and the Far East witnessed yesterday a dramatic "ring of fire" solar eclipse. So-called annular eclipses occur when the Moon - passing between Earth and the Sun - is not quite close enough to our planet to completely obscure sunlight, leaving a thin ring of the solar disc visible. They happen every year or two, and can only be seen from a

narrow pathway across the planet.

Yesterday's eclipse arrived on the northern hemisphere's longest day of the year - the summer solstice - when Earth's north pole is tilted most directly towards the Sun. The "ring of fire" was first visible in northeastern Republic of Congo from 5:56 local time (04:56 GMT) just a few minutes after sunrise. This is the point of maximum duration, with the blackout lasting 1 minute and 22 seconds.

Arcing eastward across Africa and Asia, it reached "maximum eclipse" - with a perfect solar halo around the Moon - over Uttarakhand, India near the Sino-Indian border at 12:10 local time (0640 GMT). More spectacular, but less long-lived:

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TAIWAN: A total solar eclipse is seen from Yunlin county yesterday. —AFP

US Asians soul searching over Floyd death

WASHINGTON: As anti-racism protests broke out across the United States, Viet Hoai Tran knew exactly what he wanted to write on his poster - "Yellow Peril Supports Black Power". "If we are talking about fighting for justice, for liberation, for change... all of us have to be part of this," said the 27-year-old, who was born in Vietnam, but grew up in the US.

The death of George Floyd, a black man, in Minneapolis police custody

sparked nationwide protests - and a sense of reckoning in the Asian American community, which has historically fraught, even violent, ties with African Americans. In particular, the revelation that one of the officers charged over Floyd's death, Tou Thao, is Hmong has caused many Asian Americans to grapple with their community's complicity.

"Yellow peril" is a racial slur articulating the centuries-old Western fear of an East Asian takeover that has been repurposed by Asian Americans in a show of solidarity with the black community. "There's a lot of anti-blackness in the AAPI community," said Tran, referring to the Asian Americans and the US diaspora of Pacific Islanders.

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HOLLYWOOD: A protester holds a sign as she demonstrates at Donald Trump's Hollywood Walk of Fame star on Saturday. —AFP

Local

Woman killed in deliberate hit-and-run in Abu Fatira

Air cargo customs officers seize large drug shipment

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A woman died Saturday when a driver ran her over in Abu Fatira in a case police are investigating as a homicide. The suspect drove away from the scene after hitting the woman deliberately with his American-made vehicle, according to police based on eyewitnesses' reports. The woman was reportedly walking home when the suspect approached her and unleashed his dog to attack her. She was knocked down to the floor as a result of the attack, at which point the suspect ran her over and fled the scene, according to eyewitnesses. The woman arrived to Adan hospital in a critical condition and passed away there. Investigations are ongoing to locate and arrest the suspect.



Thirteen curfew violators arrested

Separately, police arrested 13 people for breaking the curfew on Saturday, including 12 Kuwaitis and one expatriate, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. Eight people were arrested in Al-Ahmadi governorate, two in each of the Capital and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates and one was detained in Al-Ahmadi governorate, the ministry said.

Drugs seized

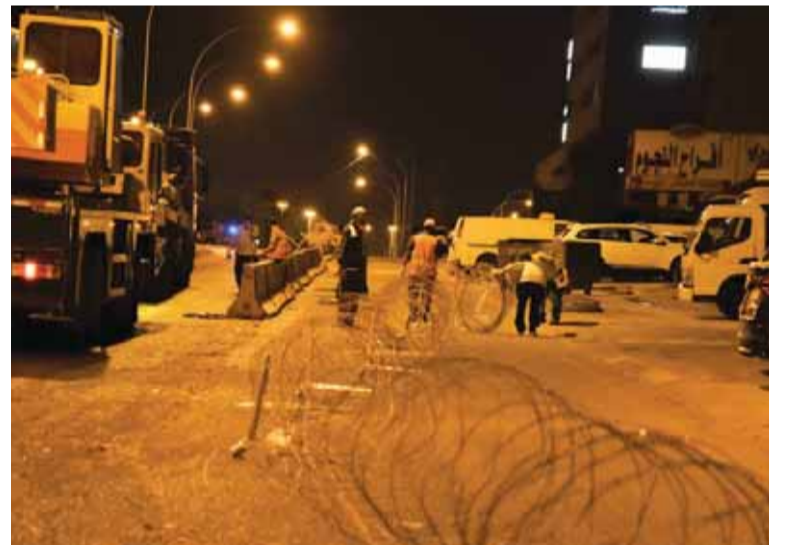
In other news, air cargo customs officers seized 18 packages containing 65 kilograms of assorted drugs, 39 tablets and 26,000 Lyrica pills; a banned substance in Kuwait. Police arrested a person who had imported the shipments from China, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, the Customs General Department said in a statement.

Curfew violators

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KUWAIT: This picture released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows drugs found in shipments through air cargo.



KUWAIT: Authorities removed barriers blocking the entrances and exits of Hawally and Khaitan on Saturday, ahead of the lifting of lockdown over the two areas yesterday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

News in brief

92,000 expats left Kuwait

KUWAIT: Around 92,000 expatriates, with or without valid visas, left Kuwait since April 1, 2020 via 600 flights through Kuwait International Airport, Al-Rai reported yesterday quoting Mansour Al-Hashemi, Operations Director at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Meanwhile, the DGCA announced that eight flights departed from Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 1,195 passengers. They included four flights to Egypt, two flights to India, one flight to Qatar, and one flight to Nepal.

Travel appointments

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry launched a new service on its official website (<https://www.moi.gov.kw/>) where Kuwaiti citizens can make appointments to apply for travel in accordance with regulations and conditions announced recently by the government. The Cabinet had allowed limited air travel for citizens with critical health conditions who should travel at their own expense. Students who must travel to attend their tests will be allowed to do so, as well as citizens who have foreign wife or husband abroad and the trip should be for 30 days minimum. Any person who wants to travel should submit a request to the Interior Ministry 10 days before the trip, and citizens should pay for their treatment in case of contracting the virus.

Plasma donation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Blood Bank launched an online platform for patients who recovered from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to register and donate their plasma. The registration can be done via www.btas-kw.org/ccpdonation/. Donation rooms were allocated in Kuwait Blood Bank building in Jabriya, and Sheikha Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Center in Al-Sabah area.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive along the Sheikh Jaber Causeway in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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Virtual talent hunt organized by ICSK Senior

KUWAIT: Talent hits a target no one else can hit. The Indian Community School Senior (ICSK Senior) showcased its first virtual Talent Hunt on June 18, 2020 on the virtual online platform, which is in a way an art fest too, the very first of its kind in any school in Kuwait. The objective of this program was to discover the hidden talents in the children. The children participated zealously in the event. Talents like song rendition, classical and contemporary dances, instrumental music performances were there. The children showcased their expertise in all these items and were greatly appreciated. The children were also encouraged to hone their skills as these are essential for the development of overall personality of the children.

The chief guest for the program was Sanjeev Suri, the Country Manager of Air India to Kuwait. The guest of honor for the occasion was Mangala Pillai Principal of The Indian Excellent School Sharjah and Ramachandran Nair, Chairman of The Indian Excellent School Sharjah. The other dignitaries were the Honorable members of the Board of Trustees, Principals, Vice Principals, Deputy Vice Principal of all the branches of ICSK, Khaitan, Amman, Junior and Senior. Dr V Binumon Principal and Senior Administrator of ICSK Senior welcomed the Chief Guest, Guest of Honour, Honourable Board of Trustees, Principals, Vice Principals, Deputy Vice Principal, teachers, parents

and the loving children of ICSK whole heartedly with lot of warmth and affection.

The program got its carpet rolled with invoking the blessings of God Almighty with the Islamic prayer by Master Mohammed Faiz, followed by the prayer song 'You Are My Refuge' by Swarnjali, the Senior School music band. The Kuwait and Indian national anthem was also rendered to pay homage to the nations. The chief guest Sanjeev Suri inaugurated and declared the virtual talent hunt open and also addressed the audience. A token of gratitude, a virtual memento was gifted to Sanjeev Suri.

A very special performance was staged by Maanya Bhansali and Master Johan Joy of class 2 from ICSK Junior in the form of a cinematic dance and a mellifluous song. With their performance the stage was set on fire. An authentic classical dance was also performed by Anjana Ravi Prasad. The next was the much awaited inauguration of the ICSK social media platform, again the first of its kind in any school in Kuwait, 'Fire Talents' through YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, where the children of ICSK get the unique opportunity to showcase and flaunt their talents and skills. This was inaugurated by Mangala Pillai, Principal The Indian Excellent School Sharjah and she also addressed the gathering. A token of gratitude and appreciation was also gifted to Mangala through the virtual platform.

The inaugural ceremony of the Virtual Talent Hunt reached its culmination with the vote of thanks proposed by Mini Shaji Deputy Vice Principal ICSK Senior. After the inaugural ceremony, there was an array of scintillating and mesmerizing performances of the children belonging to various age groups. For the next two to three hours, it was just a flamboyant staging of performances by the child prodigies of ICSK that left a benchmark for all the other children.



Local

United Nations hails Kuwait's aid to refugees worldwide

Estimated \$430 million support for UNHCR activities since 2013

KUWAIT: The United Nations has lauded Kuwait's generous aid to refugees and displaced people worldwide, considering it as an international exemplary in this domain. "Kuwait has contributed generously in aid of millions of refugees and internally displaced individuals around the world in support of UNHCR's activities in countries including Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iran since 2013 until our present day with an estimate of \$430 million," said Representative of United Nations Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator to Kuwait Dr Tarek Elsheikh in a press statement on Saturday on the occasion of the World Refugee Day. He voiced the UN's deepest appreciation to the State of Kuwait and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Humanitarian Leader, for their support to refugees.

"Additionally, Kuwait is an effective and key member of UNHCR's 20 million club of donors. The State of Kuwait is a strategic partner to UNHCR and is an international exemplary," he said. The UN official pointed out that Kuwait, being an International Humanitarian Center, has developed strategies and mechanisms to provide aid and support through hosting International pledging conferences to Syria and Iraq situations, in addition to hosting Yemen Peace Talks. He noted that the World Refugee Day this year, comes in the midst of dramatic global changes as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has exacerbated the vulnerability of refugees and internally displaced people, particularly women and persons with disabilities. "The COVID-19 pan-

demia is having a dramatic effect on the jobs, livelihoods and well-being of workers and their families, as well as on businesses - particularly micro, small and medium enterprises - worldwide. Vulnerable groups are particularly affected including: informal workers, young people, women, persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants. Refugees and mi-



Pandemic poses threat to refugees

grant workers, including many domestic workers, tend to be in temporary, informal or unprotected work, often associated with low wages and poor social protection and discrimination," he clarified.

According to the UN, nearly 80 million women, children, and men around the world have been forced from their homes as refugees or internally displaced people. The UN official warned that the global pandemic poses an additional threat to refugees and displaced people, who are among the most vulnerable. The recent UNSG Policy Brief on COVID-19 and People on the Move called on gov-



AMMAN: This May 29, 2020 file photo shows relief workers preparing food parcels donated by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society to Syrian refugees in Amman, Jordan. — KUNA

ernments to ensure that they are included in all response and recovery efforts. "Everyone can make a difference and Every Action Counts. This is at the heart of UNHCR's World Refugee Day campaign this year. The United Nations aims to remind the

world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society, and Every Action Counts in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world," he quoted a statement by the UN refugee agency as saying. — KUNA



KUWAIT: 'Al-Takatuf Al-Kuwaiti' (Kuwaiti solidarity) charity group distributed food aid to people in need in Bnaid Al-Gar and Hawally on Saturday, as part of its activities to help people struggling due to the effects of the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the country. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

International

MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2020



Mount Merapi erupts, spewing ash 6 km high

Virus fears fuel bicycle sales in congested Bangladesh cities

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TULSA, Oklahoma: US President Donald Trump arrives for a campaign rally at the BOK Center on Saturday. — AFP

Latam virus cases pass two million

Trump rally defies virus • Spain reopens to tourists

TULSA: Coronavirus infections in Latin America surged past two million on Saturday, with worst-hit Brazil home to nearly half of the cases as the virus accelerates its spread in the region. Europe, which has endured months of lockdowns to slow the virus but at a crippling economic cost, was set to further ease restrictions with Spain reopening to tourists yesterday and Italy enjoying its first Serie A football match in 103 days.

In the US, which has been taking stuttering steps to reopen even as 20 states have reported a rebound in infections, President Donald Trump Saturday claimed his measures had "saved millions of lives" as he addressed his first rally in months. "Now it's time to open up, get back to work," he told the crowd in Tulsa, Oklahoma, even as six members of his advance team tested positive for COVID-19.

The world's largest economy is taking a beating in a year when Trump seeks re-election. Trump had downplayed the risk that the evening rally might trigger a coronavirus outbreak, ignoring danger warnings by

Tulsa health and municipal officials. After the president had boasted on Twitter that "almost one million people" had requested tickets for the rally, the 20,000-capacity arena was far from full, with many upper deck seats empty.

The United States remains the country hardest-hit by the pandemic with 119,719 deaths out of 2,254,630 official cases, according to a tally Saturday by Johns Hopkins University. With nearly 50,000 deaths and more than one million cases, Brazil is the second worst-affected. In total Latin America and the Caribbean have 2,007,621 confirmed cases, according to an AFP tally based on official tallies. The figures were particularly alarming in Chile, where the death toll nearly doubled to more than 7,000 under a revised tallying method, and passed 20,000 in Mexico.

Spain reopens to tourists

Europe meanwhile chalked up more than 2.5 million cases. Although the spread has slowed, Europe is still

the worst-affected continent. The continent is easing its way out of strict lockdowns, even as the World Health Organization warns against giving in to isolation fatigue. Spain yesterday reopened its borders to European Union countries in a bid to get its tourism industry back up and running after lifting its state of emergency.

British tourists will also be allowed in without having to quarantine, the Spanish foreign minister said. As his country emerges from a 14-week lockdown, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warned that Spain remained vulnerable to the virus, which has claimed more than 28,000 lives there. "We must remain on our guard and strictly follow hygiene and protection measures," he warned hours before the borders opened.

In France, millions more children were preparing to return to school today after three months away. "I cried with joy when I got the confirmation from the teacher that my two children would be going back to school full time," said Noemie from the southern city of Nice.

France is also reopening cinemas from land stadiums for team sports, and in another sign of returning normality, actors have also started kissing again on film shoots.

A vaccine remains months off at best despite several trials, and scientists are still learning more about the virus, its symptoms and the extent to which it may have spread before being identified. "The world is in a new and dangerous phase," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned Friday. "Many people are understandably fed up with being at home... but the virus is still spreading fast." The virus has now killed more than 461,000 people and infected 8.7 million worldwide.

The Palestinian Authority announced Saturday it was temporarily closing the cities of Hebron and Nablus in the occupied West Bank after a sharp rise in infections. Only goods will be allowed in, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayeh told journalists. Authorities have reported a total of 687 cases in the West Bank, including two deaths so far. — AFP

3 killed in Britain stabbing rampage

READING, United Kingdom: Three people were killed and three seriously injured when an assailant went on a stabbing rampage in a park filled with people relaxing in the southern English city of Reading on Saturday, police said. The Thames Valley Police said they had launched a murder investigation and were not treating the incident as terror-related after making one arrest at the scene.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the "appalling incident" and other leading politicians expressed sympathies for those hurt at the Forbury Gardens park in the historic centre of the city of 220,000. "This is not currently being treated as a terrorism incident, however officers are keeping an open mind as to the motivation for the incident and are being supported by colleagues from Counter Terrorism Policing South East," the police said in a statement.

They confirmed arresting a 25-year-old man but made no reference to media reports suggesting he was Libyan. "My thoughts are with all of those affected by the appalling incident in Reading and my thanks to the emergency services on the scene," Johnson tweeted. Home Secretary Priti Patel called it "a senseless attack on people enjoying a Saturday evening with friends".

A Black Lives Matter protest took place at the park earlier but police said there was no indication the two incidents were connected. "In terms of the protest and the people who attended from Black Lives Matter, we're all safe," the Reading BLM event organiser Nieema Hassan said on Facebook. "None of us are affected. We had all left by the time this happened."

Witnesses reported seeing two air ambulances and several police cars rush to the park on Saturday evening. One witness described a lone assailant walking through a park filled with people relaxing on the grass and stabbing them at random. "The park was pretty full. A lot of people sat around drinking with friends," Lawrence Wort told the Press Association. "One lone person walked through, suddenly shouted some unintelligible words and went around a large group of around



READING: A delivery rider talks to a police officer securing a police cordon in central Reading on Saturday following a stabbing incident at Forbury Gardens park. — AFP

10, trying to stab them."

Wort said he saw three people being stabbed "in the neck and under the arms". The assailant then lunged at another group and "got one person in the back of the neck", Wort said. "Then when he realized everyone was starting to run, he ran out the park," said the witness.

Officials said two people were being treated in the emergency department of Reading's Berkshire Hospital. "An horrific, dreadful incident," policing minister Kit Malthouse tweeted. The main opposition Labour party's leader Keir Starmer called the incident "very concerning". Media reports said police conducted a search of the property where the suspect is believed to have lived.

Britain has witnessed two terror-related attacks in the past year. A convicted jihadist who was out on parole after serving a sentence for terror offences was shot dead by police after stabbing five people — two fatally — by London Bridge in the heart of the British capital in November. Police killed another assailant who injured three people in another London stabbing attack in February.

An overwhelming majority of Britain's serious crimes are committed with knives and other stabbing weapons because of the country's very strict gun ownership laws. Johnson's Conservative government promised to toughen up penalties for terror-related crimes after winning a sweeping mandate in a December general election. — AFP



KOLKATA: Indian citizens of Chinese origin holding placards and Indian flags shout slogans in support of the Indian army during an anti-China demonstration in Kolkata's Chinatown on Saturday. — AFP

Indian minister claims China lost 40 soldiers

MUMBAI: China lost at least 40 soldiers in a clash with India at their disputed border this week, a federal government minister has said, as the nuclear-armed countries remained locked in confrontation on the frontline yesterday. China has not said anything about any losses in the hand-to-hand combat that took place in the heavily contested Galwan Valley in the western Himalayas, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed and at least 76 injured. "If 20 were martyred on our (Indian) side, then there would have been at least double the casualties on their (China) side," V K Singh, the minister for roads and transport, told TV News24 in an in-

terview broadcast late on Saturday. Singh, who is a former army chief, did not provide any evidence to support his statement. He said China historically never accepted any war casualties including in the 1962 conflict with India.

China's state controlled Global Times said earlier there had been casualties on the Chinese side but did not elaborate. Singh said the Indian side had handed over Chinese troops who had strayed into Indian territory after the violent standoff. India's defense ministry spokesman Bharat Bhushan Babu refused to comment on Singh's interview.

The nuclear-armed Asian neighbors traded accusations on Saturday that the other had violated their shared de facto border, an area that this week became the site of their deadliest clash in half a century. Troops remain locked in a face-off at several locations along the poorly defined Line of Actual Control, despite talks between local commanders to de-escalate. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has criticized China for escalating border tensions with India. — Reuters

International

Top US prosecutor who probed Trump allies fired

Berman steps down, ending stand-off with Barr

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK: A stand-off over the independence of one of the country's most important prosecutor's offices ended on Saturday when Geoffrey Berman agreed to step down as US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, the office that had been investigating President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani.

Berman's confirmation of his departure came after Attorney General William Barr told him he had been fired by Trump at Barr's request, and that Berman's hand-picked No. 2, Deputy US Attorney Audrey Strauss, would become Acting US Attorney until a permanent replacement is installed. Under Strauss' leadership, Berman said the office could continue its "tradition of integrity and independence."

Berman's office, which is known for prosecuting the most high profile terrorism cases, Wall Street financial crimes and government corruption, has not shied from taking on figures in Trump's orbit. It oversaw the prosecution of Michael Cohen, Trump's former personal lawyer, indicted two Giuliani associates and launched a probe into Giuliani in connection with his efforts to dig up dirt on Trump's political adversaries in Ukraine. Giuliani has not formally been accused of any wrongdoing.

