

Friday Times

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Local

Privacy under siege



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Talking about privacy and individual freedoms is a controversial topic among supporters and opponents, and each of them has their reasons according to circumstances. But nowadays it has become a double-edged sword.

Supporters believe that privacy should be protected in all cases, while those who are against it believe that this is not the case when public health is threatened. I think this issue will always be debatable for various reasons, mostly political, but with the advent of COVID-19, it has become more intense and the argument has become more complicated and confusing.

Amnesty International has warned that applications to track coronavirus patients may collect in-depth personal information, claiming that the privacy and security of thousands of people is at risk by the new platforms. The organization is saying that the programs differ in their features, but can generally be classified into two categories - decentralized applications, where data is kept on the device, and centralized applications where data is kept on a separate server.

Meanwhile, privacy advocates tend to agree that it is better to store information locally on a device than send it to a separate server, but I wonder what kind of information should be classified as confidential in the world of social media and the Internet.

Amnesty International reviewed software from 11 countries in the world, including Kuwait, used in applications on the phone linked to an electronic bracelet to track contact with people who may be infected with the coronavirus in home quarantine to ensure that they do not mix with others for a specific period of time. When the home quarantine period is over, the person is required to return the electronic bracelet to health authorities in the country.

Other countries have used similar applications, such as Austria and Switzerland, but they are decentralized models for tracking contact via Bluetooth. Other applications for example, use a centralized system, but information is only downloaded voluntarily with users' consent or at the request of a health authority. However, Amnesty said that there are still concerns about these applications. Personal information includes the individual's health status,

nationality, age, gender and travel history.

Personally, I am a supporter of privacy of individuals and protecting them from harm, especially with regards to their personal life and security, but are we tackling this issue from a political and human perspective or health-wise or both? Is age and gender confidential information nowadays? I am not a proponent of violating privacy, and I respect this vehemently, but I wonder which data that can pose a danger when exposed publicly.

I understand how some people can be careless by disregarding protection guidance and deliberately mixing with others. I agree that in such cases the society must obtain a tool such as these applications to protect healthy people from possible harm temporarily.

I have more concerns about keeping track of individuals' affairs through electronic systems throughout the year via social media, for instance. Most of us today have one or more accounts in these electronic programs, for which you must include data about yourself when registering such as name, nationality, country and age.

In such accounts you can and may keep a record of videos, ideas, stories or opinions related to your life and anything else you wish. You may document your travels and it even retains your memories from past years and reminds you of them. I know that it requires your permission before reposting, but in reality everything that is published on the Internet remains in existence for years. But I have not seen any protesters.

Some may argue that what is published on social media is with the consent of the persons themselves. I think this issue is more complicated and overlapping, and the topic of health privacy today is not spying on the personal info of individuals without their knowledge. We are surrounded with many electronics platforms that we only know very little about. We are great users of computers, but how many of us know how to fix it when broken?

I believe that the issue of individual privacy is important and I hope that these organizations follow up the matter when the coronavirus crisis is over, and not just an application that has info that is likely to be found on any social media account.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: This picture taken on June 21, 2020, shows a partial view of the Sheikh Jaber Causeway in Kuwait City. The causeway project, which includes two paths over the Kuwait Bay, is the world's biggest maritime causeway project. Undertaken by Kuwait Ministry of Public Works (MPW), the construction began in 2013 and was officially inaugurated in May 2019. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Friends, a lasting treasure



By Abdellatif Sharaa

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Yes, it is the weekend already, believe it or not, and we are expected to see the country open up more, so please my dear friends continue being careful. Keep wearing your masks when in closed quarters, try your best to keep your distance from your brothers and sisters, and once you finish a job, wash your hands or keep a sanitizer handy. We must make 'Mr Corona' understand that he will never ever be trusted until he goes away with anger and never shows his ugly face again no matter how long he lurks around. As I said before, I will never get tired of saying that it is our behavior that will keep us corona-free, and if we behave as we are supposed to, coronavirus will not find a home to survive, and that home is a cell in the human lungs. If we do not heed the warnings and follow instructions, well, I am sorry, because then we will realize that we brought it upon ourselves.

I did not have the chance to sit next to my father a lot as I left home early on, then one day after getting married, I was visiting my parents and found myself sitting next to my father during a hot day. We were having a cold drink, and talking about the lives of grownups, marriage, responsibilities and commitments. My father started to turn the ice cubes in his

glass, then gave me a stern and serious look and said: "do not forget your friends at all, they will be more important to you as you grow older." He continued, "regardless of how much you love your family and children, you will always need friends. Remember to go out with them and keep in touch."

"What a strange advice," I thought to myself back then. I just joined the married life, I grew wiser, and thought that for sure my wife and the family we will build will be all that is needed to give my life a meaning. Yet, I followed my father's advice and kept in touch with my friends, and I was keen to increase their number each year. Then as years went by, I realized that my father knew what he was talking about. After a life that spanned over sixty years, here is what I learned: Time goes by, life keeps moving on, distances grow larger, children grow up and become independent and often get separated from their families although this breaks the family's hearts, jobs come and go, people do what they should not do, parents pass away, colleagues forget what you gave them, yet true friends remain regardless of time and distance between them. Love your family, care for your children, but let there be friends for you.

Local

Cabinet expected to ease coronavirus restrictions

MPs demand approval of civil rights law for bedoons

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The council of ministers was expected at a meeting yesterday to approve easing the coronavirus restrictions and take the country into the second phase of the five-phase return to normal life.

That move was delayed a week ago because of the steep rise in the number of cases especially among Kuwaiti citizens, and although the number of cases remains relatively high, the cabinet is likely to decide on the move.

The health ministry has however attributed the rise in the cases in the past few days to the house testing campaign launched by ministry teams earlier in the week, but there

are some signs indicating the situation was improving, especially that the recovery rate hit 80 percent. Under the second phase, malls will reopen, curfew will be relaxed to be from 9:00 pm to 5:00 am, restaurants and cafes will partially reopen and government offices will resume with a limited capacity.

Central bank governor Mohammad Al-Hashel, who heads a government committee on economic stimulus during the coronavirus crisis, said yesterday that reopening the economy as quickly as possible while maintaining health precautions, is the best way to help the national economy.

Bedoons' rights

In the meantime, a number of MPs yesterday

called for approving a draft law that grants basic civil and humanitarian rights to over 100,000 of stateless people, locally known as 'bedoons'.

The call came following reports of a young bedoon man, studying at the medical college, attempting to commit suicide by taking pills apparently over difficult living conditions. The man was rescued at hospital and his action triggered angry reactions on social media.

MP Mohammad Hayef said the rejection to approve the civil rights law for bedoons in the assembly has compounded their tremendous sufferings and led to deterioration in their living conditions.

He said that these difficult conditions have

caused psychological and physical illnesses to a large number of bedoons, especially those who are unable to renew their IDs from the Central Agency for Illegal Residents, which is essential for most bedoons to do their transactions. Hayef said the coronavirus crisis has even complicated the misery for many bedoons.

MP Nasser Al-Dossari called on the assembly's human rights panel to keep the draft law ready so it can be debated and approved in the next assembly session, adding that the law grants bedoons basic human rights. MP Thamer Al-Suwait said that MPs must insist to debate and vote on the civil rights law at the earliest in order to end the human sufferings of bedoons.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Local



Mahboula workers stage sit-in protest after employer 'abandoned' them

Employer reports workers absconding to avoid payments, workers lament

By Faten Omar

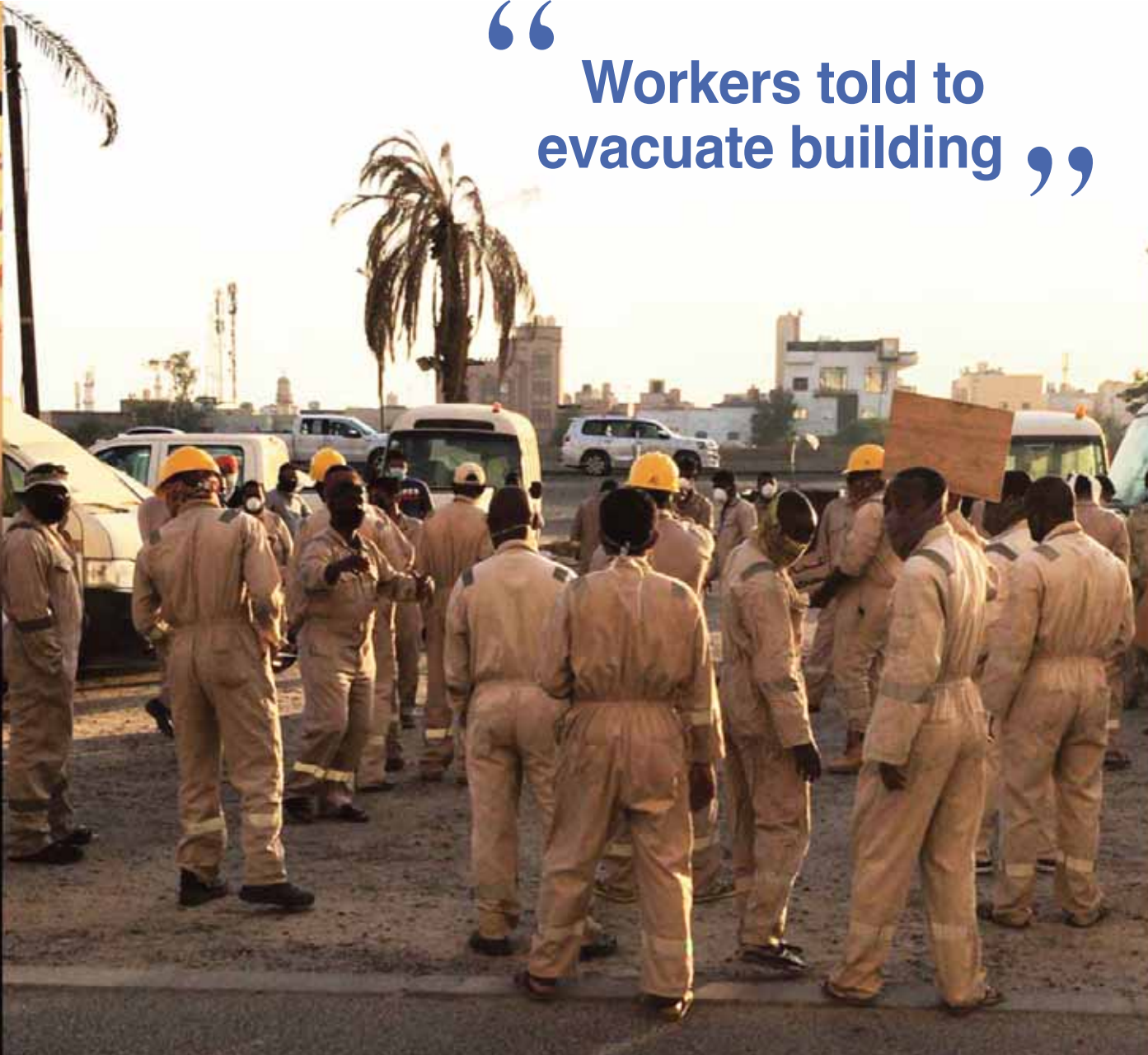
Around 200 workers staged a peaceful sit-in protest on Wednesday evening at their apartment building in Mahboula over unpaid salaries, saying that they have not been paid for four months.

Dozens of workers from Egypt, India, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and elsewhere working for a private technical company told Kuwait Times that they have not been paid for four months and are now being forced to go home without their salaries. The last time the men have been paid was in February.

"Our only wish now is to go home but with our money. We worked and deserve to be treated with respect. Our employer is forcing us to go back to our home countries promising us to send our money there, but we all know that once we leave the country, no one will send us anything," one of the workers who asked to remain anonymous told Kuwait Times.



“ Workers told to evacuate building ”



An estimated 500,000 expat employees in Kuwait have lost their jobs, had salaries completely stopped or cut since the pandemic lockdown began in mid-March. More than 100,000 expatriates have left the country on repatriate flights. Hundreds of thousands are stuck in the locked down areas in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Mahboula and Farwaniya without income and are unable to leave the country.

According to the worker, the company has filed absconding cases against him and his colleagues, canceling their civil IDs and visas as a way to force their repatriation without being paid.

“Thanks to Kuwait for extending our visas, otherwise we would be in violation of the country’s law. We have dignity and respect to ourselves. We do not want to be visa violators, at which point we could be accused of breaking the law,” the employee said.

According to the protesting workers, the company’s owner told them that they have to evacuate the building that they are living in. “The haris told us to evacuate our apartments next Sunday. In short notice, they want us to leave our flats to the streets with no money,” the worker said.

“We have been experiencing regular water cuts and elevator cuts by the landlord because our employer hasn’t paid him rent for five months. We have written a letter of complaint to the Ministry of Labor about these issues but we have not received any reply yet,” he noted.

According to the worker, the company informed them that they are on unpaid leave since April 25. The workers told Kuwait Times that they have not received their rights and their passports were taken by the employer.

“They were sending food to some workers but because the food was Asian, it was hard for some to digest. We were buying food from our own pockets while others couldn’t afford it. The fact that they were sending food to our building is proof that we are not absconding as they claim.” Workers asked for intervention by all the relevant authorities to rescue them from these injustices.



KUWAIT: These photos provided by a representative of the protesting workers show them holding signs demanding justice during a peaceful sit-in outside their building on Wednesday.

Defense Ministry fumigates Kuwait graveyards



KUWAIT: Ministry of Defense personnel fumigated facilities at graveyards around the country in an effort to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The operation was done in cooperation with Kuwait Municipality to help protect families of the deceased, people attending funerals and graveyard workers, funeral affairs director at the municipality Dr Faisal Al-Awadhi said.

Kuwait Times

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Local

Over 24,000 students register in ministry's online platform

29,908 12th grade students eligible to take final exams

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Education announced the enrollment of 24,264 male and female 12th grade public school students so far to the ministry's online platform to take interactive classes, noting at the same time that there are 29,908 students who are eligible to take the 12th grade final exams. This came in a press release Wednesday after an expanded meeting headed by Minister of Education and the Minister of Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi with directors of all educational districts and directors of secondary schools.

The statement quoted the minister as praising the ministry's endeavors with regards to the launch of the educational online platform,

and the efforts of members of the educational field, saying that these efforts have an effective impact on the success of the progress of the educational process. He further stressed the importance of focusing on some of the main issues, national responsibility, participation and cooperation between the ministry's sectors.

Meanwhile, Acting Ministry Undersecretary and Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Badr Bajad urged school principals to communicate with concerned authorities in case they have inquiries on all matters related to the educational online platform. In the meantime, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Education Osama Al-Sultan expressed his ap-

preciation for schools and students' response in registering for the educational platform. Sultan added that students' registration will continue in order to allow the remaining students to register. He explained that registration was briefly closed Tuesday in order to update and sort the number of students, and enable bedoon students to register by their civil ID number only without the need for a serial number. The education ministry has not provided timetables or details on when it plans to launch online classes for grade 12 students. The current plan calls for grade 12 students to resume classes by August, and students of other grades by October. — KUNA



Education Minister Dr Saud Al-Harbi

News in brief

Oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil fell by \$1.05 to \$36.91 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared with \$37.96 pb a day earlier, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, the price of the Brent crude dropped by \$2.32 to \$40.31 per barrel, and the West Texas Intermediate also went down by \$2.36 to \$38.01 pb. — KUNA

3,805 passengers

KUWAIT: A total of 3,805 passengers were set to depart Kuwait yesterday aboard 23 flights to Nepal, India, Egypt, Pakistan, Armenia, Iran, Qatar and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said. Meanwhile, DGCA announced statistics of expats who departed to their countries via Kuwait International Airport during the period from March 16 until June 23. The total number of passengers was 104,746, who boarded a total of 663 flights to 92 destinations, it explained.

Paperwork banned

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manfouhi gave orders to stop all paper correspondence and instead use electronic means of communications only starting yesterday, except for official documents. This decision falls in line with the Health Ministry's instructions to limit paperwork as much as possible in an effort to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Kuwait, Manfouhi explained in a press statement.

Kuwaiti, Nigerian FMs discuss bilateral ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, on Tuesday, had a phone call with Nigerian counterpart Geoffrey Onyeama. Both top diplomats discussed bilateral ties and means to enhance cooperation in various fields, especially in combating impacts of COVID-19. Recent regional and global political developments were discussed as well during the call. — KUNA



Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah

UNESCO opens nominations for 'Kuwaiti' digital prize

PARIS: UNESCO announced on Wednesday that it will open nominations for the 2020-2021 Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO Dr Adam Al-Mullah said in a press statement that the last date to submit entries will be next September. The prize encourages society to be more inclusive and encouraging towards people with disabilities, he indicated, adding that the digital sphere provided boundless opportunities to help this sector of society. Participants — whether individuals, institutions, and international NGOs — should submit works that would provide a considerable contribution to persons with disabilities, Mullah said. He revealed that the \$40,000 prize will be equally divided by winners of the contest chosen by UNESCO's higher-ups. The winners will be awarded in an event to be held in Paris on December 3. — KUNA



Dr Adam Al-Mullah

Arab Parliament rejects Israeli annexation plans

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament rejected and condemned any plans or measures taken by Israeli occupying force to annex the Jordan Valley, the northern Dead Sea and settlements, as it contravene with international law and United Nations resolutions. In their conclusion statement, after a virtual session featuring Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the Arab Parliament called on the international community, especially the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations, to live up to their responsibilities, take immediate and firm measures to prevent the implementation of the annexation plan by the Israeli occupying force. The parliament also called on regional, international par-

liaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to reject the Israeli plan to annex the Palestinian territories in occupied West Bank, defend the two-state solution, and clarify implications of the annexation scheme on the chances of peace in the region and on international peace and security. The Arab Parliament praised the joint action taken by Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, Netherlands, Ireland and the European Union regarding the Israeli government, through which they warned against annexing any parts of the West Bank, calling on these countries to continue their international diplomatic contacts in this regard. The parliament also called on the European Union to take urgent and proactive steps to stop the annexation plan and recognize the independent state of Palestine and its borders of June 4 1967, and its capital city of Jerusalem, by all EU countries that have not yet been recognized the Palestinian State. At the same time, the Arab Parliament affirmed its support for the decision of the Palestinian leadership to cut all forms of the relationship with Israel and to break away from the agreements and obligations arising there from signed between the PLO, Israel and the United States. — KUNA

Convicted rapist arrested in chalets area after resisting police

Human trafficking suspect remanded; 'double personality' woman sentenced

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police arrested a citizen wanted to serve a 20-year prison sentence in two separate rape cases. The arrest took place recently at the chalets area in Sabah Al-Ahmad, where he resisted arrest and tried to escape. In this regard, security sources said that an Ahmadi police patrolman suspected the Kuwaiti man at a routine checkpoint in the area when he said that he left his ID at home, but eventually produced it when the officer insisted. An identity check revealed that the man is wanted for 20 years in prison in two rape cases, and was arrested after his attempt to escape failed. The suspect was referred to the central prison to serve his sentence.

Drunk driving

A 34-year-old Syrian woman and a 23-year-old Kuwaiti woman were recently arrested at a checkpoint at the Hawalli immigration department roundabout for driving under the influence of alcohol. Security sources said that on asking for their IDs, the Kuwaiti woman insulted the patrol officer and tried to physically assault him when he asked her to get into the patrol vehicle.

She was eventually brought under control, and both were arrested and referred to Salmiya police station, where the citizen insulted the officer once more. A case was filed and further investigations are ongoing.

Human trafficking

An informed source said the prosecutor general decided to jail the Bangladeshi MP accused of money laundering, human trafficking, visa



Vehicles' inspection waved till Dec 31

trade and bribes for 21 days in the central prison pending investigations in the case filed against him. He also decided to remand in custody the other suspects, while he released a female owner of a company suspected in the case on a KD 2,000 bail.

Double personality

The appeals court sentenced a Kuwaiti woman to seven years in jail after she was found guilty of forgery. The woman reportedly forged documents to create a fake personality, then used her double personality to marry two times, have two jobs and also forge a Kuwaiti nationality. The court also sentenced the woman's husband and a second man to seven years in jail each for being complicit in the case.

Bootleggers arrested

Police busted five apartments used for brewing home-made liquor during a raid in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, the Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Information Department said. Police first arrested five men who broke the curfew, and then noticed that they were in an abnormal condition. They later discovered that the five used five apartments to produced home-brewed alcoholic drinks. The suspects were taken to the proper authorities for further action.

Hand freed

Qurain Firemen freed a domestic helper's hand that was stuck in an Arab-style toilet in



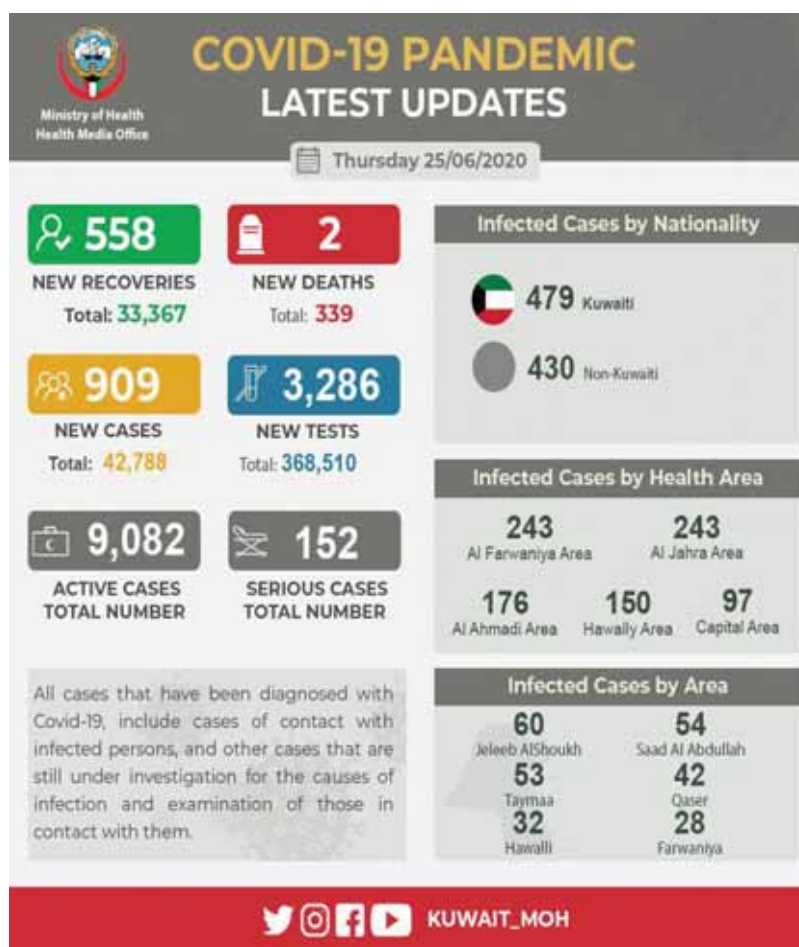
a house in the area. Paramedics then looked after the woman and gave her necessary medical attention.

Vehicles inspection

The Interior Ministry announced that vehicles' technical inspection is waved from March 12 until December 31, 2020 as per ministerial decision 443/2020, which exempted all types of vehicles from inspection for the said period provided they have valid insurance for at least one year.

Kuwait confirms two COVID-19 deaths, 909 cases

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health yesterday reported two deaths and 909 more cases of COVID-19, raising the count to 339 and 42,788 respectively. The latest infections include 479 Kuwaiti citizens, while the remaining cases are of several other nationalities, the ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in his daily briefing. Earlier yesterday, the Ministry of Health said that 558 more coronavirus patients had recovered in the past 24 hours. This brings the country's overall count of recoveries from the viral illness to 33,367 so far, the ministry said in a statement. Lab analyses and tests showed that the patients had already been cured of the virus, the ministry added. — KUNA



Health Ministry probes nurse embezzlement case

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Health Ministry opened an investigation into suspected administrative violations in the nursing services sector in Al-Sabah Health District, over suspected unlawful payments made for nursing staff members. This comes after it was discovered that a nurse who worked in a hospital in Al-Sabah medical specialized zone had left Kuwait on a recent flight after embezzling over KD 15,000 in unlawful payments throughout her time working for the ministry.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health Dr Mustafa Reda issued an administrative order to form an investigation committee headed by Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs in order to probe "administrative wrongdoings" in the nursing services sector in Al-Sabah Health District. He also ordered the committee to come up with a mechanism to improve nursing services in Al-Sabah specialized medical centers and hospitals in order to avoid similar violations from happening in the future.

In other news, the technical department in the Ministry of Health addressed all hospitals to arrange for the return of expatriate doctors stuck abroad. It instructed hospital administrators to provide lists of the names of doctors from all departments stuck abroad. Notably, 658 nurses, radiologists and lab technicians who were stuck in India had returned to Kuwait this month, while nurses are set to return to Kuwait from the Philippines and Egypt soon.

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WHO warns of oxygen shortage

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Democracy 'under threat' during pandemic



RAMALLAH: The Israeli settlement of Beit El is pictured behind a Mosque in the city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. —AFP

Israel wages war of semantics

'Area C' - Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank

JERUSALEM: To the United Nations, "Area C" is Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank. But Israel, which aims to annex parts of the territory, is waging a war of semantics over its status. Pro-Israel NGOs and more recently a government agency are using email and social media to take aim at foreign media about their "biased" grammar when describing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But rather than trying to impose the biblical "Judea and Samaria" term used by Israel for the West Bank, the reproaches focus on the Oslo peace accords of the 1990s. As part of these interim Israeli-Palestinian agreements, the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C. The first two zones constitute around 40 percent of the territory and were due to be largely under Palestinian jurisdiction.

Area C was to remain under full Israeli control, with the intention of Israel transferring part of the zone to the Palestinians under a final agreement. But peace talks collapsed and Israel now intends to annex its settlements and the Jordan Valley - which lie in Area C - and could set such plans in motion from July 1. Annexation forms part of a broader US peace plan unveiled in January, which paves the way for the eventual creation of a Palestinian state in the remaining territory. Currently more than

450,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank, alongside more than 2.8 million Palestinians.

Washington is now proposing a 50-50 split of Area C, separating around 300,000 Palestinians who live there from the settlers whose homes would become part of Israel. Yossi Beilin, one of the Israeli negotiators of the Oslo accords, said that Area C was intended to become "part of Palestine" in a final deal. Viewing Area C now as Israeli territory "abuses the Oslo agreement", he told AFP, by turning something "interim" into something "forever". Beilin said the Israeli right believes they are being "very generous" in proposing to divide the area in two. "They don't understand why the world is against it," said Beilin, who has served as a minister for the left-wing Labor party.

'Disputed' land?

The West Bank was ruled by Jordan following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and Amman later annexed the territory, in a move never recognized by the international community. Israel drove out Jordanian forces in the 1967 Six-Day War and sees the land as "disputed", opposing the term "occupied", which is widely

used in international media.

An Israeli government official recently told a European correspondent to abandon the phrase "occupied Palestinian territory". Foreign media including AFP describe Areas A, B and C as Palestinian territories, referring to the region as the "occupied West Bank". The United Nations special envoy, Nikolay Mladenov, clarified to AFP that Area C is "considered occupied Palestinian territory". But efforts by an Israeli government department to seek out journalists on social media - telling them to scrap the term - have escalated in recent weeks.