The standoff with Berman follows the latest in a series of moves by Barr that critics say are meant to benefit Trump politically and undermine the independence of the Justice Department. It also comes as Trump has sought to purge officials perceived as not fully supporting him. In recent weeks he has fired a series of agency watchdogs, including one who played a key

role in Trump's impeachment earlier this year.

Berman, a Republican who held a position in Trump's transition team and was once a law partner of Giuliani, has also pursued cases against tycoon sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who was found dead in his Manhattan jail cell last year. The row with Berman began late Friday, when Barr unexpectedly announced that Berman was stepping down and would be replaced by US Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Jay Clayton. Berman, however, issued a statement of his own, saying he had no intention of stepping down until the Senate confirmed his suc-

cessor. Southern District prosecutor, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Barr's initial decision to install Carpenito was a "huge departure" from normal practice.

In the letter, Barr said he was "surprised and quite disappointed" by Berman's statement late on Friday night in which he refused to quit his job, and he accused Berman of choosing "public spectacle over public service." "I have asked the President to remove you as of today, and he has done so," Barr said.

'I don't get involved'

Trump told Fox News Channel he approved Barr's request, and said he did not know Giuliani was being investigated by Berman, although he had read that recently. "If (Barr) wants to do something ... I don't get involved," Trump said in an interview. "But the president has to sign a document, where I guess you give it your OK. And he wants to run his operation, and that's okay with me." Asked if Barr said why he wanted to fire Berman, Trump said: "We spent very little time talking about it, but I have a lot of respect for Attorney General Barr."

Although Berman agreed to step down on Saturday, it did not end the political controversy swirling around his highly unusual firing. It comes after Barr intervened in February to scale back a sentencing recommendation for Trump's longtime friend Roger Stone over the advice of career prosecutors. Then in May, Barr asked a federal judge to dismiss the criminal case against Trump's former national security adviser Michael Flynn, again prompting questions about



Geoffrey Berman

whether he was acting in the president's personal interest.

Jerrold Nadler, the Chairman of the Democrat-controlled House Judiciary Committee, said he has launched an investigation into Berman's termination. US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the firing appeared to have "base and improper motives," while the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Diane Feinstein, urged the panel's chairman, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, to launch an investigation into "political interference in the work of the Justice Department." Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer urged the Justice Department's inspector general to launch an investigation into "blatantly corrupt DOJ interference". — Agencies



Democrats launch investigation

and that his office's investigations would continue.

On Friday, Barr said he had picked Craig Carpenito, the US Attorney for the Southern District of New Jersey, to serve as Acting US Attorney until Clayton's confirmation. But in a letter on Saturday to Berman, Barr back-tracked from that plan, saying Strauss would take over in an acting capacity. One former

Judge allows release of Bolton's book

WASHINGTON: A US judge refused Saturday to block the release of a tell-all book in which President Donald Trump's former national security advisor describes him as corrupt and incompetent. With John Bolton's book already widely shipped to stores for sale next week, Judge Royce Lamberth wrote that it is too late for a restraining order sought by the Trump administration to halt the process.

The DC district court judge said Bolton appeared to have failed to obtain written White House agreement that his memoir contained nothing classified. "While Bolton's unilateral conduct raises grave national security concerns, the government has not established that an injunction is an appropriate remedy," the judge wrote. He said a review of passages that the government contends contain classified material had persuaded him that Bolton "likely jeopardized national security through publication".

Despite failing in the attempt to have the book halted, Trump quickly took to

Twitter to hail a "big court win" against Bolton. "Obviously, with the book already given out and leaked to many people and the media, nothing the highly respected Judge could have done about stopping it...BUT, strong & powerful statements & rulings on MONEY & on BREAKING CLASSIFICATION were made. Bolton broke the law and has been called out and rebuked for so doing, with a really big price to pay."

Bolton's attorney, Charles Cooper, welcomed the judge's ruling but disputed the finding that his client did not fully comply with his vetting obligation. "The case will now proceed to development of the full record on that issue. The full story of these events has yet to be told – but it will be," Cooper said in a statement. The book, entitled "The Room Where It Happened", was widely shipped ahead of its Tuesday release date and many of its more damning allegations against Trump have already been reported in the media.

It is Bolton's portrait of 17 months up close with Trump, until he was fired in September, although Trump characterizes the work as "fiction". Bolton, a lifelong Republican who stands firmly on the right of the party, contends that Trump is not "fit for office". He describes Trump "pleading" with Chinese President Xi Jinping during trade negotiations to boost the US president's chances of reelection in November by buying more



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on April 9, 2018, US President Donald Trump shakes hands with National Security Advisor John Bolton during a meeting with senior military leaders at the White House. — AFP

products from US farm states. Bolton also reports that Trump, a real estate tycoon who never held office before winning the White House, thought Finland was part of Russia.

Bolton, moreover, backs up the allegations at the center of Trump's impeachment last year that he pressured Ukraine to dig up dirt to weaken his expected Democratic presidential rival Joe Biden. Trump also committed other "Ukraine-like transgressions" in his wielding of foreign policy for personal gain, Bolton alleges. In an interview to be broadcast

Sunday, Bolton told ABC News Trump had committed what "did feel like obstruction of justice to me" in his dealings with Turkey. Trump was said to be receptive to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who brought up the criminal charges against one of his country's largest banks over violating US sanctions on Iran. Trump told Erdogan that "he would take care of things", explaining that New York prosecutors handling the case were appointed by former president Barack Obama and could be replaced, Bolton writes in his book. — AFP

Coronavirus drives Malawi tobacco farmers to brink

LILONGWE, Malawi: During his 15 years as a Malawian tobacco farmer, Boniface Namate has had to overcome many difficulties growing the plant that is the country's biggest export earner. Namate had banked on a bumper crop this year and had hoped the proceeds would enable him to buy a new car and even build a new house. However, the coronavirus pandemic has seen the 56-year-old's dreams go up in smoke.

Due to restrictions imposed to control the spread of the virus in Malawi – one of the world's poorest countries, and one of the top 10 tobacco producers – growers were barred from physically attending the auctions where prices are set. That has left farmers feeling cheated by buyers. "We are not operating normally as there is no interaction between the buyer and the grower," said Betty Chinyamunyu of the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi. "Because of this, there are trust issues," she said.

When the auction season opened in April, Namate and other small-scale farmers said their earnings had indeed evaporated. "The prices that came from the auction are not what we expected. We are devastated", said Namate. Burley leaf from Malawi makes up 6.6 percent of the world's tobacco exports. Known locally as "green gold", it is Malawi's top crop in terms of employment.

It also accounts for over 50 percent of foreign exchange earnings and 23 percent of tax revenues. So, when its 50,000 growers suffer, the country has every reason to be worried. Last November, the United States restricted tobacco imports from Malawi over allegations of worker exploitation and child labor. And the coronavirus has turned up the heat on farmers even more. — AFP

Greece extends lockdown of migrant camps

ATHENS: Greece announced on Saturday another extension of the coronavirus lockdown on its teeming migrant camps, hours after some 2,000 people protested in central Athens to mark World Refugee Day and denounce the government's treatment of migrants. The migration ministry said confinement for residents of reception and identification centers across the country would be extended to July 5. It was due to have ended on Monday.

Greece was quick to introduce strict confinement measures on migrant camps on March 21 and imposed a more general lockdown on March 23. While no known coronavirus deaths have been recorded in the camps so far and only a few dozen infections have surfaced, the measures have since been extended a number of times. Rights groups have expressed concern that migrants' rights have been eroded by the restrictions.

Earlier on Saturday, members of anti-racist groups, joined by refugees from migrant camps, marched in central Athens, holding banners proclaiming "No refugee homeless, persecuted, jailed" and chanting slogans against evictions of refugees from temporary ac-

commodation in apartments. Thousands face homelessness as Greek authorities plan to move more than 11,000 people to make room for other asylum seekers currently living in dismal island camps.

Refugees used to be able to keep their accommodation for up to six months after receiving protected status. The new conservative government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has reduced this to just a month. The government insists that it is doing everything necessary "to assure a smooth transition for those who leave their lodgings". The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has voiced concern, stressing that many of the refugees do not have effective access to social benefits and support.

In a message for World Refugee Day, the Ministry for Migration and Asylum said Greece has found itself "at the center of the migration crisis bearing a disproportionate burden". "The country is safeguarding the rights of those who are really persecuted and operates as a shield of solidarity in the eastern Mediterranean," it added. Government officials have repeatedly said Greece must become a less attractive destination for asylum seekers. The continued presence of more than 32,000 asylum seekers on the islands – over five times the intended capacity of shelters there – has caused major friction with local communities who are demanding their immediate removal. An operation in February to build new camps on the islands of Lesbos and Chios had to be abandoned due to violent protests. Rights groups have repeatedly criticized unhygienic and unsafe living conditions in existing camps. — AFP



ATHENS: Migrants and solidarity groups carry a banner as they participate in a rally on Saturday marking World Refugee Day, as they demand rights and housing for refugees and migrants in Greece. — AFP

Lenin statue unveiled in west Germany

GELSENKIRCHEN, Germany: A divisive new monument to Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin was unveiled in Germany on Saturday, in the middle of a global row over the controversial background of historical figures immortalized as statues. More than 30 years after the post-World War II communist experiment on German soil ended, the tiny Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (MLPD) installed Lenin's likeness in the western city of Gelsenkirchen.

A few hundred gathered for the ceremony, marked by fluttering red flags and the smell of grilled sausages. "Criticism of capitalism and the search for social alternatives is everywhere. We're criticizing that there's no public discussion of socialism as an alternative," MLPD chair Gabi Fechtner said. The MLPD says it is the first such statue ever to be erected on the territory of the former West Germany, decades after the eastern German Democratic Republic communist state collapsed along with its deadly Berlin Wall and Stasi secret police. "The time for monuments to racists, anti-Semites, fascists, anti-communists and other relics of the past has clearly passed," said Fechtner in an earlier statement. "Lenin was an ahead-of-his-time thinker of world-historical importance, an early fighter for freedom and democracy."

Not everyone in Gelsenkirchen, a center of the former industrial and mining powerhouse Ruhr region, has welcomed the over two-meter likeness, produced in former Czechoslovakia in 1957. "Lenin stands for violence, repression, terrorism and horrific human suffering," representatives from mainstream parties on the district council in Gelsenkirchen-West said in a resolution passed in early March.

The council "will not tolerate such an anti-democratic symbol in its district," it added, urging "all legal means" be used to block its installation. But later in March the upper state court in Muenster rejected an attempt to stop the statue that it argued would impact a historic building on the same site. The MLPD trumpeted interest from as far away as Russia, but urged guests to maintain social distancing and wear nose and mouth coverings against coronavirus infection.

Paint-splattered Bismarck

The worldwide Black Lives Matter movement following the death of African-American George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis on May 25 has found some echo in Germany. Unknown people splattered red paint on a statue of Otto von Bismarck in Hamburg's Altona district this week. The "Iron Chancellor" behind Germany's unification in 1871 is also known for hosting the Berlin Conference of 1884, which became a byword for the carving up of Africa between European colonial powers.

Berlin itself has been a hub of activism against commemorations in public space of colonialists, with much ire directed at street names honoring 19th-Century figures in the so-called "African Quarter". But political decisions to rename roads named after figures like Adolf Luederitz, a merchant who played a key role in colonizing Namibia, or Carl Peters, a colonialist behind German expansion in eastern Africa, have met with resistance from locals. In decades of experience addressing the country's Nazi and communist pasts, "things have always been done properly, it all seems very German" with official applications to local authorities and orderly dismantling of monuments, said Urte Evert, head of Berlin's Spandau Citadel museum where many old statues are on display. — AFP

International

North Korea vows to send anti-South leaflets amid rising tensions

Two Koreas still technically at war as 1950-53 conflict ended without a treaty

SEOUL: North Korea pledged to push ahead with its campaign to send propaganda leaflets into South Korea, saying it is not bound to any inter-Korean agreements, state media said yesterday.

Tension has been rising after North Korea blew up a joint liaison office and threatened military action over defectors in the South sending anti-North leaflets across the border. As state media reported angry North Koreans gearing up for their own "large-scale" leaflet campaign, Seoul's Unification Ministry handling cross-border affairs on Saturday urged the plan to be scrapped citing a violation of peace agreements.

The United Front Department of the North's ruling party, in charge of inter-Korean affairs, rejected the ministry's calls as an "absurd nonsense."

"Given their own wrongdoings, how dare they utter such words as regret and violation?" the department's spokesman said in a statement carried by state media KCNA. "When they are put in our shoes, the South Korean authorities will be able to understand even a bit how disgustedly we looked at them and how offending it was for us."

The two Koreas, which are still technically at war as their 1950-53 conflict ended without a peace treaty, have waged leaflet campaigns for decades but agreed to cease "all hostile acts" in a 2018 peace accord.

Several defector-led groups have regularly sent back flyers, together with food, \$1 bills, mini radios and USB sticks containing South Korean dramas and news, usually by balloon over the border or in bottles in rivers.

One of the groups dropped a plan to float hundreds of plastic bottles stuffed with rice, medicine and face masks into the sea near the border yesterday.

Pyongyang has also used balloons and drones to fly its anti-South leaflets, which in South Korea in the past have been rewarded with stationery if reported to police.

Heightened tensions

North Korea has upped the pressure over the campaigns with a dramatic demolition of a building on its side of the border that symbolized inter-Korean rapprochement, threats to bolster its military presence at the border, and now leaflets of its own. "Enraged" North Koreans are now "pushing forward with the



Inter-Korean ties remain in deep freeze

preparations for launching a large-scale distribution" of "leaflets of punishment" into the South, the official KCNA news agency said.

"Every action should be met with proper reaction and only when one experiences it oneself, one can feel how offending it is." Photos carried by the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed North Koreans preparing the leaflets, and cigarette butts and ashes scattered over flyers featuring the face of South Ko-



This undated picture released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on Saturday shows North Koreans preparing anti-Seoul leaflets at an undisclosed location in North Korea. — AFP

rean President Moon Jae-in.

Moon, who has long favored engagement with the North, was targeted earlier this week by Kim Yo Jong—the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un—in an extensive diatribe, calling him "disgusting" and "impudent". Seoul retorted with unusually stern criticism to Pyongyang's latest denunciations of Moon and its blowing up of the liaison office this week,

saying it will "no longer tolerate" the North's "unreasonable acts and words".

Inter-Korean relations have been in deep freeze for months, following the collapse of a summit in Hanoi between Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump. That meeting foundered on what the nuclear-armed North would be willing to give up in exchange for a loosening of sanctions. — Agencies

Indonesia's Mt Merapi erupts

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Mount Merapi, one of the world's most active volcanoes, erupted twice yesterday sending clouds of grey ash 6,000 meters into the sky, the country's geological agency said.

The two eruptions lasted around seven minutes, according to the agency, and prompted local authorities to order residents to stay outside a three-kilometer no-go zone around the rumbling crater near Indonesia's cultural capital Yogyakarta.

The agency did not raise the volcano's alert status after the eruptions, but it advised commercial planes to be cautious in the area. Local media reported that people in neighboring areas including Sleman and Klanten heard strong rumbling sounds this morning.

Mount Merapi's last major eruption in 2010 killed more than 300 people and forced the evacuation of some 280,000 residents from surrounding areas. That was its most powerful eruption since 1930, which killed around 1,300 people,

while another explosion in 1994 took about 60 lives.

Indonesia has more than 17,000 islands and islets—and nearly 130 active volcanoes. The Southeast Asian archipelago nation sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", a vast zone of geological instability where the collision of tectonic plates causes frequent quakes and major volcanic activity. 10 missing after fishing boat capsizes off Indonesia

Fishermen missing
Meanwhile, ten people were missing after a boat carrying 16 fishermen capsized in Indonesian waters near the Anak Krakatau volcano, officials said Saturday. Indonesia's search and rescue agency said the motorboat sank on Thursday after being hit by strong waves in the Sunda Strait.

"Six were rescued alive on Friday and we continue searching for the 10 people still missing today," Indonesia's search and rescue agency spokesman Muhammad Yusuf Latif told AFP on Saturday. The group had attempted to swim to nearby Rakata island, he added.

"Six returned to the capsized boat and they were rescued. But the other 10 continued swimming and their whereabouts remain unknown," Latif said. Rescue teams expanded their search for survivors on Saturday. — AFP



YOGYAKARTA: This handout photo taken and released yesterday by Indonesia's Research and Technology Development for Geological Hazard Mitigation (BPPTKG) shows the Merapi Mount volcano spewing thick smoke into the air as seen from Yogyakarta. — AFP

Virus fears fuel bicycle sales in Bangladesh cities

DHAKA: Dhaka commuters hitting the streets again after a months-long lockdown are opting for bikes to maintain social distancing—and discovering that pedal power is a way to beat the city's notorious traffic.

Bangladesh lifted restrictions on movement at the end of May to revive its stuttering economy, including on the fume-spewing three-wheelers and crowded buses that serve as public transport in the capital. But the city's snarling gridlock—in which cars often crawl along at a snail's pace—has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

That's partly because many are staying home over lingering fears they will catch the virus. But for increasing numbers thronging Dhaka's Bangshal Bike Bazar—home to some 150 speciality stores—pedalling to work or school is becoming the new normal.

"Bike sales have grown to a historic high," shop owner Mohammad Ibrahim, who now sells nine bicycles a day instead of three, told AFP. "Most people now avoid buses, taxis or auto rickshaws... (and) buying bicycles as alternatives."

Salesman Abdus Sobhan said mid-range bicycles selling at 10,000-25,000 taka (\$US120-\$300) had sold out. "I think a bicycle would be much safer for my commute," college student and part-time call-center worker Toufikul Islam told AFP as he bought a new two-wheeler. Rezoan Mahub, a senior executive at a paper-importing firm, said the lockdown made him realize the benefits of owning a pushbike.

"Bicycles are more convenient than cars or motorbikes," he said. Other major cities are experiencing similar spikes in sales, the Bangladesh Bicycle Merchant Assembling and Importers Association told AFP. "This year... we expect bike sales will double," association spokesman Mohammad Rasel said of the \$500 million market, where around 1.5 million pushbikes are sold each year. Mahub said he was optimistic that the turn to two-wheelers in Dhaka would see residents breathing cleaner air in the city. — AFP

Internet blackout in Rakhine enters 2nd year

YANGON: The internet shutdown in Myanmar's conflict-ridden northwest, described by rights groups as the world's longest, entered a second year yesterday with locals and campaigners appealing for an end to the blackout as coronavirus fears grip the region.

The Myanmar military has been embroiled in a bloody civil war since January 2019 against the Arakan Army (AA), an insurgent group fighting for more autonomy for ethnic Rakhine Buddhists. The government shut down mobile data in several townships across Rakhine state and neighboring Chin state on June 21 last year, causing panic among residents desperate for information about the unrest.

Human Rights Watch had called on Friday for an immediate end to "the world's longest government-enforced internet shutdown".

"It's critical for civilians to get the information needed to stay safe" during a global pandemic, said HRW's Linda Lakshmir. The country has so far recorded 287 coronavirus cases including six deaths, but experts fear the low numbers are due to a lack of testing. A government official said earlier this month the internet shutdown would continue until at least August 1 in eight townships.

Telecom companies said the government ordered the blackout to prevent "illegal activities". The conflict has displaced

Beijing reports 22 new virus cases as millions tested

BEIJING: China's capital reported 22 new cases of the coronavirus yesterday after a mass testing effort that has collected more than two million samples in a race to contain a new outbreak.

The fresh cluster in Beijing has raised fears of a resurgence of the virus in China, which had largely brought the disease under control over recent months.

Dozens of communities have been sealed off in the city to contain the spread, with residents told to avoid non-essential travel and schools closed. The new infections reported yesterday include a nurse—the first health worker to test positive since the re-emergence of the illness just over a week ago.

More than 220 people have tested positive in the new cluster. State news agency Xinhua said local authorities had set up more than 2,000 sites across the city that had obtained 2.3 million samples.

The latest outbreak first emerged at a wholesale food market, prompting fears over the safety of the city's food supply. The virus was detected on chopping boards used to handle imported salmon. Beijing officials on Friday advised citizens to dispose of frozen seafood and bean products bought from the site.