"I believe this public nitpicking on Twitter is a new phenomenon," said Glenys Sugarman, former director of Israel's Foreign Press Association. "I handed over the FPA towards the end of last year - I was not aware of anything like this by the GPO," she said, referring to Israel's Government Press Office. The GPO, which is linked to the prime minister's office, acknowledged "occasional engagements with incorrect/inaccurate/biased reports in the media". The government department stressed, however, that it was not "the GPO's role" to clarify Area C terminology ahead of Israel's possible annexation.—AFP

International

UN, Europe, Arabs warn Israel against annexation

Washington gives green light

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations and European and Arab powers on Wednesday warned Israel that its plans to annex Palestinian land would deal a major blow to peace but the United States offered its green light. One week before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to start the annexation process, a UN Security Council session provided a final opportunity for the international community to urge him to change course. "I call on the Israeli government to abandon its annexation plans," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told the virtual conference. The UN coordinator for the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, said annexation "could irrevocably alter the nature of Israeli-Palestinian relations."

"It risks undoing more than a quarter of a century of international efforts in support of a future viable Palestinian state living in peace, security and mutual recognition with the State of Israel," he said. Seven European nations - Belgium, Britain, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland and Norway - in a joint statement warned that annexation would "severely undermine" prospects for resuming the Middle East peace process. "Under international law, annexation would have consequences for our close relationship with Israel and would not be recognized by us," they warned. Arab League secretary general

Ahmed Aboul Gheit said annexation "will destroy any prospect for peace in the future" and threaten regional stability.

US defers to Netanyahu

But the administration of President Donald Trump, a close ally of Netanyahu, has declined to criticize annexation and has rejected the consensus of most of the world that Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are illegal. "Decisions about Israelis extending sovereignty to those places are decisions for the Israelis to make," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters in Washington. Trump in January unveiled a Middle East plan that would pave the way for Israel to annex areas around Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley that it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Palestinians, in turn, would have an independent state but one that is demilitarized with a capital on the outskirts of the contested Jerusalem.

The plan also calls for major economic investment into Palestinian areas, funded largely by Gulf Arab states that find common cause with Netanyahu and Trump in hostility toward Iran. But US allies including the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, one of two Arab states to have a peace treaty with Israel, have warned that annexation would jeopardize the Jewish state's hopes for better ties. Pompeo brushed aside

Peace treaties

In 1978, Israel and Egypt agree on peace terms after talks brokered by the United States. The Camp David accords are the first peace agreement between Israel and an Arab state. The peace treaty is signed in 1979 by Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, who is assassinated two years later by Islamists opposed to the deal. A second peace accord, with Jordan, will follow in 1994.

Invasion of Lebanon

In 1978 and again in 1982, Israel invades civil war-ravaged Lebanon in a bid to halt cross-border attacks by Palestinian militants. Israeli-backed Lebanese militiamen kill hundreds of civilians in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut. Israeli troops remain in southern Lebanon until 2000. In 2006, after the abduction of Israeli soldiers by Shiite militant group Hezbollah, Israel launches a devastating month-long offensive in Lebanon.

Intifadas

The first Palestinian intifada, or uprising, erupts in 1987. It ends in 1993 when Israel agrees to limited Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza as an interim step towards a comprehensive peace agreement. The deal is sealed with an historic handshake between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who is assassinated two years later by a Jewish extremist. —AFP



JORDAN VALLEY: Israeli security forces fire tear gas to disperse Palestinian protesters amid clashes following a rally against Israel's West Bank annexation plans, in the Jordan Valley village of Fasayil on June 24, 2020. —AFP

such concerns, saying the United States was "talking to all of the countries in the region" about the weeks ahead. "I regret only that the Palestinian Authority has refused to participate in that," Pompeo said.

Palestinians urge action

At the United Nations, Palestinian representative Riyad al-Malki said annexation would be

a "crime." "Israel seems determined to ignore that big red stop sign the international community erected to save lives," he said. He warned that the Palestinians could approach the International Court of Justice and urged nations to impose sanctions on Israel if it goes ahead. European nations, while opposed to annexation, have been split on how severely to respond if Israel goes ahead. —AFP

Key dates in Israel since its creation

JERUSALEM: Here are some milestones in the history of Israel, founded more than seven decades ago.

Born through war

Israel is created in May 1948, formed out of British-ruled Palestine three years after the end of World War II when the Nazis killed more than six million Jews. Israel immediately comes under attack by its Arab neighbors but repulses them. More than 760,000 Palestinians are driven out or flee, becoming refugees. In 1956, Israel attacks Egypt alongside Britain and France, which are seeking to overturn the nationalization of the strategic Suez Canal. They eventually withdraw under pressure from both the United States and the then Soviet Union. In June 1967, Israel wins a crushing victory over its Arab neighbors in the Six-Day War, seizing the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. In 1973, Egypt and Syria launch a surprise attack on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur to try to win back their lost territories, but are repulsed.

The Six-Day War and its impact on the Middle East

JERUSALEM: The Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, or Six-Day War, radically changed the map of the Middle East, opening the way to occupation and settlement of Palestinian territories by Israel. Between June 5 and 10, Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria. It occupied Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Syria's Golan Heights. Although Israel has since withdrawn from Sinai and the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and east Jerusalem have been annexed and the West Bank remains occupied by the Jewish state.

The build up

The lightning conflict was preceded by months of mounting tensions, with incidents flaring up in Israel and along ceasefire lines with Syria and Jordan. Israel threatens to take action against Syria if raids continued by Palestinian group Fatah, which launched its first military operation in December 1964. On April 7, 1967, six Syrian Mig planes are shot down during combat with Israeli planes, according to the Jewish state. On May 16, Egyptian president Gamal

Abdel Nasser demands that UN peacekeepers in the Sinai withdraw from Israel's border. He then blocks the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping, cutting off the Israeli port of Eilat. On May 30, King Hussein of Jordan signs a mutual defense pact in Cairo with Nasser.

Egypt's air power destroyed

At dawn on Monday, June 5, Israel stages an air assault that destroys more than 90 percent of Egypt's air force on the tarmac. Its armored vehicles head for Egypt. Arab countries declare war with Israel and Jerusalem comes under mortar fire.

Gaza falls

On Tuesday, June 6, the Israeli army seizes Gaza, which at the time is under Egyptian administration, pushing forward into the Sinai Peninsula. Israeli troops enter Jerusalem's Arab zone.

Israelis enter east Jerusalem

On Wednesday, June 7, armoured vehicles clash in the heart of the Sinai, as the Israeli army occupies the east bank of the Suez Canal. Its navy seizes Sharm el-Sheikh and clears the Gulf of Aqaba for Israeli ships. Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem are bombarded. Israeli forces enter Jerusalem's Old City and Prime Minister Levi Eshkol visits the Western Wall. Israeli forces take most of the West Bank of the Jordan River, including the towns of Bethlehem and Jericho. Jordan accepts a ceasefire proposed by the UN. —AFP

International

Yemen weddings air on live TV to avoid virus shutdown

COVID cases on the rise in war-ravaged Yemen

SANAA: The Yemeni grooms sit expectantly inside a TV studio, waiting for their wedding parties to be broadcast live so that families and friends can join in the celebrations despite a coronavirus lockdown. The pandemic has forced weddings to be scaled down or cancelled across the world but in the Yemeni capital Sanaa the traditional folk music and dancing have been beamed into people's homes instead. Well-wishers call into the satellite channel Alhawyah to offer their congratulations to the grooms, dressed in their finest clothes and with rifles propped up next to them and traditional daggers tucked into their belts.

As the number of coronavirus cases began to rise in war-ravaged Yemen, Alhawyah - Arabic for "identity" - began hosting wedding parties with the aim of reducing guest numbers and preventing the spread of the virus. Participants are sprayed with disinfectant before entering the studio for the all-male gatherings, where a popular band performs. Before the pandemic, weddings in Yemen were lively affairs that drew hundreds of guests - both men and women but separately in line with tribal tradition. The men spent the evening chewing qat, a mild narcotic that is a mainstay of Yemeni culture.

Presenter Abdulwahab Yahya said the idea of the show is "to keep the bridegrooms in good

health and to help them enjoy their weddings despite coronavirus". "Instead of guests coming to wedding halls to greet the bridegrooms, they can phone and greet them during the two-hour show," he said. Osama al-Qaood spent months trying to organize his big day before opting for a televised event. "Normal wedding gatherings will help spread the disease to neighborhoods and communities. My real joy is to ensure a healthy society," he told AFP. Yemen is engulfed in a long war between Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who control much of the north including Sanaa, and the government which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Five years of conflict have killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, and created what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. UN agencies and humanitarian groups have warned that Yemen's dilapidated health system will not be able to cope with a major outbreak of coronavirus. Authorities have so far reported 967 cases including 257 deaths, but the real toll is feared to be much higher. "I hoped that I would be able to organize a normal wedding where relatives and friends get together to celebrate," said another of the grooms, Mohammed I-Rahoumi. "But amid the spread of coronavirus, we came to the TV channel to receive greetings," he said. — AFP



HAAJAH: Salwa Ibrahim, a five-year-old girl suffering from acute malnutrition and weighing three kilograms, is bathed by her mother outside their impoverished house in Yemen's northern Hajjah province. — AFP

US puts sanctions on 5 Iran's ship captains

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on five Iranian ship captains who delivered oil to Venezuela, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reaffirmed Washington's backing for Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido. Speaking at a news conference, Pompeo said the ships delivered about 1.5 million barrels of Iranian gasoline and related components, and warned mariners against doing business with the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, whose ouster Washington seeks. "As a result of today's sanctions, these captains' assets will be blocked. Their careers and prospects will suffer from this designation," Pompeo said in a statement later.

"We will continue to support the National Assembly, interim President Guaido, and the Venezuelan people in their quest to restore democracy," Pompeo added to reporters. President Donald Trump's administration is seeking to block Iran's energy trade and also bring down Maduro. It has threatened reprisals and warned ports, shipping companies and insurers against assisting the tankers. Venezuela's exports are hovering near their lowest levels in more than 70 years and the OPEC member's economy has collapsed. Yet Maduro has held on, frustrating the Trump administration.

In a statement on Twitter, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza called the sanctions "an excess of arrogance" and "more proof of the Trump hawks' hatred of all Venezuelans." Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi wrote in a tweet that Washington's action signaled the failure of its pressure campaign and said Iran and Venezuela "remain steadfast in countering unlawful American sanctions." Iran has sent five tankers since April to the socialist government of fuel-starved Venezuela. The shipments have done little to alleviate hours-long lines at gas stations. — Reuters

Political stagnation, COVID-19 galvanise Maghreb migrants

ALGIERS: "Here, I don't exist - I die little by little," said Hamid, a young Algerian, his gaze fixed on Mediterranean waters he sees as his route to a better future. "My only hope is to leave for Europe." Like thousands of citizens from the Maghreb, the 28-year-old has chosen to risk his life by crossing the Mediterranean on a makeshift boat. With the coronavirus pandemic further squeezing already scant economic opportunities, Algerians and Tunisians are more determined than ever to reach Europe.

The deadly nature of their gamble was underlined again this month when 60 people, mostly women and children, drowned off the Tunisian coast. But this has not put Hamid off. An engineer by profession, he has work, but is forced to live with his parents because his salary is not enough to rent a separate apartment. His friends Djamel and Mohamed are also set on making a seaborne bid from Annaba, a northeastern city that is a popular launchpad for illicit crossings to Europe. The migrants are known locally as "harraga", "those who burn" - a reference to successful travellers setting their identity papers alight upon reaching their chosen destination, to avoid repatriation.

A protest movement that started early last year and quickly toppled longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika had sparked young people's hopes for a better future at home. But as the unprecedented peaceful movement has been ever more harshly repressed and the oil-dependent economy has tanked on low crude prices, illegal departures have ticked up again. Djamel

said that with people being arrested for simply "posting opinions on Facebook", making for the seas "has become a question of survival".

'Society regressed'

Algerian defence ministry figures show authorities arrested 1,433 people trying to depart illegally from Algeria's shores in the first five months of this year - more than three times the figure for the same period of 2019. The monthly numbers of detentions dropped dramatically from 828 in January to just 16 in March, as the country's coronavirus outbreak kicked in. But Kouceila Zerguine, a lawyer based in Annaba, is convinced that actual migrant departures from Algeria are anyway far higher than the official figures.

"You have to multiply that number by 20," because you have to account for those who actually complete their trip without being intercepted, Zerguine said. Sociologist Mohamed Mohamedi said the Hirak protest movement had offered citizens brief "hope of shaping a life" in Algeria. But, he said, "the return of the 'harraga' is due to the return of hopelessness". Mahrez Bouich, a professor of philosophy and politics in Bejaia in northeastern Algeria, agreed that the lack of hoped-for changes, along with economic stagnation, were to blame.

The pandemic has "exacerbated social inequalities and injustices", Bouich said. Despite a 2009 law that punishes migrants intercepted at sea with six months in prison (five years for smugglers), growing numbers of Algerians are attempting the crossing - often more than once. Aboard the boats are doctors, nurses, policemen, the unemployed and entire families, lawyer Zerguine said, arguing that the phenomenon cannot be explained by unemployment alone. Those who decide to leave "want to live with the times, they want more freedom and dignity". Mohamed, the prospective migrant, said Algeria's social conservatism had overlooked young people. "My grandparents are more open in spirit than my parents - it's mad," he said. "Society has regressed and I refuse to regress with it." — AFP

International

Democracy under threat during pandemic, global leaders warn

Some countries using virus curbs to 'silence critics'

STOCKHOLM: Over 500 political and civil society leaders, Nobel laureates and rights groups yesterday warned that some governments were using the coronavirus pandemic to "tighten their grip on power," undermining democracy and civil liberties. In an open letter signed by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, actor Richard Gere and Nobel Peace Prize laureates Shirin Ebadi, Lech Walesa and Jose Ramos-Horta, among others, the authors called the ongoing pandemic a "formidable global challenge to democracy."