The Xinfadi market supplies more than 70 percent of Beijing's fresh produce and



In this file photo, Mro ethnic people displaced from the surge of fighting between ethnic armed rebel group of the Arakan Army and government troops take refuge at a compound of a Buddhist pagoda are seen during a government-organized visit for journalists in Buthidaung township in the restive Rakhine state. — AFP

tens of thousands of civilians and seen hundreds injured and scores killed, with both the military and the AA trading allegations of abuses.

Few in Myanmar have personal computers, with the majority relying on mobile phones to access the internet for communications and information—making those under the blackout especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Rights groups have also condemned the blocking of several local media websites and are urging telecom firms to push back against the government's orders.

Rakhine state is also home to the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group that faced a brutal crackdown by the military in 2017.

Some 750,000 fled to neighboring Bangladesh in violence that has led to charges of genocide against Myanmar at the UN's top court.

The 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Rakhine live in what Amnesty International has branded "apartheid conditions", with little freedom of movement. "We want to know more information regarding COVID-19, what's happening to the displaced people in Sittwe (Rakhine's capital) and what's happening in Bangladesh," Abdullah, a Rohingya resident from Mrauk U township, told AFP by phone. They now struggle to contact relatives, send them money or even check the weather forecast, he added. — AFP



BEIJING: People wearing face masks queue to take a swab test during mass testing for the COVID-19 coronavirus in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

has been closed. On Friday officials said they had launched a nationwide campaign to inspect food imports. Employees of restaurants, supermarkets, markets and food delivery couriers are being tested for the virus, Xinhua said.

The chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention told reporters Friday that the new outbreak had been "brought under control" but Beijing would still see new cases.

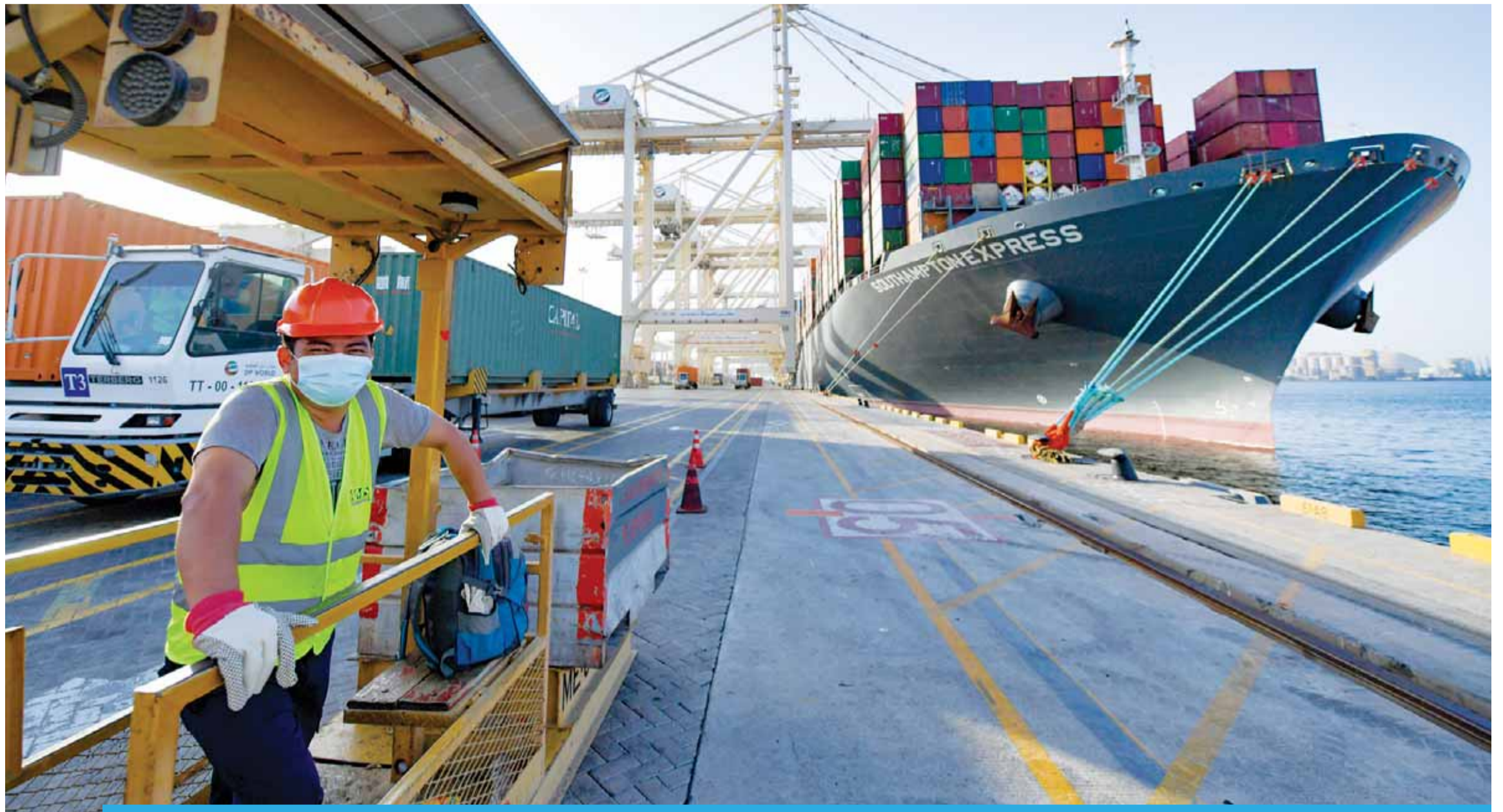
"People who have not been exposed to the Xinfadi market between May 30 and June 12 are at a very low risk of being infected and do not have to make an appointment for nucleic acid testing," Liu Xiaofeng,

deputy director of the Beijing Center for Disease Control, said Saturday. The outbreak has also spread to Tongzhou, the administrative hub in Beijing where key government offices are located, health officials said. One case was reported in the area yesterday.

China recorded 26 new cases nationwide yesterday including three domestic infections in Hebei province, which neighbours Beijing. One of the patients worked at the Xinfadi market. Health officials also confirmed a new imported case. Infections brought in by Chinese nationals returning home had accounted for the majority of recent cases until the Beijing cluster. — AFP

Business

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10 Black-owned eateries in US buoyed by grassroots support**10** Pakistan ramps up health spending in budget**11** Lockdown will impact sales, prices of Kuwait real estate sector in 2020

DUBAI: An employee wearing a face mask is pictured at the port of Jebel Ali, operated by the Dubai-based giant ports operator DP World, in the southern outskirts of the Gulf emirate of Dub. —AFP

Dubai ports giant 'prepares for the worst'

Coronavirus inflicts heaviest blow on global trade since World War II

DUBAI: The giant Dubai-based ports operator DP World is "preparing for the worst" in the months ahead, as coronavirus inflicts the heaviest blow on global trade since World War II.

However, the firm which runs port and logistics operations in 54 countries is still hungry for revenue-generating acquisitions, its chairman Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem told AFP in an interview. Already one of the most profitable government-linked entities in Dubai, DP World has spent billions of dollars on assets ranging from P&O Ferries in Britain to terminals in Chile.

But the coronavirus crisis has stifled world trade, 80 percent of which is transported by sea, leaving major supply chains paralyzed and scaling down imports and exports, including from powerhouse China. Bin Sulayem said the pandemic has taken a "big toll" on trade, eclipsing the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis and drawing similarities with the post-World War II devastation.

In those dark times, the global economy collapsed with the destruction of industries and transport infrastructure and as people fled cities, he said. "Today, factories are intact, but nobody can work. The streets are clear and safe, and nobody goes out. Shops are full with all kinds of cargo but nobody buys."

Predictions of a U or V-shaped recovery, with a slump followed by a pick-up, were too optimistic, Bin Sulayem said. Instead, he warned that the world faced an L-shaped scenario—a drop followed by a slump—unless stimulus measures were adopted.

'We will go for it'

The World Trade Organization said in April that glob-

al trade is expected to fall by between 13 and 32 percent in 2020, as the pandemic ravages normal economic activity. Bin Sulayem said trade handled by DP World through its 82 ports, terminals and logistics centers worldwide dropped by only 4.0 percent in the first quarter. "But this could be misleading," he said, noting that the traffic reflected orders placed before the crisis.

"From now on until the next four months, that's the key issue... what's going to happen—we need to watch but we are preparing for the worst," he said.



DP World still hungry for acquisitions

Despite the gloomy outlook, the chairman and CEO said DP World has not sought financial help from Dubai's government and that it would raise debt from the market to fund expansion if needed. The firm and its subsidiaries are a major source of cash for the emirate's economy, one of the most diversified in the oil-rich Gulf.

In recent years, DP World has made a series of acquisitions as part of its strategy to become the world's leading end-to-end logistics provider, with a network includ-

ing economic zones, industrial parks and inland transportation. President Donald Trump withdrew the US from a multilateral deal aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions that have battered the economy. A drop in oil prices and a slump in the global economy have deepened the economic crisis in the country, one of worst-hit by the coronavirus pandemic in the Middle East.

Central Bank chief Abdolnaser Hemmati said the psychological impact of the IAEA resolution on the rial was exaggerated and that Iran's economy could cope with the added pressure. "The circumstances created by corona, the temporary pressure on the foreign exchange market ...and the psychological atmosphere caused by the resolution of the IAEA Board of Governors should not give the wrong signal," Hemmati said in an Instagram posting.

"Despite the limited oil revenues, the country's foreign exchange balance is good and the central bank will continue to provide the needed currency... despite continued US pressure," he added.

ing economic zones, industrial parks and inland transportation.

"Even during this crisis, if I find something that is bankable and we believe it is an investment that will enhance our revenue and make profit," the company will act, Bin Sulayem said. "We look at investments that are ready to generate revenue... We are a company that has become a source of revenue for the government," he said. "At the end of the day, we have to make money immediately."

Crucial to Dubai

DP World has not announced any layoffs over the crisis and Bin Sulayem ruled out cutting salaries—unlike other major companies in the Gulf, including Emirates airline, which has announced job cuts and months of salary reductions. In February, DP World said it would return to full state ownership and delist from the Nasdaq Dubai stock exchange, saying that market demands for short-term return were not compatible with its longer-term strategy.

The company, which operates a global network of 123 business units run by a 56,500-strong workforce, posted a 4.6 percent rise in net profit last year to \$1.33 billion. DP World in 2019 handled 71.2 million TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units), putting it among the top five operators in the world. Its home port of Jebel Ali handled 14.1 million TEU, a 5.6 percent decline, but still leaving it among the top 10 globally. Bin Sulayem said none of the 8,000 companies based at the Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA), a subsidiary which contributed a whopping 23 percent of Dubai's gross domestic product last year, had left because of the crisis. —AFP



The rial lost about 70 percent of its value over several months to fall to 190,000 in September 2018 amid heavy demand for US dollars among Iranians who feared Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal and sanctions could shrink vital oil exports and severely impact the economy. —Reuters

Iran's rial drops to record low

DUBAI: The Iranian rial fell to its lowest ever rate against the US dollar on the unofficial market on Saturday, a day after Tehran's rebuke by the UN nuclear watchdog increased the pressure from US sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak.

The dollar was offered for as much as 193,300 rials, up from 188,200 rials on Friday, according to foreign exchange site Bonbast.com, which tracks the unofficial market. The economic daily Donya-e-Eqtessad gave the dollar rate as 190,800.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors called on Iran on Friday to stop denying it access to two suspected former nuclear sites, raising diplomatic pressure on Tehran.

UK to ease social Distance rule to help businesses

LONDON: British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak signalled that the government is poised to relax its two-meter social distancing rule for England which businesses have said in its current form would slow their recovery from the coronavirus lockdown.

A review of the two-meter rule would be concluded next week, Sunak told BBC television on Saturday, adding: "Obviously that is something that will make an enormous difference, I think, to many businesses who are keen to see a change." "Obviously, we need to go through that review but I am very understanding of the calls for action on that."

Many employers, especially in the hospitality and leisure sectors, have said the rule that people must remain two meters apart will stop them from getting back up to speed as the coronavirus lockdown is lifted. Sunak said he understood how the rule was affecting the ability of pubs, restaurants and other hospitality firms to reopen.

"I can't pre-empt the findings of that review but suffice to say we have made really good progress over the past few months in tackling this virus and we all want to see our pubs and our restaurants spring back to life," he said. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who announced the review a week ago, has said he will do everything he can to get the country back to normal as soon as possible without risking lives.

The review applies to England as Britain's devolved nations - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - have their own powers over health rules. Johnson has come under heavy criticism for his handling of the pandemic. Britain has the third highest number of coronavirus deaths after the United States and Brazil.

Johnson, who says the government has followed scientific advice in its approach, has to balance the need to revive the economy after its 20 percent collapse in April without allowing a resurgence in cases. Britain's retail sector has already been allowed to re-open. —Reuters

Business

Black-owned eateries in US buoyed by grassroots support

Black business owners among the worst hit during pandemic

WASHINGTON, DC: Outside the Southwest Soda Pop Shop in the US capital, a long line of customers waits, both to buy ice cream and to show solidarity with restaurants owned by African Americans, a community particularly hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We went from 30 customers to 300 customers on a weekday. It's crazy," said Andrea Jones, the daughter of the ice cream parlor's owner.

"Every day, the line gets longer," the 21-year-old said. "They come out rain or shine, they bring their umbrella. They support us no matter what. It's beautiful to see." The shop, which sits on the banks of the Potomac River, had to close because of the virus, causing huge financial strain until Jones called for support on Twitter the day before a huge anti-racism protest in the US capital. Her tweet was shared almost 30,000 times.

In recent weeks, as the nation has focused on race issues in the wake of the killing of unarmed black man George Floyd in police custody, there has been an explosion of solidarity and support from activists, as well as social media and commercial campaigns, to boost African-American restaurant owners.

Uber Eats, the food delivery service run by the rideshare giant, launched a filter to promote black-owned restaurants on June 4 in several cities in the United States and Canada, and eliminated delivery fees for those eateries.

'Almost devastating'

Numerous studies have shown that black business owners, and in particular those in the food industry, have been among the worst hit during

the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic chaos.

"Oh man, it was almost devastating," said Oji Abbott, the owner of Oohh's and Aahh's soul food restaurant who is also known as Chef O. "We lost probably every revenue stream of money that you could lose," the 45-year-old said.

Close to Howard University, one of the most prestigious historically black colleges in the country, the eatery saw the flow of tourists and students dry up overnight. Just down the street, Ben's Chili Bowl, which famously counted Martin Luther King Jr as one of its customers in the days of civil rights marches in Washington, saw its business drop by 80 percent during the lockdown.

"Black-owned businesses tend to be much smaller, they have thinner profit margins," said Sifan Liu, a research analyst with the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. "And they also have greater credit constraints and therefore, they are very vulnerable in any recession,

and particularly this one," she said. Between February and April 2020, 41 percent of small businesses with African-American owners closed due to the coronavirus, according to a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research published in June.

During the same period, only 17 percent of small businesses with white owners went under.

Hard to get capital

As with many black-owned businesses, the proprietors of Ben's Chili Bowl and Oohh's and Aahh's were excluded from the first wave of the Trump administration's loans to help keep small



WASHINGTON, DC: Oji Abbott 'Chef O' sits in front of his restaurant Oohh's and Aahh's, one of the many on U Street in Washington, DC. —AFP

They support us no matter what

businesses afloat—a vital lifeline for many.

"In the first round of the PPP (Paycheck Protection Program), the application process relied on mainstream financial institutions to deliver loans, which favored existing customers at large banks," said Liu. "And because black business owners are likely to be unbanked or underbanked, they just don't have those existing relationships and they are less likely to get those loans," she said. Abbott opened his eatery in 2003 with \$30,000 of his own savings. He has never relied on a bank to help grow his business. "In general, access to capital is hard for black business owners," said Liu.

In 2018, big banks approved 29 percent of credit applications from African-American entrepreneurs, while approving funds for 60 percent of white business owner applicants, Brookings said in a mid-April study on COVID-19 and small businesses.

"There needs to be a more targeted effort to attack racial disparities," said Liu. While Abbott said he wants to see structural changes, he remains upbeat and has seen his business pick up since a loosening of stay-at-home restrictions.

"I'd like to support other black-owned businesses, the same way they come and support me," he said.—AFP

Women bear the brunt of virus fallout in workplace

LONDON: The reverberating economic shock of the coronavirus crisis has delivered a massive setback for women because so many work in the badly exposed services sector, experts say.

The nature of the outbreak means women are more likely than men to lose or quit their jobs in vulnerable low-paying workplaces like bars, conference venues, hairdressing salons, hotels, pubs and restaurants, which faced extensive shutdowns. School closures during lockdown have exacerbated the situation because more women than men tend to care for and teach their children, even while working from home.

The services sector, covering areas like hospitality and leisure, has been ravaged by lockdowns imposed by governments across the world trying to halt the spread of the disease.

Loss of income

"In the UK and the US, women more likely to lose their jobs because they are more likely to work in services," said Cambridge University economics lecturer Christopher Rauh. "When you lose your job you are not just losing income now—but also later on," he told AFP.

As lockdowns ease and infection rates and deaths fall, the services sector is often the last to reopen because it tends to rely on large numbers of people in close contact. In Britain, stay-at-home measures began to be relaxed earlier this month but pubs, bars and restaurants are expected to reopen only from July 4.

The phased reopening in England started with outdoor markets and car showrooms, and some younger children also returned to school. However, not all primary school children will return before the lengthy summer break that starts in mid-July and runs until the start of September.

Within family units, mothers have been 1.5 times more likely than fathers to lose or quit their jobs since the crisis began, according to think-tank the Institute of Fiscal Studies. Women are also more likely than men to have been furloughed, or temporarily paid by the UK government's jobs retention scheme, it added. Mothers traditionally assume a larger share of unpaid housework on top of their paid work.

Afraid to ask

Sarah, who works in London's film industry, stays up every day until 1:00 am to meet deadlines, long after her son and daughter have gone to bed. "I did not dare ask my bosses for a special work arrangement—I did not want them to think I can't manage," she said.

Single parents face even greater demands with one fewer pair of hands. "At the start of lockdown it was atrocious," said a single mum working in the pharmaceutical sector in Paris who declined to give her name. —AFP

Ooredoo launches Nojoom Deals

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, launched its new Nojoom Deals, becoming the first telecom operator in Kuwait to reward its loyalty members with instant deals and unique offers from top brands in the market. The Nojoom Deals are a new redemption method in Ooredoo's award winning Nojoom Rewards Program, which allows Kuwait's Nojoom members to redeem their points by unlocking specific deals or offers, such as buy one get one free, unique gifts, cash vouchers, special discounts and service upgrades.

Ooredoo Kuwait partnered with Related Inc., the marketing agency specialized in the development and management of loyalty programs and rewards marketplaces, to drive digital transformation across the Nojoom

program. The newly introduced platform "Nojoom Deals" offers special discounts and relevant deals from attractive brands across various industries in the market, allowing its members to redeem their Nojoom points from as low as half a Kuwaiti Dinar worth of points.

Ooredoo is committed to providing customers with a comprehensive experience that enriches their lives and meets their expectations, this is portrayed through the Nojoom Rewards Program which has been tailor made to offer members free upgrades, vouchers and discounts from a large variety of partners to meet their lifestyle needs. In addition, customers can earn more Nojoom points from our most recent partners which include Kuwait Finance House, Booking.com, Johnny Rockets, Arby's, Floward, Joyalukkas, Cozmo, Paintball Kuwait, Mashawi, Chocolateness and many more to come in 2020.

The Nojoom Rewards Program has many benefits which include transferring Nojoom points to friends and family, donating Nojoom points for charitable causes, selecting specific Ooredoo

Pakistan ramps up health spending in budget

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's ruling party vowed to double healthcare spending as it unveiled a new budget which dramatically slashed other expenditure with the coronavirus pandemic wreaking havoc on the economy.

To a chorus of boos from the opposition, the government announced plans to cut the overall budget by 11 percent compared with last year, as revenues dried up and deficits soared in the impoverished nation. "We have prepared this budget keeping the coronavirus pandemic in mind," said Hammad Azhar, the minister of planning and industries, during a speech to the lower house of parliament.

Pakistan's economy was already on life support before officials began shuttering large segments of the economy in March as an array of lockdown measures were rolled out in effort to fight the

spread of the coronavirus. The country has since called for debt forgiveness from international donors and the IMF as tax revenues cratered, inflation soared, the currency was devalued, and fiscal deficits widened.