"Democracy is under threat, and people who care about it must summon the will, the discipline, and the solidarity to defend it," the authors wrote. "At stake are the freedom, health, and dignity of people everywhere." The letter - the aim of which is to raise "awareness and mobilize citizens" - was initiated by the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). "Just as the pandemic is

already having massive economic and social consequences, it is very likely already having very profound political consequences," Kevin Casas-Zamora, the organization's secretary general, told AFP.

Stressing that it was still early days and the full impact on democracy would have to be evaluated later, Casas-Zamora noted there were already worrying signs. Casas-Zamora pointed to "cases like Hungary where basically the emergency powers invoked by the government had no expiration date." Those powers were lifted however by a unanimous vote in parliament on June 16 that took effect the following day.

Casas-Zamora pointed also to Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's expansion of emergency powers and El Salvador's use of detention centres as other causes for concern. Noting that emergency powers were a "legitimate part of the arsenal" of democratic governments to deal with exceptional circumstances, Casas-Zamora said the

exercise of those powers had to be "proportional to the emergency." Speaking of how to balance strict measures such as lockdowns with protecting liberties, he noted that it was still hard to gauge exactly which strategy was most efficient.

As a result, it was important to not fixate on whether you had the "correct" policy but instead on whether you could adjust that policy. "There's a greater chance of finding that right balance if you are able to experiment and able to correct and adjust your public policies," Casas-Zamora said. Another worry was that not only would some governments overreach with their policies, people would also become "numb" to those types of overreaches when gripped by fear of the disease. "A fearful citizenry tolerates that and becomes used to a more constrained space to exercise their fundamental rights," Casas-Zamora said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a surge in authoritarian behavior by governments

around the world, posing a growing threat to democracy, hundreds of former prime ministers, presidents, Nobel laureates and lawmakers have warned. "Authoritarian regimes, not surprisingly, are using the crisis to silence critics and tighten their political grip," wrote some 500 signatories, including more than 60 former leaders, in an open letter organized by the Stockholm-based Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

"Even some democratically elected governments are fighting the pandemic by amassing emergency powers that restrict human rights and enhance state surveillance without regard to legal constraints (or) parliamentary oversight." More than 80 countries have enacted emergency measures, according to the U.S.-based International Center for Non-Profit Law, ranging from curfews and fines for those who breach the rules to extra surveillance, censorship and increased executive powers. — Agencies

Reparations' calls gain steam amid US racial injustice

WASHINGTON: When California State Assemblywoman Shirley Weber introduced a bill last year to study reparations for African Americans, she was worried people wouldn't accept that racial inequality and injustice were still alive and well. Instead, the bill came up for a vote two weeks after the death of an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, at the hands of a white police officer spurred a nationwide reckoning on that very topic. It passed the assembly on June 11 with a 56-5 vote. "Maybe we'll be a model for what can happen at the federal level," Weber said. The bill goes next to the California State Senate, where she expects it to pass and then be signed into law by the governor.

The idea of reparation is nothing new and has been used around the world to compensate victims of war, rape, terror and a host of other historical injustices. Yet the United States has never made much headway in its discussions of whether or how to compensate African Americans for more than 200 years of slavery inflicted on their ancestors by white people. In the subsequent decades, racial inequality in wealth, housing, healthcare and education has persisted. Some Democrats want a commission to look into reparations, but the bill that would do this - HR 40 - has been on the table for decades and never garnered broad support.

Now that Floyd's death has shed light on racial inequality, advocates say support for reparations is up. Like Weber, many do not plan to wait on the federal government



ST PAUL: People chant during a demonstration on June 24, 2020 in St Paul, Minnesota. Protestors gathered outside of Governor Tim Walz's mansion to demand a stricter reform of police legislation in the state of Minnesota. — AFP

to make a move. "There are a lot of things happening locally," said Justin Hansford, a law professor and director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center at Howard University. "Reparations are going to happen locally first, and then later on, there's likely to be a national response as well." In partnership with Columbia University, Howard University last week launched a project to identify and support local efforts to provide redress to African Americans - both for slavery and for racially motivated crimes. Called the US African American Redress Network, it details more than 100 efforts to make good, ranging from public apologies to compensation in the form of scholarships or cash.

Local action

There are several cases of reparations

being paid to African Americans which advocates say could serve as a blueprint. In the earliest example, the state of Florida in 1994 awarded payment and free college tuition to descendants of the victims of a massacre 71 years earlier, when a white mob burned their town to the ground. Georgetown University and Virginia Theological Seminary are among schools pledging to offer funds for descendants of the slaves that built them or were sold to finance them. And last year the city of Evanston, in Illinois, created a reparations fund to bridge the racial wealth gap among its residents, funded by taxes on marijuana. There are many different ways to pay reparations, but what matters is the intent, said Weber, the assemblywoman. "That's normally what people do who believe that others have been wronged. — Reuters

Wrongful arrest based on flawed facial recognition

WASHINGTON: A flawed facial recognition algorithm led to the wrongful arrest of an African-American man in Detroit, according to a complaint filed Wednesday in a case highlighting concerns over the technology which critics say reinforces racial bias. The American Civil Liberties Union, representing Robert Williams, said Wednesday it was the first known case of an unlawful arrest based on face recognition technology, which according to critics is often inaccurate in distinguishing faces of black people.

"Though Robert Williams may be the first known case, he is likely not the first person who was wrongfully arrested and interrogated based off a bogus face recognition hit," the ACLU said on Twitter. "There are likely many people who just don't know that it was flawed technology that made them a target." Williams wrote in the Washington Post that he was arrested in January outside his home and held for 30 hours, later learning he was wrongly identified based on surveillance footage from a robbery at a watch store.

"I never thought I'd have to explain to my daughters why daddy got arrested," Williams wrote. "How does one explain to two little girls that a computer got it wrong, but the police listened to it anyway?" The news comes amid rising tensions over police misconduct following the deaths of several African Americans at the hands of law enforcement, and concerns that some technologies such as facial recognition may exacerbate discrimination. Various studies show facial recognition systems used in the United States may be wildly inaccurate in attempting to identify blacks.

Joy Buolamwini, founder of the Algorithmic Justice League, an activist group, said the Williams case highlights how artificial intelligence technology can be abused to reinforce discrimination. "This example cannot be reduced to a case of one bad algorithm," she said. "Instead what we are seeing is just a glimpse of how systemic racism can be encoded and reflected in AI systems." Amid the recent unrest, some firms including IBM, Amazon and Microsoft said they would not be selling facial recognition technology to police departments until regulations are passed to ensure against misuse. But many other systems are widely used. — AFP

International

Frustration, fear and family: Lockdowns test the bankers

Stress and heavy workloads lead to domestic strife

LONDON: Lockdowns are sharpening the knives in the cut-throat world of M&A banking. Stuck at home, armed only with a phone and a laptop, senior advisors are finding out just how strong their relationships with clients really are while frustrated juniors are left to crunch numbers in the shadows, deprived of the personal access to the rainmakers who could give their careers a boost.

With the dreaded “doughnut” – or zero bonus – almost a given this year, and some banks looking to cut jobs to weather the health crisis, the strains on bankers watching multi-billion dollar pre-pandemic deals go up in smoke is taking its toll. “It’s like a Darwinian selection,” said a senior advisor at a Wall Street bank. “If you’re a senior banker and you don’t win a single pitch you can only blame yourself. You’ve failed to cultivate your relationships and now it’s clear to everyone.” “If you don’t know them well enough, you will never win a mandate over Zoom,” said the banker, who declined to be named.

A lack of face-to-face contact is not just exposing the shortcomings of some senior financiers, it is also making it harder for junior associates to learn on the job and progress, headhunters, lawyers and bankers said. “Junior bankers are challenged by old problems – long hours, excessive workload and lack of acknowledgement – but this lockdown has made them more acute,” said Anna Marietta, co-founder and managing partner of headhunter Vici Advisory. “Juniors – especially analysts and in-

terns – can also learn through osmosis and they need physical interaction in the office. They need to see how their managers are handling client relationships and solving problems,” she said.

Relationship challenge

Global M&A volumes are down 41% so far this year, a far cry from the champagne-popping records of recent years when bankers at Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan, Morgan Stanley, Citi and Bank of America – the top five dealmakers – were the toast of Wall Street. Massive government support for companies, particularly in Europe, is keeping many firms afloat and delaying the kind of lucrative takeover deals that have put M&A advisors at the top of the investment banking world, bankers and lawyers said. But the pressure to drum up business means the workload – which often involves all-nighters and 100-hour weeks – is as heavy and stressful as ever, ramping up the risks for employees who turn a blind eye to potential burnout.

“Employers have always been responsible legally and financially for harm caused when they didn’t ensure an employee’s mental or physical safety at work,” said Melanie Stancliffe, employment partner at Cripps Pemberton Greenish. “Ensuring the physical safety of employees is the prime business reason to work from home and in this new normal, the focus needs to shift to protecting employees from other risks so they are well and can support – not sue – their employer.”

For some bankers, the job stress is compounded by working from home in proximity to their families and juggling chores with conference calls, a shock to the system for people used to jetting around the world to schmooze clients. “The lockdown for many throws into sharp relief the health of their home lives,” Paul McLaren, consultant psychiatrist at The Priory’s Wellbeing Centre in the City of London. “For many high achieving City workers that is an area of their lives which they may have neglected, and participated in only from a distance. Rebalancing the power relationships at home with partners is a particular challenge at the moment.”

Lockdown strains

Still, investment bankers, with their bumper salaries and bonuses from years past, can afford more palatial setups than most employees working from home during the health crisis. Some senior bankers in Britain have escaped to their remote country piles while others have hunkered down in spacious pads with attic studies in upmarket London neighbourhoods.

For some, the opportunity to spend more time with their family is a rare gift they relish. For others, the pandemic is exposing fractures in their personal lives. Well-known lawyers and psychiatrists contacted by Reuters have reported a surge in requests for help with relationships and mental health. “Suddenly, a high-powered financial professional is stuck all day at home with someone that

they usually barely see from week to week and with whom they’ve learned to co-exist at a distance,” said Ayesha Vardag, known in City circles for winning multi-million dollar divorce settlements for her clients. Vardag told Reuters that inquiries from financial sector employees and their spouses jumped 170% in the week to May 27 as British lockdown restrictions began to ease, with some choosing to call time on their marriages before bonus cuts and layoffs damaged prospective settlements. “Many financial sector clients and their spouses are reactivating divorce enquiries they made before lockdown, left in abeyance because they wanted to work on their marriages,” she said. “Then they found they couldn’t stand it any longer.”

‘The old-fashioned way’

For junior bankers, who typically range in age from the early 20s to early 30s, the lack of career progress under lockdowns is the main source of stress coupled with an ongoing hiring freeze at most banks. Shut out of video calls with clients due to digital security concerns, five analysts and associates said their opportunities to learn from – and impress – their bosses were limited. Instead of knocking on a partner’s door to discuss ideas, some juniors said they had to lobby line managers to set up a call with their bank’s top rainmakers. The top two M&A banks, Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan, said they were pulling out the stops to keep junior colleagues engaged.—Reuters

US states reimpose virus measures as cases near record

HOUSTON: US officials on Wednesday imposed tough measures including quarantines and stay-at-home advice as daily coronavirus cases approached record levels after surging across the nation’s South and West. Nearly four months after reporting its first death from COVID-19, the United States faces a deepening health crisis as a wave of infections hits young Americans and experts issue new acute warnings. More than 35,900 cases were recorded in the past 24 hours, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, with heavily populated states including Florida, Texas and California all reporting daily record cases. The world’s largest economy is already the country hardest hit by the pandemic, with a mounting death toll of almost 122,000.

Some officials – including the Texas governor – who loosened restrictions on business, dining, public gatherings and tourism, are now urging residents to again stay home. Three northeastern states that made progress beating back the pandemic – New York, New Jersey and Connecticut

– urged visitors arriving from US hotspots to quarantine themselves. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the advisory applied to visitors from Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Utah and Texas. Washington state was originally included, but Governor Jay Inslee said this was by error and it would be removed.

Several states in the South and West including Florida and Texas are suffering what White House advisor and top scientist Anthony Fauci described as “disturbing” new surges in infections. Fauci warned the next two weeks would be “critical” to addressing the surges. Texas, among the most aggressive states in reopening in early June, saw new cases hit a daily high of 5,489 on Tuesday. A concerned Governor Greg Abbott warned Texans of the virus’s “rampant” spread and said the “safest” place to be was in their homes, adding that those who needed to go out should wear masks.

“If we are unable to slow the spread over the



NEW YORK: People eat and drink at tables placed outside of a Manhattan restaurant as the city enters Phase 2 of re-opening following restrictions imposed to curb the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

next few weeks, then we will have to reevaluate the extent to which businesses are open,” he told a local NBC affiliate. “Because if it’s not contained in the next couple of weeks, it will be completely out of control, and Texas will have to ratchet back.” Pointing to recent mass gatherings

for Memorial Day and graduations, Abbott added: “Now it’s clear that Texas is not immune to COVID-19.” Abbott is an ally of Donald Trump, but his warnings are at stark odds with the president, who proclaimed Tuesday that “we did a great job on CoronaVirus.” —AFP

International

WHO warns of oxygen shortage as COVID cases set to top 10 million

Coronavirus has killed over 480,000 so far

GENEVA: The world faces a shortage of oxygen concentrators as the number of worldwide cases of coronavirus infection nears the 10 million mark, the World Health Organization head said on Wednesday. "Many countries are now experiencing difficulties obtaining oxygen concentrators," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news conference. "Demand is currently outstripping supply." The new coronavirus has hit 9.3 million people and killed more than 480,000 so far and is rising by about 1 million cases per week. This has pushed oxygen demand to 88,000 large cylinders per day, or 620,000 cubic metres of oxygen, Tedros said.

The sudden rise has created a dearth of oxygen concentrators needed to support breathing of COVID-19 patients suffering from respiratory distress. The health agency has purchased 14,000 oxygen concentrators from manufacturers and plans to send them to 120 countries in coming weeks, Tedros said. A further 170,000 concentrators - valued at some \$100 million - will be potentially available over the

next six months. The head of the WHO emergencies program, Dr Mike Ryan, meanwhile said the pandemic in many Latin American countries was still intense as deaths in the region surpassed 100,000 this week. Many countries had experienced 25-50% increases in cases in the past week, he said.

"I would characterize the situation in the Americas in general as still evolving, not having reached its peak yet, and likely to result in sustained numbers of cases and continued deaths," he said. The United States has criticized WHO's handling of the pandemic, calling the agency "China-centric". President Donald Trump demanded an immediate review and reforms and has pledged to quit the Geneva-based body. European governments are also working with the United States on an overhaul plan. While Tedros has pledged accountability and a post-pandemic review, Ryan said on Wednesday the agency was holding internal talks over its actions including what it has learned about controlling the virus. —Reuters



TEGUCIGALPA: A doctor carries an oxygen tank after disconnecting a man infected with COVID-19 from it at a field hospital set up in the yard of the School Hospital in Tegucigalpa. The authorities of the main hospital of the Honduran capital were forced to set up four tents to assist coronavirus patients since its rooms were overcrowded. —AFP

Net! no problem: Teachers in Chile take class to kids

CARAHUE: In the south of Chile, a rural school is bringing the classroom to students, deploying vans to help teach pupils who might not otherwise have access to education during the coronavirus lockdown. Students once rode in the vehicles to attend the Dream House School in the small town of Catripulli, located in Araucania, one of the poorest regions in Chile. In this cold, rainy and rural part of the country, the vans now travel to a handful of students' homes, after hundreds of children were left adrift when classes were suspended in March.

Approximately 70 percent of Dream House School's 101 pupils are Mapuche, an indigenous people who live in Chile and Argentina. Most don't own computers and even fewer have access to the internet, meaning the students can't take part in online classes. The coronavirus has emptied Chile's schools, forcing millions of children to follow their lessons online, but there are regions where up to 76 percent of pupils don't have access to the internet, according to a study by the Digital Country Foundation. And while children may have been supplied with school work on paper, they still don't have the sort of teaching support that is available online.

Preschool teacher Marcela Cea, 29, and van driver Alexis Araneda, 34, are among those who are traveling to pupils' homes to give lessons. "It seems super good to me, because there are tasks that one cannot understand, not even the parents, so the teachers can come and give extra classes," Katalina Zuniga, an 11-year-old student who receives lessons in front of her home said. Her mother, Modesta Caninuir, says the effort helps parents and now the "pupils are not going

to get behind on their homework." Araucania, around 500 kilometers south of the capital Santiago, is the third worst affected region in the country from coronavirus. Chile has recorded more than 254,000 cases and over 4,700 deaths from COVID-19.

Emotional care

Inside the van, measures are taken to prevent spread of the virus, such as social distancing, wearing of masks, and protective clothing and shoes. Pupils are given hand sanitizer and sit on chairs placed on carpets that are washed with chlorine. The aim is not just to look after the children's educational needs, but also their emotional ones. Before the class begins, the teacher speaks to the pupil to ascertain his or her state of mind. Cesar Mendez, a 12-year-old, likes science class best. The school on wheels "helps us do our classwork which I don't know how to do and neither does my mom," he said, before heading off to lock up goats in the family pen, a fun distraction now that he no longer spends his days in class. Meanwhile Zuniga, the 11-year-old, is learning about the Mapuche new year - We Tripantu - which is celebrated during the winter solstice from June 21-24. She says she has no doubt what she's wishing for in the new year: an end to the pandemic.

Most of the children's parents raise livestock and grow agricultural products. As of April, only four percent had internet access, and only six percent had access to a computer. The majority of the children speak Mapudungun, their native indigenous language, the school principal Marcela Araneda told AFP. Most schools in Chile are private, meaning public schools like this one rely on subsidies, and are trying to bridge the gap. Private schools "have technology, computers, access to the internet, the ability to download information, watch YouTube videos, and have all the tools," said Osmin Flores, a lead teacher. He said the aim of the mobile school is to "level" the playing field. Just because they are rural children does not mean "they're going to have fewer opportunities or be less intelligent," said Flores. —AFP

Roma across Europe seen as police target in lockdown

LONDON: Roma communities across Europe have become a police target in lockdown, a report found on Wednesday, amid a sharpening global focus on racial equality and law enforcement. The report by Amnesty International, a human rights organisation, said Roma communities had faced tougher quarantines than citizens who posed a greater health risk. People returning from places with high rates of the new coronavirus - such as Italy - were not targeted by authorities with the same stringent measures as Roma communities, who were quarantined en masse in whole apartment blocks or streets, Amnesty researcher Barbora Cernusakova said. "With Roma, the explanation always was a mixture that 'they congregate and live in bigger families and are not disciplined,'" Cernusakova told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "They came up with the idea that the Roma were somehow a source of infection... Those things show very, very clearly that there is a very, very strong bias."

Many Roma live on the fringes of society and struggle for work - with those in small settlements facing legal problems when it comes to land ownership, human rights experts say. Sweeping lockdown measures have exacerbated social and economic difficulties faced by Roma communities and increased dependence on credit, with many quarantined and without work for weeks. Roma communities were largely targeted in Bulgaria and Slovakia - home to some of Europe's largest Roma minorities - while migrants were targeted in cities such as Calais in France, a common stopoff for refugees fleeing war and poverty. —Reuters

International

South Korea, US mark 70th anniversary of Korean War

Tributes paid to the 'sacrifice, bravery' who laid down their lives

SEOUL: South Korea and the United States yesterday reaffirmed their commitment to defending "the hard-fought peace" on the divided peninsula as the allies marked the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War.

Communist North Korea invaded the US-backed South on June 25, 1950, triggering a three-year war that killed millions. The fighting ended with an armistice that was never replaced by a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula divided by the Demilitarized Zone and the two Koreas still technically at war.

"On this day in 1950, the US-ROK military alliance was born of necessity and forged in blood," US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper and his South Korean counterpart Jeong Kyeong-doo said in a joint statement. The two paid tribute to the "sacrifice, bravery, and legacy of those who laid down their lives in defence of a free, democratic, and prosperous" South, the statement read.

Seoul's defence ministry puts the war's military fatalities at 520,000 North Koreans, 137,000 Southern troops and 37,000 Americans.

The North has a different history of the conflict, which it knows as the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War, and insists that it was attacked first, before it counter-assaulted.

The official Rodong Sinmun newspaper carried more than 10 stories on the war yesterday, including an editorial asserting that a US invasion had

turned "the entire country into ashes".

"A ceasefire is not peace," it said. "The enemy is aiming for the moment that we forget about June 25 and lower our guard."

The nuclear-armed North, which is subject to multiple international sanctions over its banned weapons programmes, says it needs its arsenal to deter a US invasion.

Negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington have been deadlocked for months, leaving inter-Korean relations in a deep freeze despite a rapid rapprochement in 2018 that brought three summits between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the South's President Moon Jae-in.

The Rodong Sinmun carried a picture of a war heroes' cemetery on the outskirts of Pyongyang, with the caption reading: "The great achievements of the victory generation will not be forgotten."

White doves

At the site of one of the key battlefields in Cheorwon county, near the Demilitarized Zone dividing the peninsula, a handful of surviving South Korean war veterans marked the anniversary.

"It is our misfortune that the South and North had to live for nearly 70 years in confrontation because of the war," a veteran said, before releasing white doves as a symbol of their hopes for a final peace settlement.

Kim on Wednesday suspended plans for mili-



CHEORWON: Korean War veterans salute before a monument during a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War at the Baengmagoji War Memorial in Cheorwon, near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating north and south Korea. —AFP

tary moves aimed at the South, after the North raised tensions last week by demolishing a liaison office on its side of the border that symbolised inter-Korean cooperation.

Recent events showed that inter-Korean relations "can turn into a house of cards at any time", the South's JoongAng Daily said in an editorial yesterday on the anniversary.

The South Korean government has "persistently turned a blind eye" to Pyongyang's provocations, it said, resulting in a "slackening sense of security".

"There is no free ride in keeping peace," the editorial read, adding: "We hope the government and defence ministry deeply reflect on the lesson of 70 years ago." —AFP

Chinese veterans of Korean War urge peace

SHANGHAI: Chinese army veteran Yu Jihua faced the United States on the battlefield in the Korean War and the 87-year-old has no wish to see a repeat as tensions rise again between the nuclear-armed superpowers.

The 1950-53 conflict broke out 70 years ago yesterday and just a few months later would see Chinese and US forces engaged in combat for the first time. The two giants are deeply at odds again today over a range of trade and geopolitical issues, and no one is more sensitive to that than Yu, who still suffers night terrors from the war. "If a war is started, people all over the world will suffer," he warns. Yu was a teenager when he was among a "human wave" of Chinese soldiers thrust into battle to prevent ally North Korea collapsing in the face of a militarily superior American-led UN coalition. They turned the tide, sending UN forces retreating southwards, and the brutal fighting ended with no formal peace treaty.

South and North Korea are still technically at war. Up to three million Koreans died, along with 37,000 Americans. Chinese casualty figures are disputed but Western estimates commonly cite 400,000 dead, while Chinese sources put it at about 180,000. "We must all cooperate and then the whole world will be happy," says Yu. He and fellow veterans of China's so-called volunteer army are marking the anniversary with calls for peace. —AFP

Beijing officials declare outbreak 'under control'

BEIJING: The new coronavirus outbreak that has infected 256 people in Beijing since early June is "under control", officials in the Chinese capital said Wednesday, but fears still remain over the risk of community transmission.

Authorities have raced to contain the outbreak linked to the largest wholesale food market in Beijing after the first case was announced on June 11, leading to a partial lockdown of the city.

"The Beijing epidemic directly linked to Xinfadi (market) is basically under control, but at the same time we have discovered household and workplace cluster infections and cases of community transmission," said Beijing municipal government spokesman Xu Hejian at a briefing.

"The prevention and control situation remains complicated, we cannot lower our guard in the slightest."

Officials found that 253 out of 256 Beijing cases were linked to Xinfadi in the south of the city, while contact tracing for the remaining three was still ongoing.

The city announced seven new cases on Wednesday, with the rate of infection slowing since the start of this week.

"This sends a very positive signal, and proves that the prevention and control measures taken lately, as well as lockdown of residential compounds, are effective," said Lei Haichao, head of the Beijing health commission.

"The combination of fever clinics, discovering (cases) from close contacts, and mass nucleic acid testing have played an important role in early detection."

The city increased its daily nucleic acid sample testing capacity to 300,000 from 100,000 per day in early June, said Lei, adding that 137 cases — just over half — were found through screening.

Nearly three million people have been tested. Many cases have been low-income migrant workers at Xinfadi and nearby restaurants. The market and dozens of residential compounds have been under lockdown since June 13.

Beijing has mass-tested wholesale market workers, restaurant workers, residents of medium and high-risk neighbourhoods and delivery couriers over the past week.

The cities of Wuhan, where the initial COVID outbreak emerged late last year, and Mudanjiang have also seen similar mass testing campaigns to root out undiscovered asymptomatic cases.

Experts warned that smaller, recurrent outbreaks were likely in future.

"There may be an increase in cases in the winter or next spring, but I don't think the outbreak will be as big as the first wave of the pandemic," said Zhong Nanshan, a leading respiratory expert who spearheaded China's response to the SARS pandemic. —AFP

International

Australia to deploy 1,000 troops to Melbourne virus outbreak

Quake shakes N Zealand's South Island, no damage reported

MELBOURNE: Australia's military announced yesterday it would send 1,000 troops to Melbourne in an effort to help contain the country's only significant coronavirus outbreak over fears of a second wave. Victoria state has seen a spike in COVID-19 cases, recording almost 150 new infections over the past week as new clusters have emerged in Melbourne. Yesterday authorities recorded at least 37 cases — the highest national total since mid-April. While the numbers remain small compared to global tallies, the outbreak has rattled Australia, which has been rolling back restrictions after successfully curbing the virus spread.

Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said Thursday that 1,000 troops would be deployed to Victoria "in the coming days".

Up to 850 Australian Defence Force personnel will help monitor returned international travellers being held in hotel quarantine while about 200 others will provide logistical and medical support to COVID-19 testing facilities, she added.

Military personnel are already manning the borders of states that are closed to outside visitors as well as providing planning support to health and emergency management services, including in Victoria. However, the deployment of such a large military contingent to a major Australian city is

unprecedented in the coronavirus crisis.

It comes as concern ramps up in Melbourne, with additional pop-up testing centres set up in virus "hot spots" and supermarkets reimposing buying limits amid fears of a return of panic-buying. Virus clusters have emerged in large family groups spread across the country's second city, at a hotel used for quarantining returned travellers and at a clothing store. Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews said 1,000 workers were going door-to-door urging residents in the worst-affected areas to get tested, with hopes of testing 100,000 people in 10 suburbs over 10 days. "This suburban testing blitz is all about finding all of those people that have this virus, then having them quarantined in their home with appropriate support," he told reporters.

"It's about bringing further stability to these numbers. The numbers will grow, but that's exactly the strategy: Find these cases."