"It is difficult to say anything with certainty about the coronavirus's impact ... but there is no doubt that our GDP—which we thought could grow around 3 percent—will now go down by around 0.4 percent," Azhar told parliamentarians.

Pakistan has struggled for decades to collect sufficient taxes, piling pressure on successive governments over the decades to provide ample funding for the country's ailing healthcare and education sectors. Estimates suggest that only around one percent of the 200 million population filed a return in 2018.

The unveiling of the budget came just days after the World Health Organization called on Pakistan to implement "intermittent" lockdowns to counter a surge in coronavirus infections that has come as the country loosened restrictions in recent weeks. Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly



Services and top-ups, exchanging Points to Miles with leading Airline Companies such as Kuwait Airways and Qatar Airways as well as redemption for partners' cash voucher which are readily accessible through www.ooredoo.com.kw or the MyOoredoo App.

Established in 2012, the Nojoom

Rewards Program has been continuously revamped to match the Kuwaiti lifestyle, which is modern and youthful and meets local and international trends. Nojoom has been awarded the best loyalty program in the Middle East and Africa for three consecutive years in 2012, 2013, and 2014.



PESHAWAR: Government employees shout slogans as they march during a protest against government's fiscal budget for 2020-21, in Peshawar demanding an increase in salary. —AFP

lambasted the lockdown measures, saying the moves are disproportionately hitting the poor who are unable to absorb the economic damage.

Hospitals across Pakistan, however, say they are at or near capacity, and some are turning COVID-19 patients away. —AFP

Fed officials signal rising caution on US recovery

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON: Two US Federal Reserve officials sounded increasing pessimism on the swiftness of any economic recovery from the novel coronavirus epi-

dem and warned the unemployment rate could rise again if the disease is not brought under control. The central bank already made clear it expects a full economic healing from the impact of the virus to take years as it kept interest rate near zero at its policy meeting last week.

But nascent signs of recovery in US economic data, with better-than-expected job gains and retail sales for the month of May, had fueled some hopes that the United States could bounce back more quickly. Fed officials pushed back on that view on Friday and cautioned against reopening the economy too hastily after the end

of state lockdowns aimed at containing the virus, which has killed more than 118,000 Americans.

California, North Carolina and a string of US cities mandated or urged mandatory use of masks on Thursday to get a grip on spiraling coronavirus cases as at least six states set daily records. "This lack of containment could ultimately lead to a need for more prolonged shut-downs, which result in reduced consumption and investment, and higher unemployment," Boston Fed President Eric Rosengren said in a virtual event organized by the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. —Reuters

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Lockdown will impact sales, prices of Kuwait real estate sector in 2Q20

Sales totaled a solid KD 280 million in Feb 2020, down by 1.2% y/y

Chart 1: Real estate sales (KD million per quarter)



Chart 2: Investment sector sales (KD million per quarter)

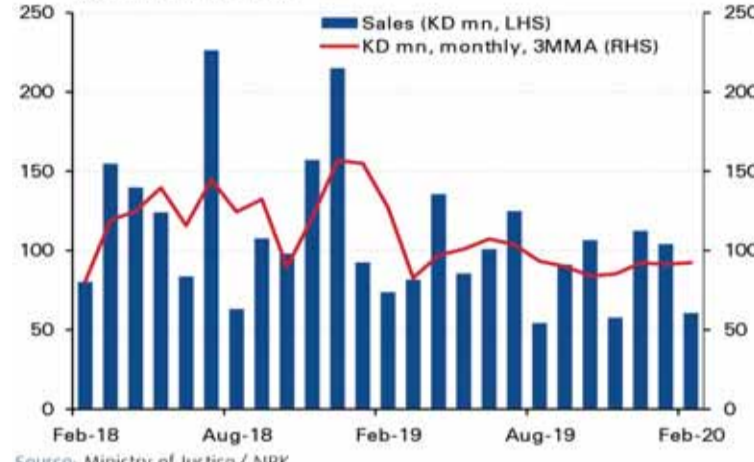
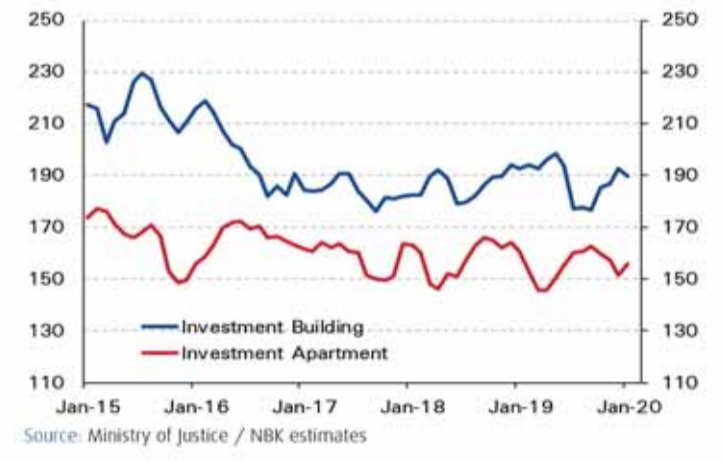


Chart 3: Investment sector price indices (index, 3-month moving average, 2010=100)



KUWAIT: Real estate sales totaled a solid KD 280 million in February 2020, down by 1.2 percent y/y and 7 percent m/m. (Chart 1.) This follows sales of KD302 million in January, marking a strong start to the year. The monthly decline in total sales was driven by a notable drop in residential and investment sales which more than offset a strong rise in commercial sales. With respect to prices, our residential real estate price index rose 9 percent y/y as of January, while investment prices remained soft, on relatively weak demand and high apartment vacancy rates.

Looking back at 4Q19, sales were moderate at KD 773 million, although down 6 percent q/q and 24 percent y/y, wrapping up a relatively strong year overall for real estate. Sales in 2019 exceeded KD 3 billion, maintaining the recovery seen in 2018 which saw a similar level of activity. Sales were driven by solid volumes in the residential sector (+8 percent) encouraged by strong confidence, improving market conditions, and lower prices at the onset of 2019.

No data is yet available post February due to the total lockdown. However, we expect the real estate market, especially the commercial and investment sectors and to a lesser extent the residential sector to be impacted in 2Q20 by the coronavirus and the related precautionary measures, namely the lockdown and business restrictions which have led to weaker business conditions and job losses especially among the expatriate population. Real estate shares in Bursa Kuwait have indeed shown signs of distress, with the real estate index down a steep 19 percent (as of June 14) since late February, though recovering from a low of nearly 30 percent in April in line with a general equity market pick-up helped by the easing of lockdown restrictions and rising oil

prices. Longer-term market pressures could also arise from newly proposed policies to correct the demographic imbalance by reducing eventually the expat population share to 30 percent from the current 70 percent. Returns could also be affected by a recently-proposed law to waive rents for six months and reduce rents by 60 percent in the six months thereafter in times of crisis.

Investment sector may suffer

Investment sector sales fell 42 percent m/m and 18 percent y/y to KD 62 million in February. Looking back at 4Q19, sales were roughly in line with the 2019 quarterly average, at KD 277 million. The monthly drop was driven by a decline in prices, number of transactions and average transaction size.

Meanwhile prices remained relatively soft in this sector, which has been burdened by weak fundamentals since early 2017, partly reflecting softer demand from the expatriate segment but also continued oversupply. Building and apartment prices as of January were down 3 percent and 5 percent y/y respectively.

Prices and sales in the investment sector will likely be negatively impacted by the coronavirus, especially given that the bulk of rental demand for such properties typically stems from the expat labor force, which has certainly been affected by the lockdown and business closures. Further, with oil prices and economic growth expected to recover but remain moderate next year, slow progress on policy reforms, and investors increasingly turning to the residential sector for opportunities it may take some time for demand and prices to recover to pre-2017 levels. Additionally, according to the consumer price

index, residential rents (mostly apartments) remain in deflationary territory (-0.3 percent y/y) though have been stable over the past ten months, but are expected to resume a downtrend on reportedly higher vacancies, with recent reports of rent cuts and/or no rent for 1-2 months as landlords attempt to attract new tenants.

Residential sector to show greater resilience

Residential sales eased to KD 116 million in February from KD130 million in January (-11 percent m/m, -5.6 percent y/y). The lower sales came on the back of a notable drop in the average size of transactions, which fell by 14 percent m/m.

Meanwhile prices maintained the positive trajectory observed through 2019, with home and land prices up 8 percent and 13 percent y/y respectively in January, supported by strong demand.

While other sectors will likely be affected by coronavirus restrictions and lockdowns, the residential sector has typically been more resilient to such shocks, as the demand base stems from the local population with mostly stable jobs, and supply is somewhat limited, especially in prime areas.

Impact on commercial sector

Commercial sector sales rose 53 percent m/m (3.6 percent y/y) to KD 104 million in February, driven by a doubling of the number of transactions, which more than offset an 24 percent drop in average transaction size, indicating that smaller/ more subprime properties were transacted. Similarly on a yearly basis, the higher transactions coupled with a drop in average transaction size points to smaller size/less premium property deals having taken

place. The commercial sector will almost certainly be affected by the coronavirus lockdown and its adverse effect on business sales and revenues. There have indeed been various reports of businesses struggling to pay rent for commercial space, leading to rent reductions and deferred payment for various commercial tenants, but mostly for severely impacted retail tenants with high rents in malls.

Market outlook

Our previous view was for the market to be somewhat steady in 2020 on a relatively softer overall economic climate, but risks are now clearly to the downside. This is in light of a prolonged coronavirus situation and a severe slump in oil prices, which will impact economic growth, sentiment and financial markets. It is too early to say how large the economic and property market fallout from both shocks will be, but it is probable that the prices of property – like other key asset classes – will be affected. Virus concerns have already weighed down on immigration, with a weaker job market and various travel bans already in place, which may in turn affect demand for property rentals and weigh on property prices. Additionally, lower oil prices may lead investors and homebuyers to be wearier of market conditions, resulting in postponement of would-be property purchases, though this may be offset in the near-term by pent-up sales from the lockdown period. Nevertheless, with the recent easing of business restrictions and the end of the total lockdown in May in accordance with a five-phase plan, a recovery may be on the horizon, but the pace of which will naturally depend on the longevity of the pandemic.

Chart 4: Residential sector sales (KD million per quarter)

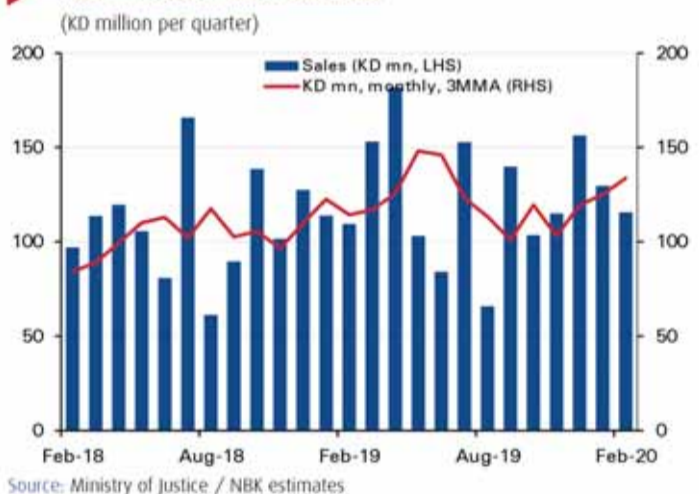


Chart 5: Residential sector price indices (index, 3-month moving average, 2010=100)

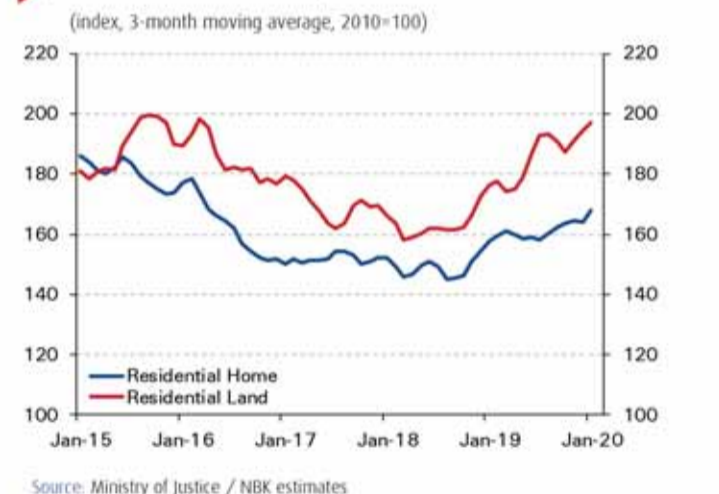
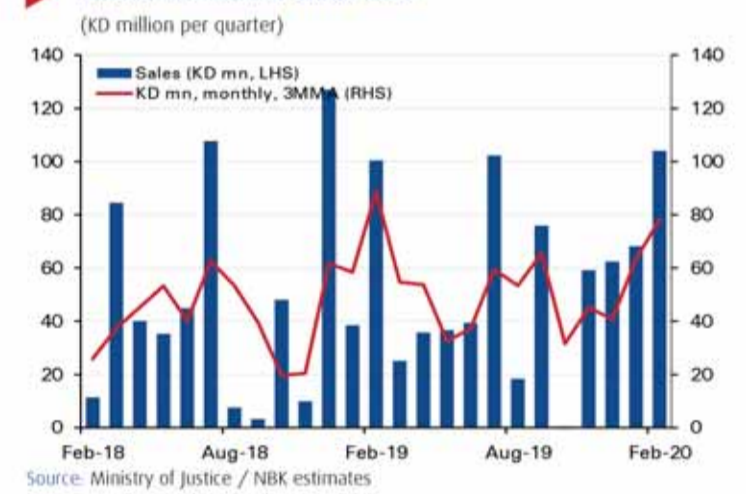


Chart 6: Commercial Sector sales (KD million per quarter)



C3 Social Impact Accelerator program helps ME startups

KUWAIT: As global industry came to an almost complete halt over the past couple of months, many startups in the region have bravely and creatively turned around the way they do business to stay afloat and, in some cases, even thrive and grow.

A few of them are the 2019 graduates of the C3 Social Impact Accelerator Programme powered by HSBC. The program helps startups to receive the tools they need to thrive in the global economy, including guidance on raising funds and how to manage their governance practices. Such cases include:

- Chefaa, last year's winner, the Egyptian based e-health startup is now fulfilling triple the number of orders it used to get before the Covid-19 lockdown was imposed.

- InnoTech, an Omani based 3D printing EdTech startup, has completely pivoted operations by utilising its 3D printing capabilities to manufacture medical equipment, to ensure the country is well equipped as international supply chains are disrupted.

- MyU, a Kuwait based e-learning startup, supported schools and educational institutions to continue teaching online, making the process easier on teachers, students, and parents.

This year's edition of the program – which is now open – has attracted over 600 applicants from eight countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MIENAT). Twenty-four finalists have been carefully shortlisted following a proven, rigorous selection process by the evaluators from HSBC, Bain & Company, and C3.

As per the program's qualifying criteria, all the selected startups are contributing significantly to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, are revenue generating, and are profitable or have a clear profitability path.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed travel bans and restrictions on hosting events, C3 and HSBC have decided to turn the originally planned one-week program in Dubai, into a four-week online format, with board meeting simulations and the final pitch competition scheduled to run in August.

Commenting on the challenges and opportunities of running the event online, Medea Nocentini, Co-founder and CEO of C3, said: "COVID-19 is pushing us to accelerate plans we had for quite some time to further boost the effectiveness of our program. Hosting lectures and workshops online over a longer period of time will provide our entrepreneurs with increased expert accessibility and give them a chance to better absorb critical learning material."

The customized lectures and interactive online sessions of the program are delivered by international trainers, tackling topics such as Theory of Change, social impact measurement, and pitching to impact investors, over four weeks.

Sabrin Rahman, Regional Head of Corporate Sustainability, HSBC, MENAT, said: "We have given the online structure a lot of thought to ensure that the entrepreneurs get all the benefits they were hoping for from the program, from engaging and insightful training, to networking with impact investors and likeminded entrepreneurs. We learnt a lot from last year's program and are confident that the second edition of C3 will deliver an even better experience for our entrepreneurs."

Roger Winfield, Chief Executive Officer of HSBC in Kuwait, said: "We are proud of our partnership with the C3 Social Impact Accelerator. This program really helps entrepreneurs maximize their social and environmental impact on the community, and I am delighted that Kuwait's MyU from last year's edition is supporting the education sector during this time. I look forward to seeing the 2020 winning startups at the final event in August."

Thanks to C3's partnership with Bain & Company and Al Tamimi & Company, the pitch competition winners will also benefit from mentoring sessions where they receive one-on-one tailored pro-bono support. Also, C3's partnership with CNN Arabic will create further opportunity to raise awareness of the program.

Russia's central bank cuts key rate to new low

MOSCOW: Russia's central bank announced a 1.0-percentage-point cut to its key interest rate, taking it to 4.5 percent, the lowest level in decades, in a bid to revive the economy after a virus shutdown.

A global slump in demand during months of lockdown measures triggered by the coronavirus epidemic led to "more profound than expected" disinflationary factors, the bank said in a statement. The bank has abided by a conservative monetary policy for years, targeting four percent inflation, but said Friday that the rate decision was taken because this figure may dip "significantly" below the target next year.

It said the negative effect of the economic lockdown has been "more extended" than previously assumed, hitting investment and incomes and increasing unemployment. "The influence of the weaker ruble and the episodes of increased demand for certain product groups in March has been exhausted," it said.

It said further cuts would be considered, based on inflation dynamics, economic activity and domestic and global market risks. The next bank meeting on monetary policy is scheduled for July 24.

Russia's State Statistics Agency on Friday published figures showing employment grew to 6.1 percent in May, steadily growing from 5.8 percent and 4.7 percent in April and March, respectively. Consumer spending fell by 19.2 in May year on year, figures showed, though rose from even lower levels in April of this year by 6.7 percent.

President Vladimir Putin declared a "non-working" period from late March, but on May 12 lifted the national lockdown, say-

ing regions were free to impose rules based on local stages of the epidemic.

Some sectors of economy were opened up, though many remain crippled by the restrictions. The central bank predicted that the contraction of the economy in the second quarter "could prove more sizeable than expected," after growth of 1.6 percent in the first quarter. It predicted the GDP for the year 2020 would shrink by four to six percent, and a return to pre-coronavirus levels of economic growth only in 2022.

Central bank chief Elvira Nabiullina said she also expected the recovery to take longer than previously forecast, notably due to oil production cuts at least until the end of July that Moscow has agreed with the OPEC cartel.

The new key rate is the lowest in recent history, below the previous record of five percent in June 2010. "This is quite a change relative to previous 5 years of quite conservative monetary policy," said Renaissance Capital's chief economist Sofiya Donets.

"So it could clearly affect both borrowing and savings in the economy," she told AFP, adding she expects a return to a more neutral policy next year.

"The rate of 5 percent or below would indeed be the lowest over this century," said Dmitry Polevoy, chief economist at the Russian Direct Investment Fund. "With downside risks to inflation outlook, strong ruble and recessionary economic environment there is clearly room to enter this uncharted territory of lower policy rate to fuel the just-started economic recovery," he said. — AFP

Beijing tests food and parcel couriers as coronavirus checks widen

City has done almost 2.3 mln nucleic acid tests so far

BEIJING: Officials in Beijing are carrying out tests to detect traces of coronavirus on all food and parcel delivery workers in an effort to rein in a new outbreak, state-backed media reported yesterday.

Officials in the Chinese capital have been expanding nucleic acid testing across the city of 20 million since a cluster of infections linked to a food wholesale market erupted just over a week ago.

The outbreak, the first in Beijing in months, has now surpassed previous peak numbers in the city in early February.

A nucleic acid test involves a swab sample taken from the back of a person's throat or respiratory tract, and the sample is then tested for the presence of the coronavirus' genome.

Testing was initially focused on residential areas near the sprawling Xinfadi market and on people who worked or shopped there.

Officials are now targeting the tens of thousands of delivery personnel who regularly traverse the city, where fleets of motorised pedicabs and scooters ridden by couriers delivering parcels and food are a common sight.

Workers at SF Express, China's second biggest courier firm, arrived in batches at testing points in Beijing on Friday evening, Beijing News reported.

Food delivery firm Meituan Dianping confirmed that all of its riders in the city would be tested and those who had carried out deliveries in high-risk areas would be temporarily taken off duty, undergo nucleic acid tests and be quarantined at home for 14 days.

Customers will be able to view details on



BEIJING: A man wearing a face mask sits in a subway train on Saturday. — AFP

disinfection of the delivery package and their courier's body temperature online, Meituan said on its Wechat account.

Beijing News said that all couriers in the city would be tested by next week.

Officials have highlighted the risk of contamination through packaging in Beijing, which reported 22 new cases on Friday. The capital has now recorded more than 200 locally transmitted infections since June 11.

Officials have been testing people working in catering, including restaurant staff, as well as imported food after the virus was found on chopping boards at Xinfadi used to handle salmon.

A total of 2.3 million nucleic acid tests had been carried out in Beijing as of 0600 local

time yesterday (2200 GMT on Friday), Zhang Qiang, an official from Beijing's municipal committee, said at a news conference.

Residents of 40 communities under lockdown in the capital are required to self-isolate at home to avoid possible further transmission of the virus, Zhang said.

Those that do not comply will be centrally quarantined for 14 days, after which they should take another nucleic acid test and are free to leave if the result is negative, he added.

In Dongcheng district in the eastern part of Beijing, two Reuters journalists received notice on Friday that everyone living in their communities would be tested, even though they were in low-risk areas. — Reuters

Novartis halts malaria drug trial against COVID-19

ZURICH: Swiss drugmaker Novartis is halting its trial of malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) against COVID-19 after struggling to find participants, it said on Friday, as data emerged from other studies raising doubts about its efficacy. Novartis' trial began in April and sought to test the drug in 440 hospitalized patients. But the project only managed to recruit a handful.

Novartis' move follows this week's U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) decision to revoke emergency use authorization for hydroxychloroquine against COVID-19 on grounds it and a related drug, chloroquine, are unlikely to help patients.

Hydroxychloroquine, also used to treat inflammatory disorders including rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, has been caught in a political debate as U.S. President Donald Trump promoted it, even though there was no scientific evidence that it helps against the new coronavirus. Several studies of the decades-old malaria drug including in Britain were recently halted after scientists concluded it was "useless" against COVID-19. This week the World Health Organization halted the hydroxychloroquine arm of one of its trials. "The recruitment challenge facing our

hydroxychloroquine trial has made it unlikely that the clinical team will be able to collect meaningful data in a reasonable time frame to determine the efficacy of hydroxychloroquine in treating patients with COVID-19," Novartis said. Trump, who said he used HCQ as a COVID-19 prophylactic, criticized the FDA decision to revoke its emergency authorization.

The Basel-based company said its study, so far, raised no safety issues and drew no conclusions about HCQ's efficacy. Novartis' trial coincided with increasing use of Gilead Science's drug remdesivir, which has been shown in trials to speed recovery from COVID-19.

The FDA has also warned against mixing remdesivir with HCQ.

French drugmaker Sanofi, which previously suspended recruitment of patients for two HCQ trials, told Reuters it would make a decision in "coming days" over whether it would resume its own studies. Novartis had donated up to 130 million doses of hydroxychloroquine, including millions in the United States, and Chief Executive Vas Narasimhan two months ago pegged it as the company's biggest hope against the new coronavirus. — Reuters

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Lifestyle | Features

'LORD OF THE RINGS' AND 'ALIEN' STAR IAN HOLM DIES AGED 88

Oscar-nominated British actor Ian Holm, famed for his roles in Hollywood blockbusters "Lord of the Rings" and "Alien", died on Friday aged 88, his agent said. Nominated for an Oscar for his portrayal as the coach Sam Mussabini in the 1981 award-winning film "Chariots of Fire"—which also saw him earn his second BAFTA and best supporting actor award at the Cannes Film Festival—Holm appeared in a host of top international films. He played the main antagonist Ash in the first "Alien" movie, and featured in "The Madness of King George" and "The Aviator".

Holm suffered with a Parkinson's related illness, his agency said in a statement. "It is with great sadness we can confirm that the actor Sir Ian Holm CBE passed away this morning at the age of 88," said the statement. "He died peacefully in hospital with his family and carer." US actress Mia Farrow led a parade of stars paying their respects, calling Holm "unfathomably brilliant". "He was among the giants of the theatre," said Farrow, who appeared on stage with Holm at the Royal

Shakespeare Company (RSC).

British comic and actor Eddie Izzard tweeted: "The great Ian Holm is dead. Wonderful actor and it's so sad to see him go. Farewell, you did great work Sir." Director Edgar Wright said Holm was "a genius actor who brought considerable presence to parts funny, heartbreaking and terrifying".

Late global fame

Among the other notable movies he appeared in were "Oh! What A Lovely War", "Time Bandits", "The Day After Tomorrow", and "The Fifth Element". His final film role came in 2014 in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies". His portrayal of Bilbo Baggins in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy secured global fame in later life. But he had already established himself before that as a star of the theatre with the RSC, which he joined in 1958, and appeared regularly on British TV. He won a Tony in 1967 for his performance as Lenny in the premier of Harold Pinter's play "The Homecoming" on Broadway. He was Pinter's favourite actor: "He



In this file photo taken on April 29, 2019 British actor Ian Holm (centre) poses on the red carpet arriving for the UK premiere of the film Tolkein in London.—AFP photos



British actor Ian Holm gestures during the photocall of French director Arnaud Desplechin's film "Esther Khan" in Cannes on May 19, 2000, "Esther Khan" is running for the Golden Palm at the 53rd Cannes Film Festival.

puts on my shoe, and it fits!" the playwright is reported as saying.

The artistic director of the RSC, Gregory Doran, called Holm "quite simply one of the RSC greats". The National Theatre in London, where he performed a memorable Lear in 1997, described him as an "extraordinary actor" in a tweet. As well as his Oscar nomination he was also nominated for six British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards. BAFTA said it was "very sorry"

to hear of his death. Holm was born in Essex, east of London, to a psychiatrist father and a mother who was a nurse, in 1931. He was awarded a knighthood in 1998 for services to drama. As well as his acting career, he also served in the British Army, completing national service in Austria. He was married four times and had five children. His third wife was "Downton Abbey" star Penelope Wilton. The couple divorced in 2001, 10 years after getting married.—AFP

Finnish prodigy Makela to lead Paris Orchestra

The 24-year-old Finnish prodigy Klaus Makela is to be the next musical director of the Paris Orchestra, the French culture ministry said Thursday. The young conductor will lead the orchestra when the Paris Philharmonie concert hall reopens after the coronavirus lockdown on July 9 with pieces by Ravel and Beethoven.

But Makela will not officially start as musical director until September 2022. He is currently principal conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic. The acclaimed cellist succeeds the British conductor Daniel Harding, whose time with the orchestra ended last August. Makela—one of a wave of "flying Finns" who have stormed the heights of classical music in recent years—began his meteoric career at the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2017.—AFP



Finnish prodigy Klaus Makela

Warner Records signs Black Lives Matter protest singer, 12

A 12-year-old whose song protesting police killings of African Americans in the US went viral has been signed by Warner Records, his producer said on Instagram Thursday. Keedron Bryant's song I Just Wanna Live, about his fears growing up as a black man in America, will be released on Friday, which is the Juneteenth holiday



Keedron Bryant

Hollywood poised for big-screen gamble as theatres reopen

After more than three months of coronavirus-mandated limbo, Hollywood is headed back to the big screen—and hoping that Russell Crowe's road rage thriller "Unhinged" will jump-start the recovery. The action film, due out July 10, is set to be the first wide release since US theatres shut their doors in mid-March. Christopher Nolan's much-hyped "Tenet" will follow soon after. But will the gamble pay off for those quick-moving studios? While top theatre chains across the country plan to fire up their projectors in the first half of July, screens in badly-hit New York and Los Angeles don't yet have permission to reopen.

And even with social distancing and sanitation measures boosted, moviegoers' enthusiasm for piling into dark, enclosed auditoriums amid a possible "second wave" of virus cases may fluctuate. AMC, the world's largest theatre chain, caused a stir by initially declining to mandate face masks, saying it did not want to be "drawn into a political controversy." It did a U-turn on that policy Friday following an outcry.

Everyone from indie distributors to blockbuster studios will be carefully watching to see how the experiment with new theatrical releases proceeds. "Hollywood is not a place where competitors are known for wishing each other well very often," said "Unhinged" producer Mark Gill. "And in this particular circumstance, everybody is hoping we do well." His movie bucked the industry trend, shifting its release date forward from September, as larger studios gobbled up all the prime opening slots deeper into 2020. Solstice Studios decided the lack of competing new titles, and dearth of other distractions such as major sporting events, outweighed the danger of flopping early—which in any case is reduced for a mid-budget, \$33 million movie. "The more we looked at it, it's risky of course, but it still looked like it was worth doing," Gill told AFP.

'Worth the risk'

"Somebody had to go first—it's definitely worth the risk," said Jeff Bock, a senior analyst for industry tracker Exhibitor Relations. "But I think the odds are stacked against it." While the decision to open "Unhinged" early has generated buzz—its trailer drew 210 million views in a week—its studio's pockets are less deep than those of its rivals when it comes to marketing, he noted. But "Unhinged" is really a "set-up for the other studios," he added, noting that the true litmus test will be the first

marking the end of slavery in the US. Bryant first posted the acapella gospel song on his Instagram account on May 26, the day after another African American, George Floyd, was killed by a white policeman in the city of Minneapolis.

Floyd's death—one in a long line of black people killed by white law enforcement—ignited mass Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality and a national reckoning on racism in America, both in the past and today. "Every day I'm being hunted as prey. My people don't want no trouble," Bryant sings. The original post has been liked well over three million times, and drawn praise from Barack Obama to Katy Perry.

It also caught the attention of producer Dem Jointz, who reportedly added music. Dem Jointz said in an Instagram post Thursday that he was "Thankful" to share the song alongside the Bryant family and Warner Records. The US music giant will reportedly donate proceeds from the song to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).—AFP

major studio titles, including Warner Bros' \$200 million-plus "Tenet," out July 31.

Nolan—its influential director who is best known for "Inception," "Dunkirk" and the Batman "Dark Knight" trilogy—has pushed for his ambitious and secretive sci-fi thriller to stand firm with its early theatre release. Still, it was recently shuffled back by two weeks, giving New York and Los Angeles screens breathing space to reopen. Disney's "Mulan" is also due in July—shortly after Disney World and Disneyland reopen—though some analysts predict it may yet be switched to a later slot if families are seen as still nervous about going to theatres. "Word-of-mouth will be based now on not specifically which films are actually good, but which theatres are following all the guidelines," said Bock.

'You're dead'

The dangers of jumping the gun were highlighted in China, where theatres in several provinces optimistically reopened in late March, before closing again days later. The capital Beijing is now experiencing a new COVID-19 outbreak, prompting the authorities to lock down parts of the city. If fresh outbreaks are traced back to screens in the US, "theatres are going to shut down very quickly, and for a very long time thereafter," predicted Bock. Those concerns were evident in Los Angeles on Friday, when bars and tattoo parlors were cleared to reopen—but theatres notably were not. Still, Gill is focused on the tens of thousands of empty movie theatres itching to reopen across the country, but with nothing new to show—and no certainty on whether audiences are willing to return. "You can have theatres open and a good movie and be all by yourself and do everything right," he said. "But if nobody's coming, you're dead."—AFP



In this file photo taken on June 12, 2020 a woman walks past the El Capitan Theater which is closed due to the Covid-19 virus, on Hollywood Blvd, Hollywood, California.—AFP

Cobain 'Unplugged' guitar sells for record \$6 million at auction

The guitar that grunge rock icon Kurt Cobain played during his legendary 1993 MTV Unplugged performance sold Saturday for a record \$6 million, the auction house said. The retro acoustic-electric 1959 Martin D-18E that Cobain strummed for Nirvana's career-defining performance in New York—just five months before his suicide at age 27—sold after a bidding war to Peter Freedman, founder of RODE Microphones, Julien's Auctions said.

At \$6.01 million after fees and commission, the instrument was the most expensive guitar ever sold at auction, among other records. The starting estimate was \$1 million. Freedman said he plans to display the guitar in a worldwide tour, with proceeds going to benefit performing arts. "When I heard that this iconic guitar was up for auction I immediately knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure it and use it as a vehicle to spotlight the struggles that those in the performing arts are facing and have always faced," the Australian was quoted as saying by Julien's Auctions.

The guitar was sold with its case, which Cobain had decorated with a flyer from punk rock band Poison Idea's 1990 album "Feel the Darkness." Until now, the most expensive guitar in history was a Fender Stratocaster, dubbed "Black Strat," used by Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour. It had been sold by the musician for nearly \$4 million during a charity sale in June 2019. Nirvana's acoustic performance during the taping for the popular MTV Unplugged series on



In these file photos, the guitar used by musician Kurt Cobain during Nirvana's famous MTV Unplugged in New York concert in 1993, is displayed in the window of the Hard Rock Cafe Piccadilly Circus in central London prior to the auction of the guitar in Beverly Hills in June.—AFP photos



November 18, 1993 became what is considered one of history's greatest live albums. It included renditions of Nirvana's hits "About A Girl" and "Come As You Are" along with covers including David Bowie's "The Man Who Sold the World." In October 2019 Cobain's cigarette-singed cardigan worn during the "Unplugged" performance sold for \$334,000.—AFP



Batman and Kim Kardashian headed to Spotify podcasts

Spotify has penned a podcast deal with DC Comics—home to Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman—bringing scripted superhero episodes to the audio streaming platform. The deal announced Thursday follows a separate Spotify deal with Kim Kardashian West for a criminal justice podcast, as the Swedish platform continues to splurge on a raft of original content. The multi-year deal with DC parent WarnerMedia for an "original slate of narrative scripted podcasts" will explore "new shows based on the vast universe of premier, iconic DC characters," the companies said in a statement.

It did not confirm which comic book characters would feature, or the cost of the deal,

which will also include "new dramatic and comedic podcasts" based on other Warner Bros. titles. But the deal comes as Spotify ramps up its podcast content, including a reported \$100 million outlay last month on "The Joe Rogan Experience," the most downloaded podcast in the United States.

On Wednesday, it emerged Spotify had inked an exclusive deal with Kardashian West, the reality star turned criminal justice advocate. The show will investigate the case of Kevin Keith, a convicted mass murderer who maintains his innocence for the 1994 deaths of three people including a four-year-old child, according to the Wall Street Journal. Keith's death sentence was commuted to life in prison by Ohio's governor in

2010 due to unanswered questions in his case.

Several dozen former judges, lawyers and prosecutors believe he may have been wrongly convicted and had called for his execution to be halted. Spotify confirmed the deal with Kardashian West to AFP, but declined to offer any further details. For a little over a year, Spotify has slowly been moving into the podcast world. In early 2019, it bought the podcasting company Gimlet Studios for around \$230 million, as well as the production interface Anchor for more than \$100 million. And in February, Spotify acquired The Ringer, a sports and entertainment production studio, for between \$141 million and \$195 million, depending on several variables.—AFP

Lifestyle | Art

Leonardo's 'quick eye' may be key to Mona Lisa's magnetism

Scientists believe Leonardo da Vinci's super-fast eye may have helped him catch the enigmatic magic of Mona Lisa's smile. This superhuman trait, which top tennis and baseball players may also share, allowed the Renaissance master to capture accurately minute, fleeting expressions and even birds and dragonflies in flight. Art historians have long talked of Leonardo's "quick eye", but David S Thaler of Switzerland's University of Basel has tried to gauge it in a new study published Thursday alongside another paper showing how he gave his drawings and paintings uncanny emotional depth.

Freeze frame

Professor Thaler's research turns on how Leonardo's eye was so keen he managed to spot that the front and back wings of a dragonfly are out of synch—a discovery which took slow-motion photography to prove four centuries later. The artist, who lived from 1452 to 1519, sketched how when a dragonfly's front wings are raised, the hind ones are lowered, something that was a blur to Thaler and to his colleagues when they tried to observe the difference themselves. Thaler told AFP that this gift to see what few humans can may be the secret of

Leonardo's most famous painting. "Mona Lisa's smile is so enigmatic because it represents the moment of breaking into a smile. And Leonardo's quick eye captured that and held it," he said.

"So often our memories are of a fixed image, not a movement. Leonardo and perhaps other artists had that ability to pick up the point of breaking into a smile" or emotion. Thaler suspects the Japanese painter Hokusai—best known for "The Great Wave of Kanagawa"—had the same ability. The Edo master (1760-1849) also picked up the difference in dragonfly wings, which led Thaler to wonder if "he saw (in) the same freeze-frame way as Leonardo".

Thaler applied "flicker fusion frequency" (FFF)—similar to a film's frames per second—to try to judge Leonardo's extraordinary visual acuity in the study for the Rockefeller University in the US as a part of a wider Leonardo DNA Project looking at the Renaissance polymath. Because of our slower FFF, we construct a single 3D image of the world by jamming together many partially in-focus images, he said.

Leonardo realised he could freeze the separate snapshots with which we construct our perception, Thaler believes. Thaler told AFP that he was fasci-



In this file photograph visitors take pictures in front of the Mona Lisa after it was returned at its place at The Louvre Museum in Paris. —AFP

nated by the case of Ted Williams, an American baseball legend who claimed to have trained himself to see the seams of a baseball as it flew towards him. "It is said that elite batters can see the seams" even when the baseball is rotating 30 to 50 times per second, Thaler said.

In Leonardo's case, Thaler estimated that to see

the difference in batting dragonfly wings clearly, the artist would have to have an FFF range of 50 to 100 frames per second. The average person's is between 20 to 40 per second. Thaler told AFP it was not clear if the gift was genetic or if it could be learned.

Da Vinci's 'evening' portraits

The researcher also described in another paper how Leonardo used psychophysics—much of which still remains a mystery today—to communicate beauty and emotion. He said Leonardo's mastery of the sfumato technique—which subtly blurs the edges of images and creates a 3D effect—allowed him to render lifelike expressions and gave an intimate gaze to his portraits. He believes that Leonardo achieved selective soft focus in portraits by painting in overcast or evening light, where the eyes' pupils enlarge to let in more light but have a narrow plane of sharp focus. The enlarged pupils of his sitters—also a sign of affection or attraction—were a mark of beauty in Renaissance portraits. It appears to confirm what the artist himself wrote in his notebook: "In the evening and when the weather is dull, what softness and delicacy you may perceive in the faces of men and women..."—AFP

Microbes could 'help save Old Masters' and catch forgers

Scientists said Thursday that microbes could be game changers in authenticating and preserving Old Master paintings and other art. A new US study could have far-reaching consequences for the \$60 billion a year art market, in which provenance can be notoriously hazy and difficult to pin down. Researchers said microbes clinging to the surface of paintings and sculptures can be used not only to help identify counterfeits, but they could also be crucial in halting the decay of some of the world's great cultural treasures.

The team from the J. Craig Venter Institute (JCVI) also raise the prospect of artists' DNA being used to seal the provenance of even centuries-old works. Microbiologist Manolito Torralba told AFP that the tiny organisms which live on art can point to the origin of a work and in some cases where it has been kept over its history. The study, using samples taken from art held in a private collection in the Italian Renaissance capital of Florence, claims to be the "first large-scale genomics-based study to understand the microbial communities associated with ageing artwork." Professor Torralba said the technology used by him and other researchers could also be used to pick up human DNA on the art as "another approach for detecting counterfeits", eventually enabling researchers to authenticate a painting or a manuscript.



Photo summary of the various artworks sampled for the study "Characterizing microbial signatures on sculptures and paintings of similar provenance." Circles indicate swabbed areas on each sample artwork. —Photo from JCVI

DNA signatures

"Many Renaissance artists used their own biological material in their artwork," he told AFP. "Leonardo and others were very known for using their own saliva and some used their own blood," said the researcher, a leading member of the Leonardo da Vinci DNA Project, which hopes to confirm that the remains entombed at the Chateau of Amboise in France, where the Italian master died in 1519, are indeed his. But Torralba said study-

ing microbes' hidden artistic life had potentially even more far-reaching implications. "If you move a piece of artwork from one region to another it is colonised by bacteria from the new region." "It doesn't show an absolute timeline of where it was... but you can see that it may have come from a particular area," he added.