Australia has recorded roughly 7,500 cases of coronavirus and 104 deaths in a population of 25 million, with several regions believed to be effectively virus free. Meanwhile, a moderate 5.5-magnitude earthquake rattled New Zealand's South Island yesterday but police said there were no reports of damage and the offshore tremor did not prompt a tsunami warning. The shallow quake



MELBOURNE: People leave a Costco outlet with a trolley full of toilet paper and cleaning products as fears of a second wave of COVID-19 have sparked a rush on some supermarket items in Melbourne. — AFP

struck at 10:20am (2220 GMT) just off the coast of the remote Milford Sound region at a depth of 14 kilometres (nine miles), the US Geological Survey

said. New Zealand's official GeoNet seismic monitoring service put the strength at 5.9 and an even shallower depth of five kilometres.—AFP

Japan may consider first-strike alternative to Aegis Ashore by Oct

TOKYO: Japan's National Security Council may pick a replacement for the Aegis Ashore missile-defence system by October, according to public broadcaster NHK, and the country's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, has suggested one option could be a first-strike weapon. The surprise decision this month by Defence Minister Taro Kono to suspend Aegis Ashore has reignited a discussion in government and local media about whether Japan should obtain the capability to attack enemy bases to stop North Korean ballistic missiles and counter a growing threat from China's military in East Asia.

The government is concerned about Aegis Ashore's cost, and the possibility of spent booster rockets falling into populated areas. Before Japan picked the missile-defence system in 2018, ruling party lawmakers agreed that attacking missile bases didn't contravene the country's war-renouncing constitution because doing so would be an act of defence.

That conclusion prompted a decision to buy 1,000-kilometre (621 mile) range air-launched cruise missiles that could hit North Korea from the Sea of Japan. But it would be

difficult to use such missiles to hit mobile launchers without satellite targeting capability, experts say.

Any first-strike policy would represent a fundamental and controversial shift in military posture that could spur concern among Japan's neighbours. The United States, Japan's key ally, has also had reservations about Tokyo gaining an independent strike capability. Other alternatives to Aegis Ashore could include increasing the number of airborne early warning aircraft or deploying drones that could monitor missile sites and attack if a launch were judged to be imminent.

Without an Aegis Ashore substitute, Japan would have to rely more on Aegis radar-equipped ships that patrol the Sea of Japan and Patriot missile batteries that are a last line of defence against incoming warheads.

Keeping even two Aegis ships permanently on patrol, however, requires several vessels and hundreds of sailors that Japan's stretched navy might need elsewhere. Kono will speak at a news conference in Tokyo starting at 0700 GMT.—Reuters

Pilots' virus chat blamed for deadly Pakistan plane crash

ISLAMABAD: The pilots of a plane that crashed last month in Pakistan, killing 98 people, were pre-occupied by the coronavirus crisis and tried to land with the aircraft's wheels still up, according to initial official reports released Wednesday.

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane crashed into a crowded residential area on May 22 after both engines failed as it approached Karachi airport for a second landing attempt, killing all but two people on board, and a child on the ground.

The preliminary report outlines the flight's chaotic final minutes and a bizarre series of errors compounded by communication failures with air traffic control. Investigators found the plane was at more than twice the correct altitude when it first approached the runway, and the tower advised the pilots to circle for a more gradual descent, the report states.

But, instead of going around, the pilots attempted to land anyway — even though they had raised the landing gear. Air traffic control saw the Airbus A320's engines scrape the runway with a shower of sparks, but did not tell the cockpit.

The badly damaged engines failed as the plane turned to attempt a second landing.

Pakistan's aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan told parliament the pilots had been discussing the coronavirus as they attempted to land and had disen-

gaged the craft's autopilot.

"The pilot and co-pilot were not focused and throughout they were having a conversation about corona. The [virus] was on their minds. Their families were affected and they were having a discussion about it," Khan said.

"Unfortunately the pilot was overconfident," the minister added. Khan also pointed to a troubling review of pilot credentials that is bound to reverberate through the country's airline industry.

He said a probe last year found that 262 of Pakistan's 860 active pilots had fake licenses or had cheated on exams — including an unspecified number of PIA pilots.

The crash investigation team, which included officials from the French government and the aviation industry, analysed cockpit data and voice recorders.

Pakistan's deadliest aviation accident in eight years came days after domestic commercial flights resumed following a two-month coronavirus lockdown.

According to the report, the plane had been on the ground for 46 days during that time.

But it was "100 percent fit for flying, there was no technical fault", Khan said. Qasim Qadim — a spokesman for the Pakistan Airline Pilots Association — called the investigation's findings "mind-boggling".—AFP

International

India reinforces flashpoint area as China holds ground: Sources

Residents report long lines of military trucks, artillery on nearby roads

LEH: Indian fighter jets roared over a flashpoint Himalayan region Wednesday as part of a show of strength following what military sources say has been a Chinese takeover of contested territory.

Chinese forces have held onto a chunk of land covering several square kilometres (miles) at the mouth of the Galwan valley following a deadly brawl there on June 15, the Indian military sources told AFP. The two sides publicly declared they would pull back following the clash, which left 20 Indian soldiers dead after a battle involving rocks and nail-studded batons. But both countries have maintained troops around the valley, with India deploying more forces and trying to project military might.

Indian jets regularly took off Wednesday from a military base in Leh, the main Indian town in the contested region, and headed towards the mountainous border 240 kilometres (150 miles) away.

There were also checkpoints on main roads out of Leh and a frenzy of military activity around the town, which lies at 3,500 metres (11,500 feet). Residents reported long lines of military trucks and artillery on nearby roads. "We now have a good strength present in the area," an official of the Indian army's Northern Command told AFP on condition of anonymity, referring to the reinforcements.

Tashi Chhepal, a retired Indian army captain who has served in the area and is based in Leh, said the mobilisation was unprecedented in a sensitive region touching Pakistan as well as China. "I haven't seen

this kind of military movement before," he told AFP.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday called on India to observe previous bilateral agreements and "work with China to take concrete actions and resume peace and stability in the border areas". Beijing had made similar calls for resolution after a fist-fight in May that proved to be a warm-up for the medieval-style battle at Galwan.

Images taken on Sunday by the US satellite firm Maxar showed trucks and huts at camps on the river near the scene of the fighting. It was not clear which side they belonged to. The two countries fought a border war in 1962, but this month's fighting was their deadliest encounter in 53 years.

According to Indian military sources, Chinese troops ambushed Indian soldiers and forced them down a ridge where they had gone to remove a Chinese "encroachment".

A bilateral accord prevents the use of guns, but the fighting was still fierce, with rudimentary weapons. China has in turn accused Indian soldiers of twice crossing the Line of Actual Control, the unofficial boundary, provoking its troops.

But the Chinese appear to be sticking to their gains at Galwan and the nearby Pangong Tso lake, police intelligence and military sources told AFP.

China is now claiming the valley as its own, in statements that India has rejected. Indian analysts are dubious of the chances of a major easing of the tensions or that India will reclaim the territory.

The settlements of densely packed low-rise buildings help fill a gap in affordable housing for the tens of thousands of migrants streaming into the city every day, urban experts say. The issue of regularising them comes up every few years ahead of local elections, with all political parties promising to deliver on the longstanding demand. In December, the federal government passed a law to legalise Delhi's unauthorised colonies. It will "pave the way for incentivised planned urbanisation, and transform urban squalor into modern urban spaces with modern amenities," Housing Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said last year.

'Confusing orders'

Worldwide, more than 3 billion people are forecast to lack access to adequate and affordable housing by 2030, according to UN-Habitat, the United Nations' settlements agency.

India's sprawling capital has settlement types of varying degrees of formality, legality and tenure.

Unauthorised colonies - where poor, middle-class and richer residents live - are slightly more secure than slums that are seen as encroachments and face the constant threat of eviction.

While most colonies are characterised by poor infrastructure and amenities, the housing ministry dropped 69 enclaves from its initial list of those that are to be regularised because they are "wealthy".

Residents demand regularisation because they hope it will drive up property values, and they can access bank loans to improve their homes, said Mukta Naik, a fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, a think tank.



AHMEDABAD: Activists of Gujarat's Karni Sena organisation shout slogans during an anti-China demonstration at a commercial area in Ahmedabad on June 24, 2020. China and India have agreed to reduce tensions a week after their deadliest clashes in over 50 years on the disputed Himalayan border left 20 Indian troops dead in brutal hand-to-hand fighting. —AFP

Harsh Pant from the Observer Research Foundation think-tank in New Delhi said: "Anything that the

Chinese now say can't be taken on face value. India, hopefully, has learnt its lessons now." —AFP

Delhi's illegal colonies await makeover after coronavirus

NEW DELHI: When Sanjiv Yadav moved to Delhi from the northern Indian town of Etawah, he rented a small room in an illegal settlement like millions of other migrant workers in the capital city.

Over the past decade, he set aside money to buy a one-room home in Vikas Nagar in West Delhi, a so-called unauthorised colony of a few hundred homes and shops, receiving a power of attorney for his property - not a title that he can legally sell or transfer with.

That is about to change, with the planned legalisation of more than 1,700 such illegal colonies in Delhi, which the federal government says will benefit about 4 million people. "I own this house, but I can't get a bank loan. With the regularisation, I can get a title with which I can get a loan," Yadav told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"We also don't have proper facilities: the roads are bad, the garbage is not collected. We hope that after regularisation, all this will improve," he said, standing outside his home.

More than two-thirds of Delhi's 18 million people live in informal settlements, according to government data. Unauthorised colonies are built in violation of zoning regulations, often on farmland that is illegally subdivided.

"But owing to the many steps and institutions involved, regularisation has been governed by a series of confusing, sometimes contradictory administrative orders," she said. Regularisation must result in "physical and social infrastructure, as well as minimum necessary services and community facilities," according to the Delhi Master Plan.

But it is not a necessary condition for providing infrastructure, said Naik. In addition, colonies that have been legalised are categorised as "regularised unauthorised", and it is not clear how quickly or uniformly their property values rise, she said.

With new rules issued last October, residents in unauthorised colonies can register online for a title.

Satellite imagery is used to map colony borders, and the geographic information system (GIS) verifies property boundaries, after which a title is issued. The entire process would be completed in six months, Puri had said.

But with a strict lockdown to contain the coronavirus, the process has been delayed, and there is no way to settle any boundary disputes, said Sanjeev Kumar, a member of the residents' association of Gopal Nagar, an unauthorised colony.

"The process is meant to be easier, but it is still complicated, and they are not taking on board our objections to the maps," he said. "The law is well intentioned, but implementation is poor, and it is not clear when we will get our titles," he said.

Better future

More than 250,000 residents have registered online, and about 600 had been given deeds before the lock-

down brought a halt to operations, said R.S. Meena, a deputy director at the Delhi Development Authority.

"The system is new, so people are still getting used to it. But the process should pick up speed, and titles will be issued to everyone who meets the criteria," he said, adding that any disputes are also addressed.

Almost 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050, according to U.N. estimates, with affordable housing becoming a critical issue.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised Housing for All by 2022, but the home ownership programme is not aimed at the urban poor and homeless who do not qualify for the subsidised loans, according to housing advocates.

Meanwhile, cities have been slow to meet the needs of people living in informal settlements, a task made more urgent by the spread of the coronavirus in the under-served areas.

As part of a stimulus plan, India has vowed to create adequate migrant rental housing in the cities.

But that will not stop the creation of more informal settlements and unauthorised colonies, said Paras Tyagi, co-founder of the Centre for Youth Culture Law and Environment (CYCLE), a public policy non-profit in Delhi.

"What's needed in these settlements is proper roads, water supply and sewage lines and clinics. Not just titles," he said.

"The government should incentivise land pooling in unauthorised colonies to create infrastructure and affordable housing," said Tyagi, who is lobbying for upgrading Delhi's urban villages, whose residents also lack titles. —Reuters

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A young female hippo born on June 7 named Gloria swims with its mother inside its enclosure in the Zooparc of Beauval in Saint-Aignan, Central France. — AFP

Louvre Abu Dhabi reopens
after 100-day closure

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Louvre Abu Dhabi reopens after 100-day closure

Visitors in masks and gloves returned to the Louvre Abu Dhabi on Wednesday as it reopened its doors after a 100-day closure under coronavirus restrictions. The usual paper maps were replaced with a phone app, thermal scanners were in operation and valet parking, a common service in the United Arab Emirates, was suspended for now. Entrance is by timed ticket and visits last a maximum of three hours.

With travel into and out of Abu Dhabi still restricted, residents of neighbouring Dubai, just a 90-minute drive away, cannot yet enter. "Of course, it has been a challenging time," said the museum's director Manuel Rabate, acknowledging that restrictions would limit visitor numbers. "Our purpose is really to

make sure that all the visitors have the best experience on the safest experience," he told AFP, adding that in difficult times, art could help people find "solace and appeasement".

Countries around the world have closed museums and cancelled cultural and sporting events in a bid to slow the pandemic's spread. The Louvre Abu Dhabi opened in late 2017 and attracted some two million visitors in its first two years of operation. Under a 30-year agreement, France provides expertise, lends works of art and organises exhibitions—in return for one billion euros (\$1.16 billion).

The Louvre in Paris, home to the Mona Lisa, is to reopen on July 6 after the government eased restrictions on museums and historic sites. —AFP



In this file photo an employee cleans the grounds behind the closed gates of Disneyland Park on the first day of the closure of Disneyland and Disney California Adventure theme parks.—AFP

Disneyland in California delays reopening as virus cases rise

Disneyland in California on Wednesday delayed its planned reopening as coronavirus cases climb in the US state. The resort near Los Angeles, including Disneyland and Disney California Adventure, had planned to welcome visitors back July 17, pending government approval. Disney said in a statement that Californian officials would not issue reopening guidelines before July 4, leaving the theme parks insufficient time to restart as proposed. "Given the time required for us to bring thousands of cast members back to work and restart our business, we have no choice but to delay the reopening of our theme parks and resort hotels until we receive approval from government officials," a statement said.