Fast-tracking restoration

But investigating microbes that live on art could be even more revolutionary when it comes to preservation and restoration. Torralba argued. Bacteria can "remain on a work for a very long time", feeding on oil paint or canvas. He said that microbes can survive often aggressive cleaning and restoration attempts, some of which have ended up doing more harm than good. "We know we can detect who is there," Torralba said referring to the microbial populations on a work.

"The next step is to detect what they are doing and what they are metabolising," he added. "Then we can have a very specific approach to killing off the bacteria that may be degrading these pieces of art." "That should be the approach for preservation and conservation, because you can only do so much to prevent mould, moisture and light damage," Torralba said that "restoration labs spend an incredible amount of effort and money on restoring art." But a "molecular approach can fast-track a lot of restoration efforts," he insisted.—AFP

Online Pablo Picasso auction raises almost £5 million



Pablo Picasso's Le Reservoir is exhibited as Sotheby's NY previews highlights of the Evening Sale at Sotheby's during the coronavirus pandemic on June 19, 2020 in New York City. —AFP photos



Pablo Picasso's Femme Assise is exhibited.



Pablo Picasso's Tête de femme endormie is exhibited.

An online auction of almost 200 works spanning the career of world famous Spanish artist Pablo Picasso fetched almost five million pounds, London auctioneers Sotheby's said on Friday. It was the first auction organised by Sotheby's since the UK partially lifted its coronavirus lockdown rules in the first half of May. The 10-day World of Picasso sale ending Thursday included 60 works from the private collection of the artist's granddaughter Marina Picasso.

Some 188 works together totalled 4,832,125 pounds or \$6,128,101 with 92 percent of lots sold and 83 percent of those "selling for prices above their high estimates," Sotheby's said in a statement. The highest selling item was a 1950 vase - "Grand Vase aux Femmes Nues" - which sold for 435,000 pounds (482,000 euros, \$540,000), said Sotheby's.

Another notable sale was a palette used by Picasso, which sold for more than 56,000 pounds despite having a maximum sale estimate of just 6,000 pounds. There were 39 bids for the palette, which the artist used in June 1961. Pastels, ceramics and silver plates were among the other items for sale. Picasso, who died in France in 1973 aged 91, was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century and was one of the founders of the Cubist movement.—AFP

Photos of stolen Van Gogh handed to Dutch art sleuth

A Dutch art detective revealed Thursday he has received two recent photographs of a Vincent Van Gogh painting stolen from a museum during the coronavirus lockdown. Burglars snatched the 1884 painting "Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring", which is valued at up to six million euros (\$6.6 million), from the Singer Laren Museum near Amsterdam on March 30. Arthur Brand, dubbed the "Indiana Jones of the Art World" for tracing a series of high-profile lost artworks, said he was handed the photos a few days ago by a source he declined to identify.

The photographs, of which AFP was given two copies, show the painting, together with a front page of the New York Times newspaper of May 30 to prove when the photos were taken. "After three months of intensive investigation, I was handed these pictures. This is the first 'proof of life' we have that the painting still exists," Brand said, adding that valuable pictures are often destroyed when the thieves realise they cannot be sold.

He added that the photos were "circulating in mafia circles". In the photographs, a new scratch can be seen on the bottom of the painting, which Brand said he believed must have happened during the robbery. The New York Times issue in the photographs of the painting featured an interview with Brand and Octave Durham, the notorious Dutch burglar who stole two paintings from Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum in 2002. It also showed a copy of Durham's 2018 book "Master Thief", placed on a black plastic background.

Asked about the authenticity of the painting shown in the photos, Brand said one of them shows the back of the artwork featuring the so-called provenance—the history of ownership—which serves almost as a type of fingerprint for the artwork. "There is no doubt in my mind that



This handout photograph released by Arthur Brand on June 18, 2020, taken on an unknown date and at an undisclosed location, shows the 1884 painting by Vincent van Gogh called "Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring", stolen from the Singer Laren Museum near Amsterdam on March 30, 2020, alongside a copy of May 30, 2020, edition of The New York Times newspaper. —AFP photos



This handout photograph shows a detail on the rear of the 1884 painting by Vincent van Gogh called "Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring."

this is the genuine article," he said.

'Great number of tips'

Brand, who declined to divulge how he obtained the photos, said he believed there could be a number of reasons the art thieves decided to circulate them. "It could simply be that they are trying to find a buyer in the criminal underworld," he added. The photographs "could also be a plan to try and cast suspicion on Durham, because they used his book in the pictures," he said. Durham however was in hospital in Amsterdam at the time of the latest heist "and has a rock-solid alibi", the detective said.

However, the reasons could be even more personal said Brand, who has recovered stolen art including a Picasso painting and "Hitler's Horses", life-sized bronze sculptures that once stood outside the Nazi leader's Berlin chancellery. "Perhaps they want to make a deal with prosecutors, using the painting as leverage," the Amsterdam-based detective said.

"Or perhaps they just want to toy with me, because they know I am investigating the case, and that I took it personally when they stole a Van Gogh right from my back yard," he said. Dutch police video images released shortly after the burglary showed a burglar smashing through a glass door at the museum in the middle of the night, before running out with the painting tucked under his right arm. Police in their latest statement said "we have received a great number of tips in this case." Asked if he had passed on the information to the Dutch police, Brand said "he was following the usual channels". "Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring" comes from relatively early on in Van Gogh's career, before the prolific artist embarked on his trademark post-impressionist paintings such as "Sunflowers" and his vivid self-portraits.—AFP

Paris Ritz sells off its silver... and ashtrays

Historic silver, crystal and ashtrays from the Paris Ritz hotel went under the hammer in the French capital in a three-day sale which started yesterday. The mythic hotel on Place Vendôme was a favourite of such icons as actress Audrey Hepburn, fashion designer Coco Chanel—who spent part of World War II tucked up there with her lover, a German spy—and the American writer Ernest Hemingway, who "liberated" its bar when the Allies retook the city. More than 1,500 lots from bed linen to bathrobes and ashtrays from the Ritz Club, which are estimated to go between 100 and 150 euros (\$168) apiece, will be sold off by

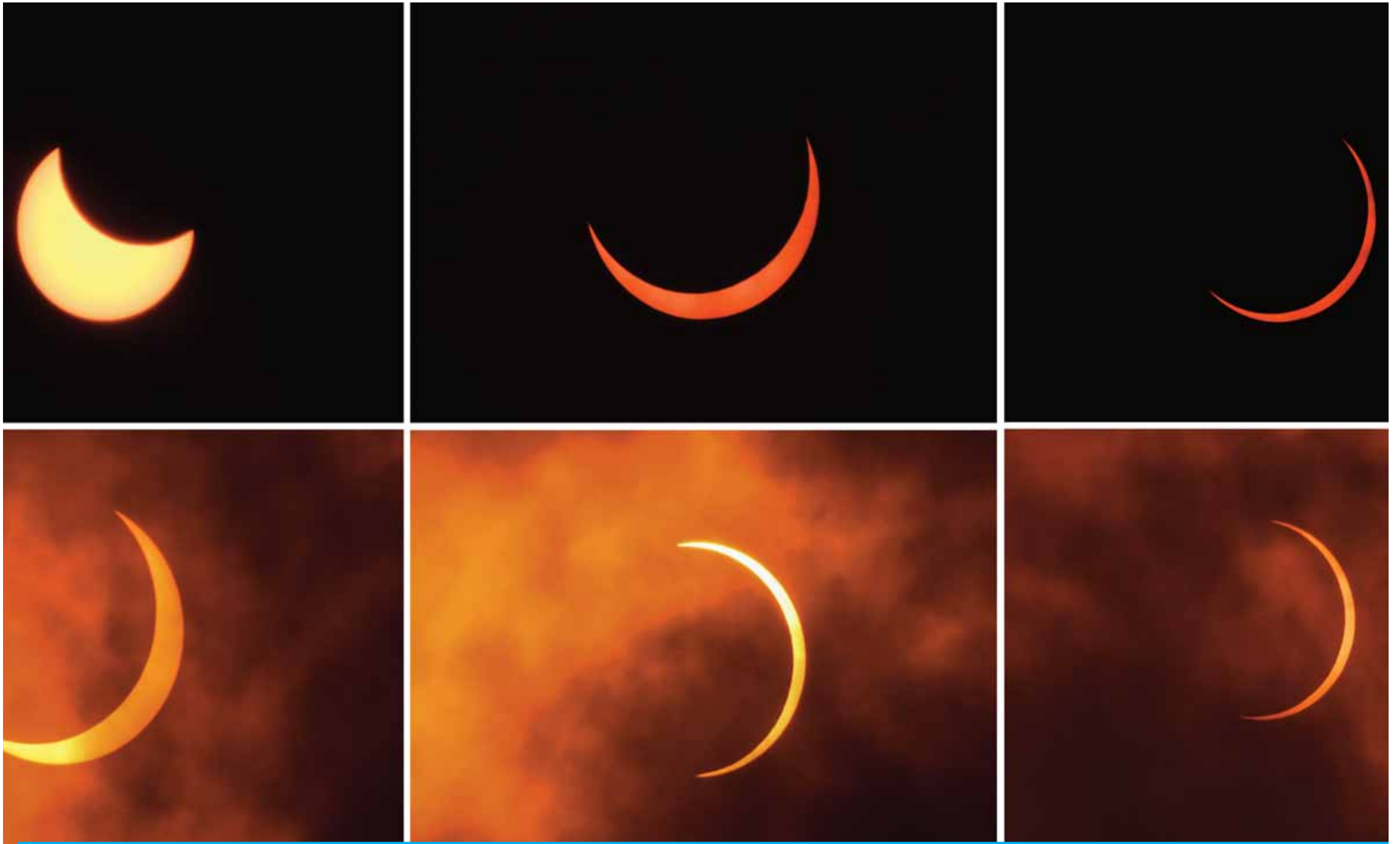
the auction house Artcurial from Sunday to Tuesday.

Two years ago some of the hotel's historic furniture was sold off for 7.2 million euros—seven times the estimate—after a major refurbishment of the hotel. Bidders from 53 countries competed for the pieces, many of which dated from its earliest era days at the turn of the 20th century under founder Cesar Ritz and the legendary French chef Auguste Escoffier. This time the star attraction will be the 400 lots of its silver service as well as its vintage crystal, much of it from the famous "Hemingway Bar" named after the hard-drinking writer.—AFP



This file photograph, shows the entrance of the closed luxury hotel "Ritz" in Paris, on the 36th day of a strict lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus.—AFP

News



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows the Moon moving in front of the Sun during an annular solar eclipse as seen from New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

'Ring of fire' solar eclipse...

Continued from Page 1

The exact alignment of the Earth, Moon and Sun was visible for only 38 seconds.

In Nairobi, east Africa, observers saw only a partial eclipse as clouds blocked the sky for several seconds at the exact moment the Moon should have almost hidden the Sun. Despite some disappointment Susan Murbana told AFP: "It was very exciting because I think I'm so obsessed with eclipses. Today has been very kind to us in terms of the clouds. And we've been able to see most of it," said Murbana who set up the Travelling Telescope educational programme with her husband Chu.

Without the coronavirus pandemic, they would have organized a trip to Lake Magadi in southern Kenya where the skies are generally clearer than over the capital. "With the pandemic situation, we're not able to have crowds... and get kids to look

through or do stuff," she said but still managed to share the event on social media. "We had around 50 people joining us via Zoom and then we have so many people via our Facebook live."

The annular eclipse is visible from only about two percent of Earth's surface, Florent Delefe, an astronomer at the Paris Observatory, told AFP. "It's a bit like switching from a 500-watt to a 30-watt light bulb," he added. "It's a cold light and you don't see as well."

Animals can get spooked — birds will sometimes go back to sleep, and cows will return to the barn. The full eclipse was visible at successive locations over a period of nearly four hours, and one of the last places to see the partially hidden Sun was Taiwan. People hundreds of kilometers on either side of the centerline across 14 countries could also see light drain from the day but not the "ring of fire".

Weather conditions are critical for viewing. A solar eclipse always occurs about two weeks before or after a lunar eclipse, when the Moon moves into Earth's shadow. Lunar eclipses are visible from about half of the Earth's surface. There will be a second solar eclipse in 2020 on Dec 14 over South America. Because the Moon will be a bit closer to Earth, it will block out the Sun's light entirely. — AFP

dalize our history, desecrate our beautiful monuments, tear down our statues, and punish, cancel and persecute anyone who does not conform to their demands for absolute and total control," he said. The stakes Saturday could not have been higher — both for the health of thousands spending hours at the arena and for Trump's political fortunes, five months before an election in which he trails in the polls.

"Today we're here to show we support President Trump and that we, the people, we'll win the 2020 election, no matter what the fake news media and other liberal, leftist, mind-controlling big firms are saying," said attendee Brad, who declined to provide his last name. The rally has been controversial in part because it originally was scheduled for Friday — the Juneteenth commemoration of the end of slavery in the US — in a city known for one of the deadliest-ever massacres of African Americans.

Racial tensions have roiled the nation following the police killing of a black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis, and Trump has fanned the flames with provocative rhetoric. Dozens of Black Lives Matter protesters did gather at rally checkpoints and confronted attendees, but no violence was reported. After the rally, officers were seen using pepper spray to disperse protesters who temporarily blocked a police convoy.

This was the first of Trump's signature rallies since March 2, when the country went into pandemic lockdown. The virus dramatically disrupted a once-booming economy, which had been Trump's strongest re-election selling point. With polls showing him trailing Biden, Trump is eager to change the narrative, and rallies have long been his favorite political tool.

But while Trump rolls the political dice, the crowd gambled with their health. Oklahoma virus cases have spiked recently, and the state's total as of Saturday surpassed 10,000. Rally organizers provided everyone with hand sanitizer, temperature checks and optional masks. Attendees were required to sign a waiver protecting organizers from any liability in the event COVID-19 spreads at the venue. — AFP

tions if the criminal investigation into suspected wrongdoing in the Eurofighter aircraft deal is shelved without pressing charges. He said he will inquire about the reasons for shelving the investigation and to make sure that the defense ministry has provided the public prosecution with all related documents. The ministry of defense referred the \$9 billion deal to the public prosecution after allegations of corruption were raised.

Trump holds fiery rally but...

Continued from Page 1

The president has downplayed the risk that the evening rally — with thousands of shouting, cheering attendees — might trigger a fresh outbreak, ignoring danger warnings by Tulsa health and municipal officials.

And he suggested that the "double-edged sword" of comprehensive coronavirus testing had led to the United States having the world's highest number of cases. "Here is the bad part: When you do testing to that extent, you are going to find more people, you will find more cases," Trump argued. "So I said to my people, 'slow the testing down'," he boomed. A White House official later told AFP that Trump was joking.

The narrative of a trouble-free campaign event was punctured, however, when the campaign announced just hours before the rally that six members of its Tulsa advance team tested positive for coronavirus. Trump nevertheless reverted to full-on campaign mode, reviving themes that dominated his 2016 campaign: smearing immigrants, building a wall on the southern border, demanding flag burners be sentenced to jail and highlighting a rising stock market. "If you see it happening on November 3," he said of America's potential rebound, "you don't have the guts to vote against Trump."

He notably steered clear until well into his one-hour, 45-minute speech of the racial tensions that have swept the country in the weeks since a handcuffed African American, George Floyd, was killed by police in Minneapolis. Instead he warned that Democrats were seeking to erase American heritage, a reference to the tearing down of several statues of Confederate slave owners and other figures.

"The unhinged left-wing mob is trying to van-

MoH launches random virus...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said yesterday that he will send parliamentary ques-

US Asians soul searching over...

Continued from Page 1

One of the worst examples was during the 1992 protests in Los Angeles over the police killing of Rodney King, a black man. Massive rioting broke out during the demonstrations, most of which occurred in the Koreatown neighborhood. Ethnic Korean store owners, feeling abandoned by the Los Angeles police, shot at black protesters from the rooftops to protect their businesses. "We, Asian Americans, have remained complicit in perpetuating anti-blackness and benefiting from white supremacy," Kevin Quach, who works on policy at the Asian American advocacy group OCA National, told AFP.

Quach noted the internalization of the model minority myth — the stereotype that Asians are the "best" minority, thus implying that other minority groups are somehow lesser — and colorism, or prejudice against darker skin tones, within the Asian community, among other examples. Even using slogans like "Yellow Peril Supports Black Power" or "Asian Americans for Black Lives Matter," Quach said, "ignores and minimizes the harm that the AAPI community has inflicted on the black community within the last 50 years," even if unintentionally.

For instance, the "yellow peril" slogan was first used in 1969 by Japanese-American activist Richard Aoki at a protest in support of Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton. Aoki was revealed in 2012 to have been an FBI informant on the Black Panthers. Asian Americans have been used "as a wedge community between black community demands and our system," said Bo Thao-Urabe, a co-founder of the Minnesota-based Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL). It's important to ensure "our communities are not used

against each other," she added.

Groups like CAAL and OCA National, which were already working with black and Latino communities, have made specific pushes to support the current protests. CAAL has provided support for Asian Americans in Minnesota who joined the demonstrations, and OCA has launched several programs explicitly about Asian-black relations, including a workshop on the model minority myth and a virtual summit on Afro-Asian solidarity.

Asians 4 Black Lives has supported protests in the San Francisco Bay Area while Equality Labs, a South Asian rights group, has forums and other resources promoting South Asian-black solidarity. Many younger Asian Americans have taken the conversation online, sharing articles on social media about combating anti-blackness. Others have posted lists of key phrases and talking points, translated into languages such as Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese, for "talking to Asian parents about institutional and internalized racism."

"Anti-blackness is not just something that you can name and it disappears," said Jenny Tam, a 21-year-old student at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities who is of Chinese-Vietnamese heritage. "It's a fear, and fear needs to be deconstructed." After Floyd's death, Tam created a Facebook group called "Asian America for Black Power" to connect Asian Minnesotans who wanted to go to protests together. The group quickly morphed into a platform, now with nearly 3,000 members, for sharing resources on where to donate, what to read, where to protest and how to talk with their families about racism.

Tam also noted that the coronavirus pandemic had served as a kind of wake-up call for Asian Americans, as it sparked an outpouring of anti-Asian racism, with many blaming China for the virus. Racism "may oppress us differently, but there's a common enemy. We're fighting the same thing," said Tam, whose parents came to Minnesota after the Vietnam War. "We are not white, and so we cannot protect a system that supports white and is harming our black community." — AFP

Sisi warns of direct Libya...

Continued from Page 1

on the Libyan people, interference in Libyan affairs and a dangerous threat to national security," said Mohammed Amari Zayed, a member of the GNA's presidential council.

"There can be no 'red line' within our borders. We reject any bid aimed at dividing the Libyan people or their territory... (and) we categorically reject any bid to impose guardianship on Libya," he added. Turkey also vowed to continue supporting the GNA's push for Sirte and demanded the evacuation of Haftar's forces from the city for a "sustainable ceasefire."

Libya has been torn by 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 oil-rich country is split between rival administrations in the east and west, with the conflict recently attracting increasing foreign involvement. Besides Egypt, Russia and the United Arab Emirates back Haftar, while the GNA is supported by Turkey and Qatar.

"Any direct intervention by Egypt now has international legitimacy, whether under the UN charter on self defense or at the discretion of the only legitimate elected authority in Libya: the Libyan parliament," Sisi said. Like Haftar, the head of the Libyan parliament is based in the east of the country, where they are both supported by Egypt.

The GNA has vowed to take Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown and a strategic access point to Libya's key oil fields. It is also the last major settlement before the traditional boundary between western

Libya and Haftar's stronghold in the east. "Some think they can trespass on the Sirte or Al-Jufra frontline. This for us is a red line," Sisi said.

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin told AFP in an interview that a ceasefire in Libya would be possible if Haftar's forces withdrew from Sirte and Al-Jufra. "It should be a sustainable ceasefire, meaning that the other side, the LNA (Libyan National Army), should not be in a position to launch another attack on the legitimate Libyan government any time it wants," Kalin told AFP in an interview in Istanbul.

Later, Saudi Arabia and the UAE voiced their backing for Sisi. "The kingdom stands by Egypt on its right to defend its borders people from extremism, terrorist militias and their supporters in the region," said a foreign ministry statement carried by state-run Saudi Press Agency. Similarly, the UAE's foreign ministry said it "is siding with Egypt on all the measures it takes to protect security and stability from the repercussions of the concerning developments in Libya," according to the country's official WAM news agency.

Cairo proposed its own ceasefire in Libya earlier this month but it was dismissed by the GNA. That proposal also called for withdrawal of foreign mercenaries, and disbanding of Libyan militias. The Egyptian president blamed "external forces" supporting "extremist militias and mercenaries" in Libya for blocking the initiative. He further urged Egyptian troops to "be prepared to carry out any mission, inside our borders, or if necessary, outside our borders."

On Friday, the Arab League announced plans to hold an urgent virtual foreign ministers meeting on Libya this week at Egypt's request. But the GNA said it would boycott the meeting as it would "merely deepen the rift" between Arab governments on the conflict. — AFP

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

very hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

The planets align to make this a great day for you, Aries. You should find that your mood is excellent and your mind focused. Romance will thrive in the nice, stabilizing atmosphere, and you should feel free to take center stage. If you've been suffering from any doubts lately, now is the time to take control of the situation and go for it.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

There's a loving tenderness in the air that you'll find very comforting, Libra. Ground your sensitive emotions and make room for love to enter the picture. It could be that you're feeling indecisive when it comes to matters of love and romance. The best thing for you to do is stabilize your emotions and then make the effort to connect intimately with another. The decisions will flow naturally from there.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Try to bring things down to reality today, Taurus. This is a good day to consolidate and organize. When it comes to matters of love and romance, try not to be so fickle. You may be giving someone the runaround just to test his or her devotion. This is an important time for you. You should probably work to ground and solidify instead of keeping things so light and ambiguous.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may need to slow down a bit after the hectic pace of the last couple of days, Scorpio. It's essential that you take a more reserved and sensitive approach, especially with matters having to do with the heart. Try to ground and center yourself. Instead of thinking about conquering someone, try simply sitting back and receiving their appreciation and affection.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Take it easy today, Gemini, and work to digest some of the input you've received over the past couple days. This is a day to contemplate and plan. With matters of the heart, you may find that a sensitive, grounded approach works best. This isn't always your favorite mode of operation, but it's one that will provide you with the balance to counteract your usual frenzied pace.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

The general atmosphere of the day may seem too slow and stodgy for your tastes, Sagittarius. Try not to get bogged down in details. Try not to worry too much. You may find that it's difficult to get any enthusiasm out of people today. You might just want to sit back and take it easy. This is a good day to plan and reorganize. Honor your recent achievements and consolidate all that you've worked for.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Anything having to do with love and romance is likely to go well today if you play your cards right, Cancer. See what you can do to ground your fluctuating emotions. Try your best to bring them into balance. Take a practical approach and slow down. Communicating with groups of people will be extremely rewarding. Come out of your shell and show your sensitive side to the world. It will be greatly appreciated.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Take it easy today, Capricorn, and work to digest some of the input you've received over the past couple days. This is a day to contemplate and plan. With matters of the heart, you may find that a sensitive, grounded approach works best. This isn't always your favorite mode of operation, but it's one that will provide you with the balance to counteract your usual frenzied pace.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a terrific day for you, Leo. You'll notice a sense of well-being that makes you feel secure that all your hard work is finally starting to pay off. It's as if you've reached a comfortable ledge in your trek up the mountain. This is a good resting spot that will let you catch your breath for a moment. Take this opportunity to relax and regroup.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Anything having to do with love and romance is likely to go well today if you play your cards right, Aquarius. See what you can do to ground your fluctuating emotions. Try your best to bring them into balance. Take a practical approach and slow down. Communicating with groups of people will be extremely rewarding. Come out of your shell and show your sensitive side to the world. It will be greatly appreciated.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

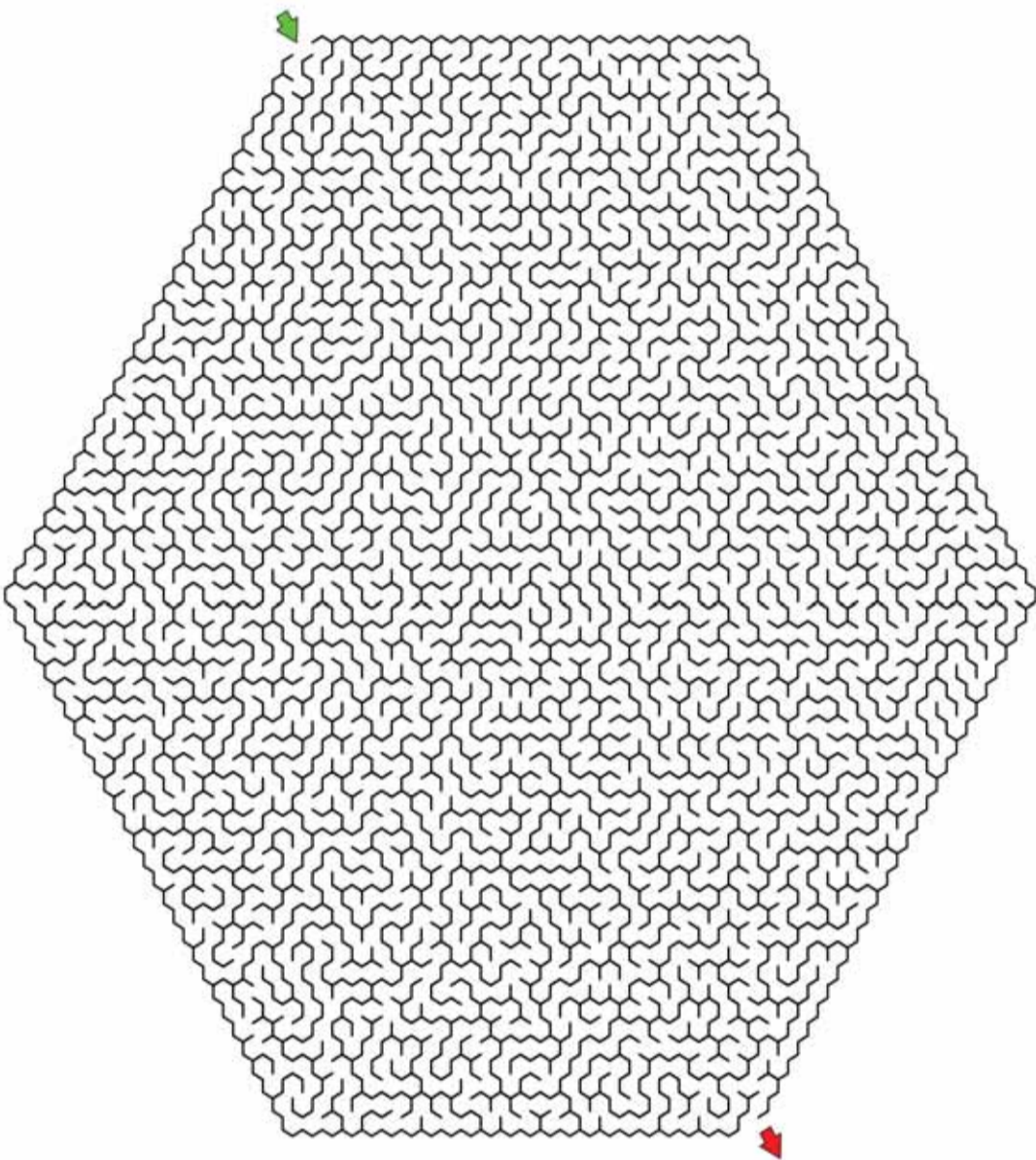
Try not to be too fixed in your attitude today, Virgo. Realize that you may have to give a little in order to work comfortably with the people around you. It's important that you be slow and reserved in your moves, especially in matters of the heart. Be open and receptive. Try not to scare anyone away with abrasive words or insisting that you're always right.



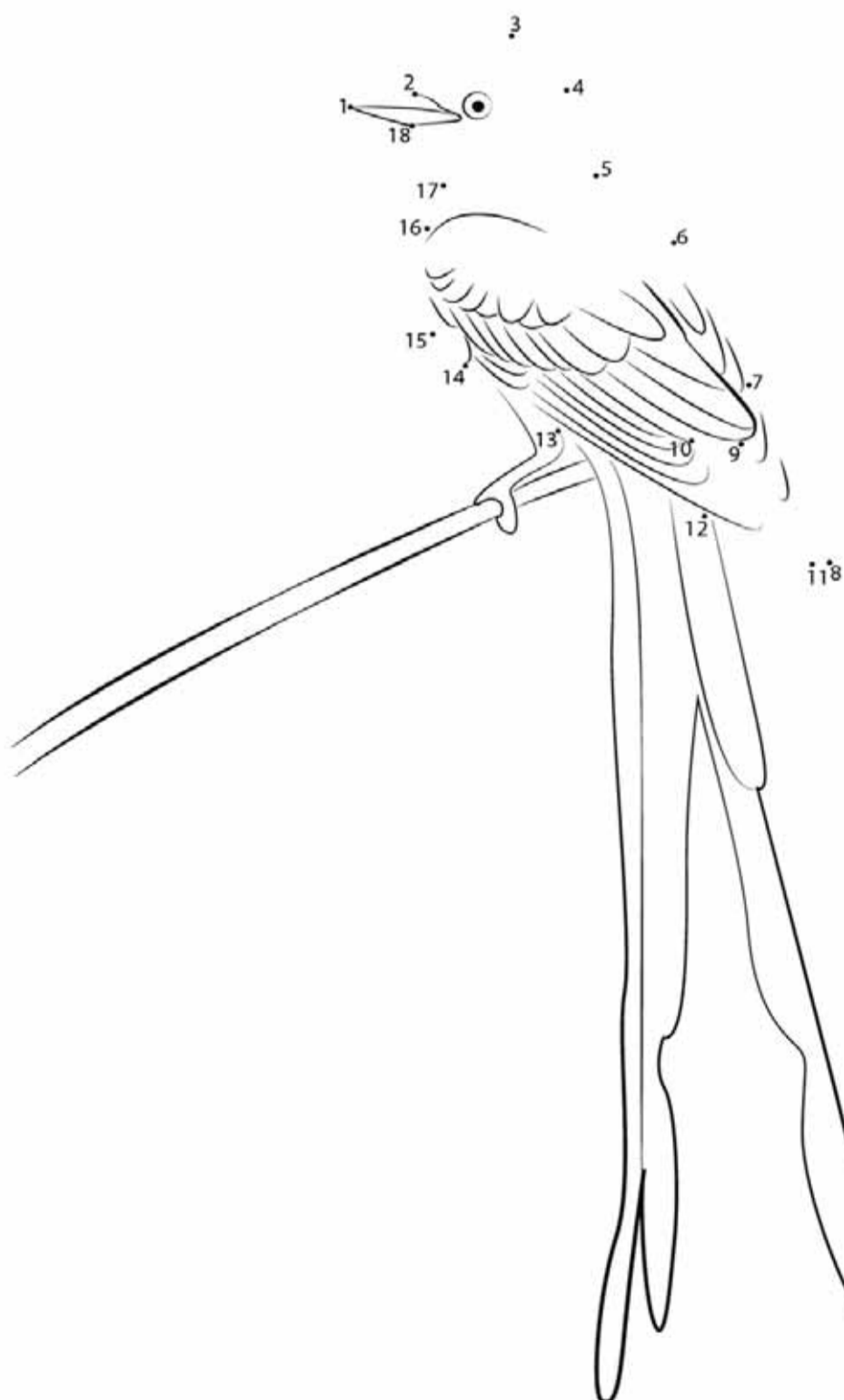
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

There's a loving tenderness in the air that you'll find very comforting, Pisces. Ground your sensitive emotions and make room for love to enter the picture. It could be that you're feeling indecisive when it comes to matters of love and romance. The best thing for you to do is stabilize your emotions and then make the effort to connect intimately with another. The decisions will flow naturally from there.

Find the way



Join the dots



Word Scramble



Chinese New Year

DIRECTIONS: Unscramble the letters to form terms associated with Chinese New Year. Watch out! A few have more than one word in the term.

- EYMNO _____
- LMLOOFNU _____
- MPINGDLU _____
- ILYAFM _____
- RNAODG _____
- INACH _____
- ASGNEOR _____
- MOBAOB _____
- IAZODC _____
- DCBANNUEA _____
- RUALN _____
- NLEEEOPV _____
- CLGDOKUO _____
- FEIWOSRKR _____
- NLNRAET _____
- DRE _____
- EFATVISL _____
- GIFST _____
- RESITPOPRY _____
- ACNEADR _____



Sports

Photo of the Day



RIO DE JANEIRO: Aaron Colton performs at Vidigal's favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Hamilton launches diversity commission

LONDON: Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton is launching his own diversity body to attract more black youngsters into motor racing, insisting the "time for token gestures is over".

Hamilton, a powerful and influential voice in the current anti-racism movements sweeping the globe, is the only black driver in F1.

He said he was teaming up with Britain's Royal Academy of Engineering to launch The Hamilton Commission to help make motor racing "as diverse as the complex and multicultural world we live in".

"I've been fighting the stigma of racism throughout my racing career — from kids throwing things at me while karting, to being taunted by fans in black face at a 2007 Grand Prix, one of my first Formula One races," 35-year-old Hamilton said in an article in The Sunday Times.

"Despite my success in the sport, the institutional barriers that have kept F1 highly exclusive persist.

"It is not enough to point to me, or to a single new black hire, as a meaningful example of progress. Thousands of people are employed across this industry and that group needs to be more representative of society." The research partnership wants to encourage young black people to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Hamilton hopes that will then open up avenues for them to boost the number of minorities represented in Formula One. "The time for platitudes and token gestures is over," added the six-time world champion.

"I hope that The Hamilton Commission enables real, tangible and measurable change. "When I look back in 20 years, I want to see the sport that gave a shy, working-class black kid from Stevenage so much opportunity, become as diverse as the complex and multicultural world we live in." — AFP

Alex Zanardi 'condition stable' but fears of brain damage

'He arrived with significant crano-facial trauma'

MILAN: Alex Zanardi, the former Formula One driver who became an inspirational Paralympic champion after having both his legs amputated in a motor racing accident almost two decades ago, was fighting for his life yesterday after a handbike crash with doctors telling reporters: "The neurological damage is serious".

Zanardi suffered serious head injuries with fears for his sight after losing control of his bike and colliding with a truck during a race in Italy on Friday.

The 53-year-old Italian was airlifted to hospital in Siena and underwent three hours of delicate neurosurgery before being placed in an artificial coma.

Zanardi remained "intubated and on artificial respiration" and his "neurological picture remains serious," doctors at the Santa Maria alle Scotte hospital said.

Dr Sabino Scolletta, head of the emergency department, said on Saturday afternoon that Zanardi was in a "stable condition".

"The clinical picture is good overall, even if it remains serious neurologically," said Scolletta, also referring to "eye injuries".

"There could be consequences for his sight. For this reason, we asked our ophthalmologists for thorough advice, but the assessment can only be made in the next few days," he explained.

Neurosurgeon Giuseppe Olivieri, who carried out the operation on Friday night, described Zanardi's condition as "very serious". "The conditions are stable, but the neurological damage is serious and uncertain, and instability and deterioration may be possible," Olivieri told journalists.

"He arrived with significant crano-facial trauma. "All the bones of the face are fractured. He also has

fractures on both sides of the frontal bone.

"At the moment, we are not talking about his neurological state. This is something that we will see later, when he wakes up and if he wakes up."

"The patient's situation is serious, that is to say that he can also die. In such cases, the improvements are slow, while the worsening can be brutal."

An investigation has been opened into the organisation of the 'Obiettivo tricolore' relay race in Tuscany.

Mario Valentini, coach of the Italian Paracycling national team, said Zanardi lost control of his bike on a hairpin turn and made "two rolls" before hitting an oncoming truck.

The truck driver later underwent tests for alcohol and drugs which were negative, his lawyer said.

'DON'T GIVE UP'

An icon in Italy, Zanardi's photo made the front pages of the country's three

sports newspapers on Saturday, despite the return of Serie A football later in the day after a three-month shutdown.

"Alex's Drama," headlined the Gazzetta dello Sport whose front page was dedicated to the four-time Paralympic champion.

"No Alex, no!" wrote Corriere dello Sport, while Tuttosport headlined: "Alex, Italy!" Messages of support poured in for the former Grand Prix driver who twice won the CART championship in the United States, before having both his legs amputated following an accident on the Lausitzring track in Germany in 2001.

He went on to win four gold medals on his handbike in the 2012 and 2016 Paralympic Games, and two silver medals, and multiple world championship titles.

a stolen lineout and swept more than 70 metres downfield with backs and forwards involved.

Thanks to a succession of penalties, the Hurricanes stayed in touch for much of the game and were level at 25-25 with 10 minutes to play, before the Crusaders found another gear and sealed the match with two late tries.

"Our discipline was pretty poor in the first half," Crusaders captain Codie Taylor said. "We gave away countless penalties and a yellow card and that's something we have to look at. Against New Zealand teams you can't afford to do that."

Hurricanes skipper TJ Perenara said the Crusaders' precision could not be faulted. "They pounced on opportunities in the first half ... and scored off all of them which is a sign of a quality team," he said.

"In the second half we got ourselves in the hunt, it was 25-25 all at one point, but we gave away a couple of penalties and ended up at the other end." At half-time, the Crusaders led 19-15 from three tries, two of them converted, to four penalties and a drop goal by Jackson Garden-Bachop for the Hurricanes.

After Garden-Bachop landed another penalty soon after half-time when Jack Goodhue was sent to the sin bin, the Crusaders tightened their discipline and restricted the Hurricanes to a sole try while scoring two more of their own.

For the Crusaders, Reece, Braydon Ennor, Goodhue, Richie Mo'unga and David Havili all scored tries. Mo'unga landed four conversions and two penalties.

The Hurricanes points came from a try to Asafo Aumua while Garden-Bachop kicked five penalties, a drop goal and a conversion. — AFP

Clinical Crusaders cane Wellington in five-try Super Rugby romp

WELLINGTON: Super Rugby champions Canterbury Crusaders returned to action with their trademark efficiency yesterday when they put away the Wellington Hurricanes 39-25 in New Zealand's domestic version of the competition.

It was five tries to one for the visiting Crusaders, whose performance was blighted only by a high penalty count. The Crusaders are the dominant side in the southern hemisphere club championship, winning it for the past three seasons, and were again looking the side to beat before Super Rugby was halted by the coronavirus pandemic in mid-March.

They had a bye when the five New Zealand sides launched their own tournament called "Super Rugby Aotearoa" last week, in front of unrestricted crowds. But despite being sidelined for more than three months they were immediately into their stride and scored inside two minutes against a Hurricanes side desperate to bounce back from their loss last week to the Auckland Blues.

All Blacks wing Sevu Reece dived over in the corner after a brilliant handling move that started from



ROME: File photograph taken on April 2, 2017, former racing driver and paracyclist, Italian Alex Zanardi takes part in the 23rd Marathon of Rome. Ex-Italian Formula One driver Alex Zanardi, who won four Paralympic gold medals after having both legs amputated in a motor racing accident, was seriously injured, in a crash while competing in a handbike race in Italy. — AFP

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte wrote on Twitter: "Courage Alex, don't give up. All of Italy is fighting with you."

"I am so anxious and frightened about Alex Zanardi that I'm holding my breath. I am his fan. I am his friend," tweeted former world Formula One champion Mario Andretti.

"Please do what I'm doing and pray pray for this wonderful man." Former Formula One world champion Fernando Alonso posted an image of Alex on his handbike: "Come on champion," with Brazilian driver Felipe Massa saying: "I pray for you".

"Fight as you know how to do it, Alex. You are a very great man, courage," tweeted in Italian Charles Leclerc who drives for Ferrari.

Zanardi raced for Jordan, Minardi and Lotus in Formula 1 in the early 1990s before switching to the CART championship in the United States where he was series champion in 1997 and 1998.

He returned to F1 with Williams in 1999 before heading back to the CART series. "Alex is one of life's truly inspirational people and as we all know, a fighter through and through. Stay strong and Forza Alex," his former Williams team wrote on Twitter. — AFP

Nick Hockley looks to reset Australia cricket

SYDNEY: Interim Cricket Australia chief Nick Hockley says he intends to repair broken relationships and ensure everyone is "pointing in the right direction" again after accepting the top job at the troubled organisation.