No new reopening date was announced. Disneyland is the world's second-most visited theme park, drawing tens of thousands of visitors each day, but it closed in mid-March due to coronavirus concerns. The postponement leaves the California resort trailing other Disney theme parks. Shanghai Disneyland and Hong Kong Disneyland have already resumed activities. Tokyo Disney is set to reopen July 1, with the Paris and Orlando, Florida parks planning to start up again in mid-July. California, the nation's most populous state, saw a daily record of 7,149 new coronavirus cases Tuesday, to pass 190,000 total. —AFP



Louvre Abu Dhabi

Louvre museum plans four-year 'transformation'

The Louvre museum hopes to transform itself and shake off its intimidating image before the Paris Olympics in four years' time, its director said Wednesday. The world's most visited museum is working on a major overhaul of how its vast collections are presented and explained, Jean-Luc Martinez told reporters. "We need to be ready in 2023/2024 for the Olympic Games, with longer hours and more rooms open," he said.

To counter its elitist image, the museum will strive for a "cultural democratisation" to make its treasures more accessible with improved presentation, labelling and curating. Martinez, who comes from a working-class background, said he wanted to build on the outreach success of the Louvre's outpost museum in Lens, a poor former mining town in northern France. He said sometimes the former royal palace in the heart of Paris can "intimidate" certain demographics and the museum needs to reassure people that its collections are also for them.

40 million euro losses

Traffic on the museum's website has jumped tenfold, Martinez said, adding that the site "will be completely overhauled next year... with all collections going online". There will be more storytelling and scene-setting in both French and English, Martinez added. Visitors under age 26 already have free access to the Louvre, but Martinez is introducing a free 20-minute mini-visit this summer in an attempt to lure Parisians back inside. The museum—which reopens after the lockdown on July 6—wants to attract more French visitors after losing more than 40 million euros (\$45 million) at the box office since the coronavirus struck.

Three-quarters of the Louvre's visitors are from abroad. With tourism at a standstill, "we are losing 80 percent of our public," Martinez said. The next three years are likely to be less than spectacular, he predicted. "We are going to be at best 20 to 30 percent down on last summer—between 4,000 and 10,000 visitors a day," he estimated.—AFP



A picture shows the Louvre pyramid by Chinese architect Ieoh Ming Pei, the entrance to the Louvre Museum in Paris.—AFP

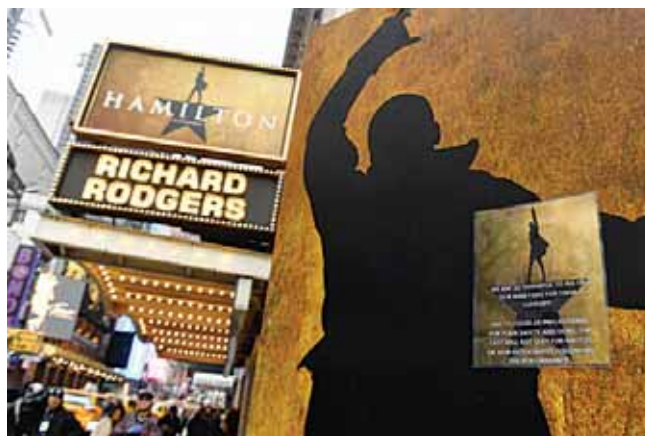
Lifestyle | Features

BROADWAY SMASH 'HAMILTON' COMES TO DISNEY+ AMID US RECKONING ON RACISM

“Hamilton” is bringing its groundbreaking blend of hip-hop musical numbers, color-blind casting and political revolution to Disney+ at a poignant moment in US racial history, its creator and original cast said. A filmed version of the Broadway stage phenomenon about the US founding fathers told through the lens of modern, multi-ethnic America lands on Disney’s streaming platform on July 3. With theatres closed due to the pandemic and the initial cast having long ago moved on to other endeavors, the movie offers a rare chance to see the original run of a show that won 11 Tonys and has grossed \$1 billion worldwide. Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda said his excitement had been piqued by witnessing the musical’s influence on nationwide anti-racism protests that followed George Floyd’s death in police custody last month.

“I know that when I see a sign at a protest out in the street that says ‘History Has Its Eyes On You,’ or ‘Tomorrow There’ll Be More Of Us,’ I know that the language of the show is connecting in a way that makes me incredibly proud,” Miranda said, referring to popular lyrics from the show. “I can’t even wrap my mind around (that),” he told an online press conference.

The musical tells the story of Alexander Hamilton and fellow founding fathers with rap and hip-hop numbers mixed in with traditional show tunes. Since its first Broadway run, the musical has been performed across the country and abroad, casted with mostly non-white actors. That diversity, and its message of risk-



In this file photo a sign for at Hamilton, an American musical on Broadway is viewed on March 12, 2020 in New York City.—AFP

musical, Hamilton berates a pro-British Loyalist who called the Revolution a “rabble,” telling the crowd that “the revolution is comin’” and “I’d rather be divisive / Than indecisive / Drop the niceties!” “Young kids who are out there, who are upset and angry... can watch this and realize that they can put their ener-

gies through writing, through challenging the people who are telling you things that you don’t like to hear, like Hamilton did,” said Onaodowan, who played Hercules Mulligan and James Madison.

‘Best piece of art’

From its 2015 Broadway debut, “Hamilton” soared in popularity, driven by social media buzz, its catchy score, and celebrity fans including the Obamas. Then-first lady Michelle Obama famously called it “the best piece of art in any form that I have ever seen in my life.” But its immense success drove ticket prices into the stratosphere, with resales fetching thousands of dollars each. “We always said we wanted to democratize the world seeing this company doing this show,” said Miranda of the film. “Folks just could not afford the ticket,” added Daveed Diggs, who played the Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson.

“We were—as a company and an entity—in constant battle with the resale market,” he added. Director Thomas Kail shot footage for the movie over three days in June 2016. The film melds two live performances—in which cameras sat among and above Broadway audiences—with closed-door renditions, in which “we were able to get on stage with a steady cam, or have a camera on a crane” for a greater sense of proximity. “This is not trying to be the show,” Kiel said. “This is its own experience.”—AFP

Never mind the skyscrapers, grab a deckchair on Milan’s ‘beach’



People sunbathe in a kind of green beach amid the skyscrapers called “Il Lido Bam” located in the “Library trees” park in the Porta Nuova district, center Milan.—AFP

Milan sun-worshippers, finally emerging from months of coronavirus lockdown, do not have to travel far to find a deckchair and a parasol: a “beach” beckons right in the middle of one of the city’s main business districts. It’s not the seaside, concedes 22-year-old student Mauro Manara Rossino. “But we’re nearly there, with some imagination!” Lido Bam, or Bam Beach, appeared at the weekend in a park in Milan’s Porta Nuova district, home to Italy’s tallest skyscraper, the Unicredit Tower.

Around 80 parasols are scattered across the park, with deckchairs spaced to respect the social distancing rules still in force since the virus lockdown began easing last month. “It’s a beautiful way of escaping the city routine,” says Francesca Gatti, a 21-year-old economics student sunbathing with a friend. The urban treat, an initiative of the park’s owner, the Riccardo Catella Foundation, is free for the time being—but next week punters will pay up to eight euros (about \$9) for their place in the sun. Rosalia Scarcella, a 45-year-old nurse, praised the sandless urban beach. After difficult months working through the pandemic crisis—which hit Italy far harder than most countries, claiming more than 34,000 lives — “I needed to take a break,” she said. “For those who can’t get away, it’s a great alternative,” she added.—AFP

Bollywood to resume shoots but virus rules dull its shine

Bollywood will resume film shoots immediately, industry representatives said yesterday, but strict virus rules banning “elaborate or extravagant” scenes threaten to strip the world’s biggest movie-making machine of its trademark dazzle. The decision by three major industry bodies ends a months-long hiatus following the imposition of a nationwide coronavirus lockdown in India in late March. Although the government allowed shoots to resume earlier this month, producers, actors and crew have been embroiled in negotiations about the health risks involved.

Yesterday, industry representatives said they had “amicably resolved the outstanding issues (and) paved the way for the immediate resumption of shootings”, including the provision of medical and life insurance to all crew members. But tough restrictions to fight the spread of the virus pose a major challenge to filmmakers, who will not be allowed to film wedding scenes or fight sequences that have long been Bollywood staples.

Furthermore, actors over the age of 65 are banned from being on set—a rule that would see some of India’s most revered stars, such as 77-year-old Amitabh Bachchan, forced to stay home instead. Social distancing norms will



put a stop to scenes showing actors kissing or embracing, spelling a return to the more conservative 1980s, when Bollywood songs often cut to images of flowers brushing against each other—then a shorthand for romance. Producers will also be required to have a doctor, nurse and an ambulance on set—a punishing requirement at a time when Mumbai is already struggling with a shortage of health workers and ambulances. The 16-page set of guidelines, framed by the Producers Guild of India, also includes a request for actors to do their hair and makeup at home and urges casting directors to locate real-life relatives for family sequences to limit interactions between strangers.—AFP

Paris fashion week to go ahead in September

Paris fashion week is to go ahead in September, the organisers said Wednesday. The French Haute Couture and Fashion Federation said it will be held between September 28 and October 6 and “comply with the recommendations of the authorities” on the coronavirus. Paris fashion week is by far the world’s biggest and most

important. With fashionistas deprived of runway shows since March, thousands are expected to descend on the French capital to see the spring summer 2021 collections. The pandemic has turned the fashion calendar upsidedown, with Paris men’s and haute couture fashion shows next month being held online.—AFP



This combination image of six pictures taken on June 15, 2020 shows drive-in haunted house actors (from top center, clockwise) Ayaka Imaide, 34, Kenta Iwana, 25, Asami Takeuchi, 33, Haruna Suzuki, 20, Kota Hanegawa, 28, plus a group photo (top left) of the cast with their sound and lights engineer Daichi Ono (L in frame), 33, at their garage in Tokyo.—AFP

Don't open the door! Japan haunted house goes drive-in

A car horn beeps and the horror begins: a bloody murder and rampaging zombies. But this drive-in haunted house in Japan protects against the most terrifying enemy of all—coronavirus. Inside a car, guests can scream as loudly as they like, with no mask required, as hideous creatures daubed in blood swarm towards them. In fact, the new format might even be scarier than a traditional haunted house, producer Kenta Iwana, 25, told AFP. “At the drive-in haunted house, guests are confined in a car so they can’t escape the horror until the end,” he said. “It makes it even more scary for them.” Iwana came up with the drive-in solution after struggling with a string of cancellations as the coronavirus outbreak took hold.

“It’s because a haunted house creates an environment with three Cs,” he said, referring to the conditions Japanese experts warn risk spreading the virus: closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings. “Orders for conventional-style haunted houses were cancelled one after another and we lost about 80 percent of our clients.” The squad is usually hired to set up haunted house experiences at amusement parks and similar venues. A normal experience might involve a windowless facility with actors playing ghosts quietly following visitors and whispering directly into their ears to scare them—all impossible in the age of coronavirus.

‘Wanting to scare’

Iwana and his team Kowagarasetai—meaning “A squad wanting to scare”—initially tried to create coronavirus-compatible performances by wearing masks painted with fake blood and playing recorded screams rather than unleashing real ones. But most of their events were cancelled anyway. “We’ve even had Halloween events scheduled in October and November cancelled,” said Ayaka Imaide, 34, head of the squad. Iwana, who quit university to become a ghost house producer, wondered if a drive-in format might work instead.

Ghost stories and haunted houses are popular forms of entertainment in Japan and are associated particularly with the summer, though the reasons for the link are unclear. Iwana says he was told the tradition began when up-and-coming kabuki actors began performing ghost stories in the hot summer months, when star actors took time off.

Behind windscreens

Kota Hanegawa, 28, plays a blood-soaked killer in the squad, though he admits he is not a big fan of scary things. He says the new format—with the actors outside accompanied by a soundtrack and narration playing inside the car—has a few positives, particularly in terms of audience feedback. “I can get very close to guests even though they’re behind the windscreens,” said Hanegawa. “It’s interesting to see their reactions so close up, while keeping social distance.”



This picture shows a demonstration of a drive-in haunted house at a garage in Tokyo.



Actors Kenta Iwana (left), 25, and Asami Takeuchi (right), 33, performing during a demonstration of a drive-in haunted house.



This picture shows fake blood on the window of a car as actors (rest after a demonstration of a drive-in haunted house at a garage in Tokyo.



Actress Ayaka Imaide, 34, putting on zombie makeup.

Imaide said she hoped the new format would help lift the mood of entertainers struggling during the pandemic. "Maybe we should just not do anything and keep our heads down," she said seriously, from underneath a full face of zombie make-up. "I don't know what the right thing to do is... But we want to continue offering a haunted house, even if it means we have to change the style a bit. We want many people to enjoy it, to enjoy being scared."

Japan's coronavirus state of emergency has already been lifted, and some amusement parks are slowly beginning to reopen, with restrictions on guests. But the squad is moving ahead with its drive-in concept for now, and tickets for its first dates next month at a Tokyo garage have already sold out. Imaide hopes guests will feel comfortable letting loose and getting the full, horrifying experience. "Let out all your fears, that's the way to enjoy it," she advised.—AFP

Eiffel Tower reopens with strict virus restrictions

The Eiffel Tower reopened yesterday for the first time since France imposed its coronavirus lockdown in March, though tourists will not be allowed to the top of the Paris landmark until later this summer. Journalists from around the world were on hand as about 50 visitors, mainly French, prepared to make the steep climb by stairs to the first two levels, as elevators will remain closed because of social distancing concerns.

Tourists and Parisians are able to admire the view of the French capital from the Eiffel Tower after a three-month closure due to the coronavirus—but only if they take the stairs. Visitors to the city's most famous monument won't be able to take the lifts until July 1, to ensure a safe distance between people to limit infection risk. The very top of the iconic monument will remain off limits to the public for now. The 10-tonne metal landmark will emerge from its longest closure since World War II in time for the summer season, but with limited visitor numbers at first, and mandatory face masks for all over the age of 11, said the Eiffel Tower website.