The Englishman assumed the hot seat last week after Kevin Roberts resigned barely halfway through his tenure over simmering anger at his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

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.

But 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.

Hockley has his hands full working to appease players and staff. "I feel like I want to sit down with every single person," he said.

"I'm just really keen to find out how everyone's feeling, in the first instance, and I'm starting to understand that," he added in a Q&A on the Cricket Australia website.

"Everyone wants a solution and every bit of clarity we can get really helps. The challenge is that time is of the essence to sort all that out. And we owe it to

the game to sort it out."

A day after Roberts quit, Cricket Australia axed 40 jobs, or some 15 percent of staff, aimed at saving Aus\$40 million (US\$27.6 million).

The governing body said it was concerned about further financial shocks this year, with smaller crowds expected and extra spending on safety measures to keep COVID-19 at bay.

All planned Sheffield Shield and Twenty20 Big Bash League matches will continue but Australia A tours and Cricket Australia XI games have been put on hold. There is also uncertainty over whether Australia can host the T20 World Cup this year in the midst of the global pandemic.

Hockley, who was the T20 World Cup chief, said it was important to "get everyone pointing in the same direction".

"And I'm pretty clear on the priorities, which are getting the teams back to work, reaching out to all our stakeholders and coming together, and focusing on delivering this summer."

An international search is underway for a permanent appointment, with a range of candidates touted in the local press from former England captain Andrew Strauss to ex-Australian football chief David Gallop. Hockley, who worked on the 2015 Cricket World Cup organising committee and before that with the 2012 London Olympics team, was circumspect when asked if he wanted the job full-time.

"My approach throughout my entire career has been to focus on doing the best job I can with what I've been tasked with, and the future will look after itself. And I'll continue the same approach," he said. — AFP

Sports

Atletico Madrid eye Champions League as Getafe stumble again in race for top four

Espanyol beaten 3-1 at home by Levante

MADRID: Atletico Madrid boosted their Champions League push yesterday with a 1-0 win over Valladolid which moved them into third place in La Liga.

A goal from substitute Vitolo with nine minutes remaining gave Diego Simeone's side the three points. They now have 52 points and a four-point edge over Getafe in their Champions League pursuit after winning for the first time behind closed doors at their Wanda Metropolitano stadium.

Vitolo had come on as a substitute after 73 minutes for Marcos Llorente and grabbed the winner with a header from a corner after Valladolid keeper Juan Antonio Caro had failed to clear. Getafe's hopes of finishing in La Liga's top four took another knock as their disappointing return from the three-month coronavirus suspension continued with a 1-1 draw at home to Eibar.

Peter Etebo's smart finish put Getafe in front at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez before Eibar's Charles equalised from close range on the stroke of half-time.

Eibar might even have snatched victory, only to have a late goal from Pedro Bigas ruled out for offside. Getafe have now taken just two points from three games since the restart.

"It's clear we needed to win to give us a boost," said Getafe's Jaime Mata. "It would have kickstarted us after the break but we have to keep fighting until we get that win. People say our ambitions are too high but we are going to keep fighting."

Getafe are punching above their weight towards

the top of the table, having enjoyed a remarkable four years under coach Jose Bordalas.

They were only promoted to the top tier in 2017 and missed out on Champions League qualification on the final day last year, edged out by Valencia.

But their challenge may not extend so far this term given this draw followed a stalemate at home to struggling Espanyol and defeat by Granada.

It contributes to a more prolonged dip in form that has included only two wins in nine. Eibar are without a victory themselves in five matches but this was a valuable point that gives them something to build on in their battle to avoid relegation. They sit 16th, three points above the bottom three.

With their coach Jose Luis Mendilibar serving a touchline ban, Eibar fell behind after half an hour when Marc Cucurella's deep cross was volleyed back in by Angel Rodriguez and Etebo steered the

ball first time into the corner.

But Eibar responded and when Getafe's defence failed to push out together after a botched Eibar free-kick, Bigas was left free to nod across to Charles, who had a simple finish.

Neither team really deserved to win it in the second half but Eibar thought they had when Pape Diop's cross grazed the top of Bigas' head and bounced in. But Bigas had strayed just offside and Eibar had to settle for a point.

Earlier, Espanyol were beaten 3-1 at home by Levante, a blow to their morale after they resumed

getting together for informal workouts as lockdown restrictions have eased around the country.

"Please be advised that it is our consensus medical opinion that in light of the increase of COVID-19 cases in certain states that no players should be engaged in practicing together in private workouts," Mayer's statement said. "Our goal is to have all players and your families as healthy as possible in the coming months."

Multiple players from the Houston Texans and Dallas Cowboys have tested positive for the virus. On Friday the NFL Network reported that a San Francisco 49ers player had tested positive, and that he had been working out with teammates in Nashville, Tennessee.

In the most recent reported cases, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers confirmed they had players or staff test positive, but declined to confirm reports that the positive results involved at least two players.

Superstar quarterback Tom Brady, who signed with the Bucs this year after a glittering two decades with the New England Patriots, worked out with some of his new teammates on a high school field in Tampa, Florida, in May. Florida, which announced a one-day record of 4,049 additional confirmed cases on Saturday, has become a worry-spot for sports trying to get their seasons on track.

Major League Baseball is shutting down all spring training facilities in Florida and Arizona — another



MADRID: Valladolid's Spanish midfielder Kike Perez (R) and Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder Vitolo jump for the ball during the Spanish League football match between Atletico Madrid and Real Valladolid at the Wanda Metropolitan stadium in Madrid on June 20, 2020. — AFP

with an impressive win over Alaves and hard-fought draw against Getafe.

Espanyol stay bottom, three points adrift of safety. Athletic Bilbao climbed to ninth after Inigo

Martinez's flicked finish was enough to beat Real Betis 1-0. Betis' Sergio Canales missed an 85th-minute penalty in the defeat, which leaves coach Rubi on the brink of the sack. — AFP

Union advises NFL players not to work out together

WASHINGTON: With coronavirus cases popping up among multiple US sports leagues, the NFL Players Association has advised members to stop working out together.

That advice from union medical director Thom Mayer came Saturday, after Major League Baseball again shuttered spring training facilities in Florida and Arizona in the wake of a spate of positive COVID-19 cases for players and team staff members.

With the NBA, NHL and Major League Soccer all hoping to resume seasons shut down by the coronavirus pandemic, and MLB trying to hammer out a framework for getting 2020 underway, the cases have sparked concern. Mayer said in a statement to NFL players that "no players should be engaged in practice together in private workouts."

The NFL is still in the midst of a "virtual" off season with no formal team training sessions set to start until July 28.

But with the league still aiming to kick off on schedule on September 10, some players have been

state where coronavirus cases are on the rise.

USA Today reported that baseball players and staff won't be admitted to the facilities until they are disinfected and deemed safe.

The move comes a day after baseball's Philadelphia Phillies, Toronto Blue Jays and San Francisco Giants shuttered training campuses over virus concerns.

The Phillies said five players and three staff members had tested positive at the team's Clearwater, Florida, training center.

The NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning closed their facility 23 miles (37km) from Clearwater, after multiple players and staff members tested positive.

The NHL said Friday that 11 players had tested positive since training facilities reopened on June 8 in anticipation of a 24-team restart in July at still unspecified "hub" locations.

The rise in COVID-19 cases in Florida could be a serious concern for the NBA and MLS, which are both planning to resume play in so-called "bubble" environments that will isolate multiple teams in the state. The NBA is planning a July 30 restart at the Walt Disney World sports complex near Orlando, Florida. The league plans to have 22 teams — 13 from the Western Conference and nine from the East — to start play with a chance to reach the final.

MLS is also planning a return at Disney World with its 26-team "MLS is Back" tournament, to be held without fans starting next month. —AFP

Hatton, Ancer, Simpson and Palmer share PGA Heritage lead

WASHINGTON: Britain's Tyrrell Hatton closed with a 24-foot birdie putt Saturday to finish among four co-leaders after the third round of the US PGA Tour's RBC Heritage tournament.

Mexico's Abraham Ancer and Americans Webb Simpson and Ryan Palmer shared the lead entering Sunday's final round of the tour's second event after a three-month coronavirus hiatus.

Hatton fired a bogey-free eight-under par 63 to stand on 15-under 198 after 54 holes at Harbour Town Golf Links in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Hatton said he hadn't felt comfortable over the layout but breezed through Saturday.

"I've been lucky with where some of my misses ended up and I've really putted well, which is a big surprise," Hatton said. "Hopefully I feel comfortable tomorrow and hit some good shots."

The 28-year-old Englishman won the Arnold Palmer Invitational in March at Bay Hill in the last completed event before the tour's three-month coronavirus shutdown began.

Hatton birdied four of the first five holes, opening with a 40-foot birdie putt and two-putting from 35 feet for another birdie at the par-5 second. He made a 10-foot birdie putt at the fourth, a 12-footer to birdie the par-5 fifth and closed the front nine with a seven-foot birdie putt. Hatton, a four-time winner on the European Tour, sizzled with the putter on the back nine as well, holing birdie putts from 13 feet at the par-3 14th and 10 feet at the par-4 16th before his dramatic close.

Ancer shot 65, starting with birdies on three of the first five holes, all from four feet or less. He began the back nine with a three-foot birdie putt and followed a 15-foot birdie putt at 13 with his lone bogey at the par-3 14th after missing the green. He answered with birdies at 15 and 16.

"Feel like I'm not making anything," Ancer said. "I made maybe two putts outside four feet. I'm hitting the ball really well. I need a lot of patience, do the same thing, and hopefully they all fall in tomorrow." Palmer, sharing the lead entering the last round for the first time since 2011, shot 66 with five birdies from inside seven feet and a 16-footer at the 10th. His lone bogey came at the third when he found a greenside bunker and missed a six-foot par putt. "I hit it pretty well," Palmer said. "Overall, I'm excited. I still haven't played my best round 1-18. Maybe tomorrow will be the day." Simpson, the 2012 US Open winner, was the 36-hole leader after back-to-back 65s but could only muster 68, making a five-foot putt at the par-5 15th his lone back-nine birdie. "I hit a few good putts that didn't go in," Simpson said. "Hopefully tomorrow I'll be on the correct side of the hole."

One stroke behind the co-leaders were Mexico's Carlos Ortiz and Americans Joel Dahmen and Daniel Berger, who won last week at Colonial in the tour's virus comeback event. He birdied two of the last three holes to shoot 63.

"Winning last week definitely helps," Berger said. "It gives you some extra confidence. I'm putting really well. I'm not exactly hitting the ball well but I'm getting up and down when I've had to."

"If I have another good round tomorrow, I think I'll be right up there." World number one Rory McIlroy, who followed an opening 72 with a 65 and 66, stood in a pack five back on 203.

"The last two days I've hit it better. I've been a little more comfortable over my shots," McIlroy said. "I'm going to have to shoot 62, 63 to have a chance." — AFP

Former Bangladesh captain tests positive for virus

DHAKA: Former Bangladesh cricket captain Mashrafe Mortaza and two other players said they have tested positive for the coronavirus as infections in the South Asian nation rise. Left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam and former opener Nafees Iqbal were the other two who revealed their positive test results.

Mashrafe, who stepped down as the one-day international captain in March but remains available for selection, announced the news on social media late Saturday. "Today my Covid-19 results came as positive. Everyone please pray for my quick recovery," Mashrafe wrote on Facebook.

"The number of infected people has now crossed one lakh (100,000). We all have to become more careful. Let's all stay at home, and not get out unless it is necessary. I am abiding by the protocol at home."

Mashrafe — also a member of parliament — had been active in helping people during the pandemic, particularly in his hometown and constituency Narail west of the capital Dhaka.

His mother-in-law and another relative tested positive last week, a Narail health official said.

Nafees, the elder brother of Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal, played 11 Tests and 16 one-day internationals for his country and is currently a domestic cricket coach. "Ten days ago I was feeling feverish. For two days my body temperature was high. I lost my appetite, felt very weak," Nafees said in an audio message emailed to reporters on Saturday.

"Then I gave sample for the test and the result came that I am COVID-19 positive." Left arm spinner Nazmul, who took part in virus aid work in his hometown of Narayanganj, said he received his results on Saturday. "I don't know how I got it. My parents also tested positive along with me," the 28-year-old, who played one Test, five ODIs and 13 Twenty20 internationals for Bangladesh, told AFP Sunday.

Bangladesh has confirmed over 108,000 infections and more than 1,400 deaths from the coronavirus so far. The impoverished country has restarted economic activities after lifting a months-long virus lockdown at the end of May even as cases continue to rise. —AFP



Mario Balotelli (left)

Mancini tells Balotelli to 'wake up'

MILAN: Italy coach Roberto Mancini on Saturday urged Mario Balotelli to "wake up" before he throws his career away.

Balotelli's ill-fated stint at hometown club Brescia appears to be coming to an end, with reports his contract will be terminated after repeated absences from training. "I've told him a thousand times that he's wasting a huge talent," Mancini told Italian television.

"I have loved Mario very much since he was a

boy and he has done extraordinary things. He has a crazy physique, speed, technique, and at 30 he is in the middle of his career.

"I hope that one day he will wake up and change," Mancini recalled Balotelli to the Italy squad when he took over as coach in May 2018, having successfully worked with the forward at Manchester City and Inter Milan.

Balotelli, who has 36 caps for Azzurri but only one since 2014, joined Brescia last summer in the hope of winning a place in Mancini's Euro 2020 squad, but has scored just five times in 19 matches for the club.

He made his debut with local team Lumezzane in Serie C as a 16-year-old, before moving to Serie A giants Inter in 2007, where he won three league titles and the Champions League. He later had two spells at AC Milan and also played for Liverpool, Nice and Marseille. —AFP

18 Alex Zanardi 'condition stable' but fears of brain damage



19 Atletico Madrid eye Champions League as Getafe stumble again in race for top four



19 Mancini tells Balotelli to 'wake up'



Arsenal stunned by Brighton late show

Wolves first side to make a move on the top four



BRIGHTON: Arsenal's French-born Ivorian midfielder Nicolas Pepe (2L) scores the opening goal during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Arsenal at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton, southern England. —AFP

LONDON: Neal Maupay played the villain twice over for Arsenal as the Frenchman netted a vital stoppage time winner for Brighton, while Wolves closed on the top four with a 2-0 win at West Ham on Saturday. In the first full weekend of English Premier League matches since the coronavirus shutdown in March, Arsenal's faint chances of a return to the Champions League next season faded further after blowing a 1-0 lead to lose 2-1.

The Gunners' cause wasn't helped by an injury to goalkeeper Bernd Leno, whose screams echoed round the empty Amex Stadium after an awkward fall provoked by a slight push by Maupay.

The German twisted his knee and pointed the finger angrily at Maupay as he was stretchered from the field. "I think he had a hyperextension of the knee and we have to assess the damage," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. Nicolas Pepe put the visitors ahead in the 68th minute with a superb strike. But Arsenal's defensive frailties were exposed seven minutes later when Brighton defender Lewis Dunk stabbed home from

close-range. Adding insult to injury for Arsenal, deep into stoppage-time Aaron Connolly helped the ball on to Maupay and he kept his head for a fine finish.

Maupay and Matteo Guendouzi then had to be separated at full-time as tempers flared. "Some of their players need to learn what is humility, especially one of them. He was talking all game, he was saying bad things," said Maupay. "This is what happens when you talk too much on the pitch."

Arteta's side are languishing in 10th place, eight points adrift of the top four, and may not even qualify for the Europa League. "It is unacceptable in the way we lost the game. The fact we missed so many chances and we did not compete for the second goal," said the Arsenal boss.

Brighton's first win in 2020 moved them five points clear of the relegation zone. After seeing Arsenal, Tottenham, Manchester United

and Sheffield United fail to win on their return, Wolves were the first side to make a move on the top four. Substitute Adama Traore enlivened a sleepy encounter at the London Stadium with a brilliant run and cross to tee up Raul Jimenez to head home the opener 17 minutes from time.

Pedro Neto then crashed home a spectacular second on the volley as Nuno Espirito Santo's men moved level on points with Manchester United in fifth, just two points behind Chelsea.

Leicester remain well on course for Champions League football themselves next season, but Brendan Rodgers's men were denied a winning return by Craig Dawson's late equaliser for Watford in a 1-1 draw at Vicarage Road.

In a remarkable conclusion, England left-back Ben Chilwell's superb 90th minute strike seemed to have

handed the Foxes all three points. However, Dawson secured a vital point in Watford's challenge to beat the drop with an acrobatic effort three minutes later to score his first goal for the club.

A point edged third-placed Leicester eight clear of Wolves and United, while Watford move a point above the relegation zone. Bournemouth remain in the drop zone as they conceded twice in the first 23 minutes to lose 2-0 at home to Crystal Palace.

Luka Milivojevic and Jordan Ayew scored for the Eagles, who move up to ninth.

The stage is set for Liverpool to return for the first time since the top-flight hiatus when the title chasers make the short trip to city rivals Everton.

Jurgen Klopp's side, 22 points clear of second-placed Manchester City, need two wins from their remaining nine games to end their 30-year wait to be crowned English champions.

If the Reds beat Everton, they can wrap up the title with another victory against Palace at Anfield on Wednesday. —AFP

Torino and Parma play out draw in Serie A return

MILAN: Torino's Andrea Belotti missed a penalty as Serie A resumed on Saturday after a three-month coronavirus shutdown with his side drawing 1-1 at home with Parma as ten-man Verona held on to beat Cagliari 2-1.

Juraj Kucka grabbed a point for Parma with his 31st-minute leveller after Nicolas Nkoulou had nodded the hosts ahead after quarter of an hour behind closed doors at Turin's Stadio Olimpico.

But the first top-flight game in 103 days in Italy got off to a false start with a deflated ball having to be re-

placed after five seconds.

Before kick-off players and referees formed a circle to observe a minute's silence for the victims of COVID-19, which has killed over 34,500 people in Italy. Torino had a message on their shirts for health care workers: "Thanks to all our heroes."

Cameroon defender Nkoulou took the knee after heading in the opening goal, paying tribute to American George Floyd, whose death at the hands of police in Minnesota sparked worldwide protests over racial and ethnic inequality.

But Parma were soon on level terms with Ivory Coast forward Gervinho setting up Slovak Kucka to blast in the equaliser 16 minutes later.

Parma could thank goalkeeper Luigi Sepe for their point when, after already denying Simone Zaza at close range, the Italian stopper then pushed away Belotti's spot-kick just three minutes after the break.

Torino ended a six-match league losing streak with their first point since January 12, but stay 15th,



Tempers flared

three points above the relegation zone, with Parma in eighth place.

"This performance gives us an important signal, we are alive," said Torino coach Moreno Longo.

"We're satisfied with the performance but not the result. We played united as a team despite coming through a difficult period. "We think positive for the next game even if the path is long and difficult."

Four postponed games take place this weekend with Verona getting past Cagliari thanks to Samuel Di Carmine's first-half brace. Di Carmine headed in the first after 14 minutes, adding a second after 26 minutes.

Verona's Fabio Borini saw red harshly after 35 minutes, sparking Cagliari hopes of a first win in sixth months. And Giovanni Simeone pulled a goal back for the Sardinians when he connected with a Luca Pellegrini cross before the break.

But Verona held on to consolidate seventh place, one point off the Europa League places. Cagliari,

meanwhile, without a win since December 2 and playing their first game under new coach Walter Zenga, are 12th.

Atalanta hosting Sassuolo and Inter Milan facing Sampdoria at the San Siro. Champions Juventus return to their quest for a ninth consecutive title at Bologna on Monday, days after their Italian Cup final defeat to Napoli.

Maurizio Sarri's side hold a one-point lead on second-placed Lazio, while Inter Milan are third, nine points adrift of the leaders. In the battle for Champions League places Atalanta are fourth, three points ahead of Roma, with Napoli sixth a further six points adrift.

At the bottom of the table SPAL and Brescia occupy the last two places and look destined to play in Serie B next season.

But five teams look set to battle to avoid the final relegation berth with just three points between Udinese in 14th position and 18th-placed Lecce. —AFP