The first visitors will be allowed in from 10:00 am (0800 GMT), a symbolic moment as France begins to tentatively open up to tourism after the virus shutdown. Eager tourists have been able to grab their tickets since June 18, when the online ticket office opened. "To ensure that ascending and descending visitors do not meet in the stairs, ascent will take place from the East pillar and descent by the West pillar," said the operator, with a limited number of visitors per floor at a time. The top level will remain

closed for now, "since the lifts taking visitors from second to top floor are small. It might reopen during the summer."

Gradual return of tourism

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

These included some of the French capital's most famous landmarks such as the Louvre museum, due to reopen on July 6, and the Palace of Versailles, which reopened earlier this month. France lifted restrictions at European borders as of June 15, and the tourism industry hopes that foreign visitors will start pouring in again as the summer season kicks off.—AFP

People arrive for the partial reopening of Eiffel Tower, in Paris, as France eases lockdown measures taken to curb the spread of the COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP photos



Visitors wearing protective facemasks walk up the stairs as they visit the Eiffel Tower.



Visitors wearing protective facemasks admire and take pictures of the view from the Eiffel Tower during its partial reopening.

Lifestyle | Travel



View of the Hallstatt village, a World Heritage-listed town on Lake Hallstatt's western shore in Austria's mountainous Salzkammergut region in Austria.—AFP photos

HALLSTATT, Austria's Alpine jewel, debates post-corona tourism



A woman takes a ride in the river ship connecting train station and village of Hallstatt.



A river ship captain steers his ship towards the village of Hallstatt.

Only a few months ago residents of the impossibly picturesque Austrian village of Hallstatt were debating how to stem the influx of tourists thronging its narrow streets, nestled between soaring mountains and a sparkling lake. Careful what you wish for: with the collapse in international travel brought about by the coron-

avirus pandemic, the tour groups that used to jam the streets—with up to 100 coaches arriving daily in the high season—have disappeared. In pre-coronavirus times the main concern for locals was that Hallstatt would be turned into an open-air theme park and become yet another symbol of the phenomenon of “overtourism”.



A woman cleans river boats at lake Hallstatt in Hallstatt.



View of the Hallstatt village, a World Heritage-listed town on Lake Hallstatt's western shore in Austria's mountainous Salzkammergut region in Austria.



View of the Hallstatt village.

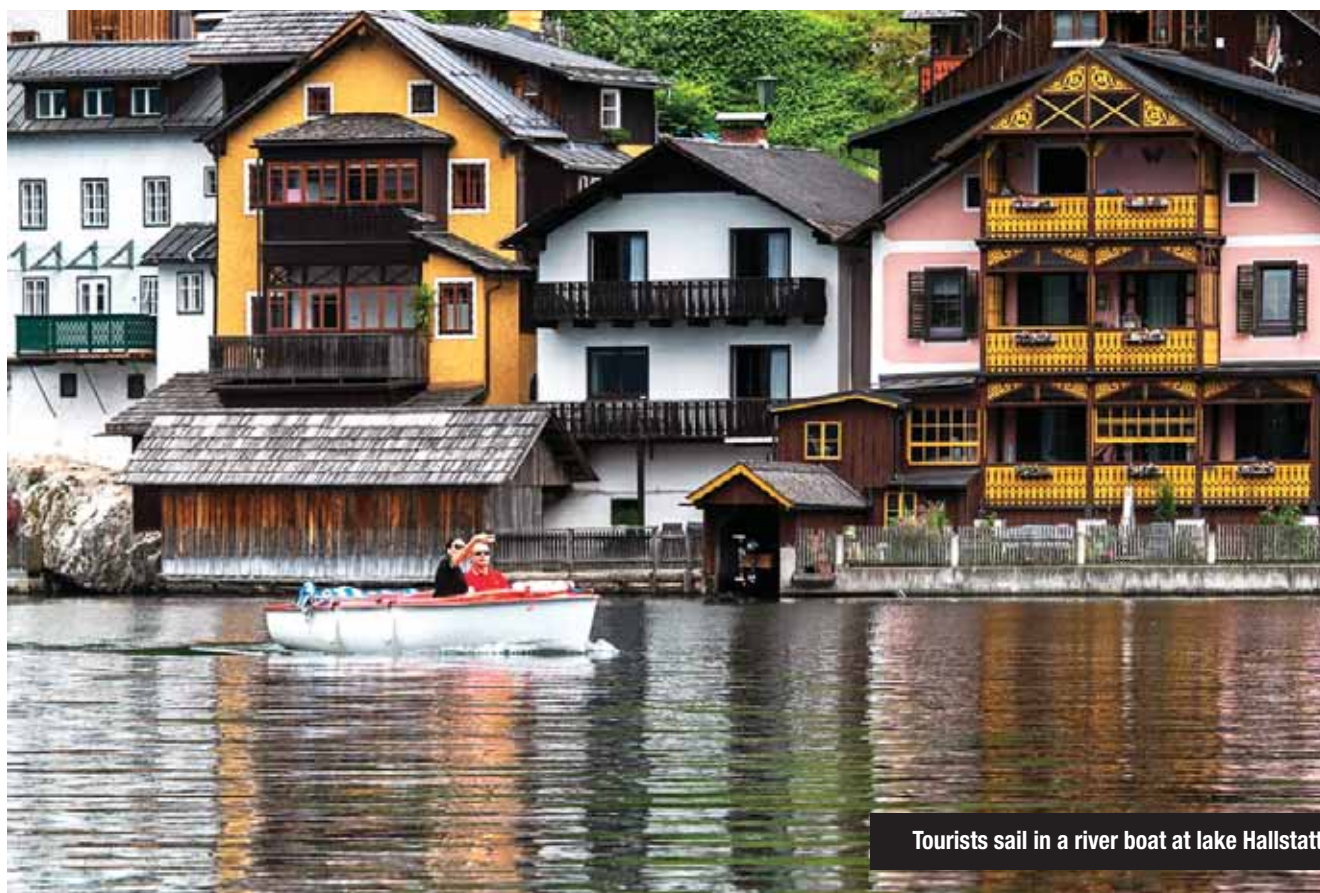


View of the Hallstatt village.

With a million visitors per year for just 750 residents, the tiny village competed with the likes of Venice and Barcelona in the rankings of most tourists per inhabitant. "There are more than 600,000 photos of Hallstatt on Instagram!" says local mayor Alexander Scheutz, still a little incredulous at the worldwide fame Hallstatt has garnered. The number of tourist coaches coming to Hallstatt doubled in the space of five years, reaching 21,254 in 2019. Many of the bigger tour groups were made up of visitors

from China, Taiwan, South Korea and the United States.

A major draw has been Hallstatt's apparent similarity to the village depicted in the wildly successful Frozen film series, with its sloping, snow-laden timber houses and pointed church spire. The unveiling of a replica of Hallstatt in 2012 in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, as well as its starring role in a Korean TV series, have also helped its international fame.



Tourists sail in a river boat at lake Hallstatt in Hallstatt.





View of the Hallstatt village during the night.



View of the Hallstatt village.

'Drones forbidden!'

While the virus has brought a measure of serenity to the village, the debate on how tourism can be made more sustainable has returned even more forcefully. According to Scheutz, a growing divide had been opening up between the local winners and losers from the tourism boom. "If you can't even walk down the street because of the crowds, if

people are eating their meals while being watched by others who are waiting for a table, it becomes off-putting," says resident Sylvia Skrilec. Even though she owns a ceramics shop and depends on tourist custom, she feels the numbers had got out of hand. Octogenarian local Verena Lobisser also made her living from tourism by running a hotel but agrees that the pre-virus situation "was far, far too much". "People

were like bees on a honeypot," she said.

She hopes the crisis "opens people's eyes" to how Hallstatt had become a victim of its own success. Various signs around the village are also testament to the tensions that had grown up around overtourism. "Drones forbidden!" reads one, while another exhorts visitors to remember that "Hallstatt is not a museum!"

View of the Hallstatt village during the night.



Lifestyle | Travel



View of the Hallstatt village.

Disney rumours

As Austria was easing its coronavirus lockdown in May, Hallstatt brought in a new system for limiting coach numbers—only for the coaches to vanish anyway. The system had been put in place after a social media rumour sent chills down the spines of locals; Disney was apparently using Hallstatt as its template for yet another film. While the car park has been full on the weekends since lockdown eased, current visitors are overwhelmingly Austrians or people from neighbouring countries.

“The way it is now reminds us of how Hallstatt was before, and we’d like it to stay that way,” says one local climbing the steps to her house which clings to the mountainside. The forced respite brought about by coronavirus should be a chance to “get things back in order” says Scheutz, who says that the village could swap quantity for “quality” when it comes to tourism. “But it’s not as easy as saying: ‘We’ll start from scratch’,” he says.

Hallstatt’s fame has helped it stave off the depopulation which afflicts so many other rural communities and has brought the locality jobs and revenue. Youth associations and schemes to provide meals for the elderly are effectively paid for by tourists. Despite all that, local councillor and conservation activist Friedrich Idam is unconvinced of the benefits of mass tourism, and jokes that he shouldn’t even be talking to the press. “Every new article about the village just makes the situation worse,” he says with a smile. Idam’s solution would be for an entry fee to be introduced. “We couldn’t call it that though, as that would reduce us to a museum, as if we were for sale,” he says.—AFP



The Mayor of Hallstatt village, Alexander Scheutz poses in front of Lake Hallstatt’s western shore.



A river boat is seen at lake Hallstatt.



View of the street in the Hallstatt village.



View of the Hallstatt village.

Kids Page

Daily SuDoku

		6			4	5		8
9			1			7		
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		2			9			4
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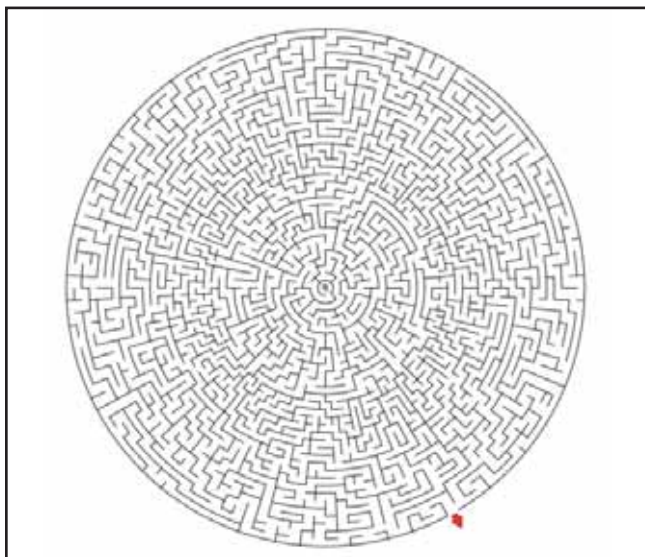
hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

Kids Mazes



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Stars

STAR TRACK

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

You probably crave solitude, Aries. Even though you may have committed to doing something for a friend or relative, now you find the idea irritating. You could have some tasks of your own that you'd rather work on, or you might simply want to go for a workout and burn off some tension. The latter idea is a good one. Perhaps if you exercise early, you'll feel more like fulfilling your obligations.

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

Although you're normally a sociable person who feels most comfortable in the company of others, Taurus, today you might rather be alone. You could feel a little under the weather or be stressed from job-related worries. You probably need some rest, but you also could benefit from taking a brisk walk. That will work off some tension, get the endorphins going, and have you feeling yourself again.

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

You tend to enjoy solitude, Gemini, and today you might feel more reclusive than usual. You could be invited to spend time with friends but not feel like accepting. You might even feel a little irritated by them. This is a great day to go for a workout or throw yourself into projects of your own. Physical activity will get rid of stress and help your concentration. Go to it.

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

Today there might be tension in the air with no discernible cause, Cancer. Family members could seem preoccupied with problems they can't quite define. Your natural inclination might be to try to cheer them up, but it probably won't work. Don't be too annoyed if they don't respond to your efforts. It isn't them. It's the planets. This is a great day to jog, do aerobics, or otherwise work off tension.

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

You could get some mysterious phone calls today, Leo, like wrong numbers or hang-ups. Other people might seem less communicative than usual, Leo, and you're likely to be preoccupied with your own thoughts. You might feel a bit more nervous than usual, but that should go away if you take a brisk walk or get some other exercise. If you've been thinking about doing some writing, this is the day to start.

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

Confusion over money matters might come up for you today, Virgo. You may need to check your records in order to shed light on some past transactions. Don't panic. All should be well. You just need to ascertain the facts. You might have some rather intense dreams tonight. Write them down. You'll want to remember them later, as they could reveal a lot about your current situation. They might also inspire future projects.

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

Someone close to you might seem more preoccupied than usual, Libra, and perhaps a bit difficult to deal with. Don't take this personally. It has little if anything to do with you. He or she doesn't want to share their troubles. You might be feeling a bit tense and jumpy, but this is nothing to worry about. Take a brisk walk or work out. This should bring some relief.

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

Today you might be feeling a bit tense, Scorpio, and you probably won't understand why. The secret? It's the planets. You might tend to jump at unexpected noises or take offense where none is intended. Relations with others could be a little strained, necessitating some communication about how you're feeling. Try to work off the tension by taking a brisk walk or perhaps working out at the gym.

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

You probably aren't going to feel much like socializing today, Sagittarius, though friends might contact you. Your patience has worn a bit thin and you could get annoyed at incidents that normally wouldn't bother you. Therefore, this isn't a good day for group communication. It might be best to have a good workout and then rest. You'll probably feel much better after you're done.

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

Uptight is the word for today, Capricorn. At some point you might find yourself the center of attention. While you normally might not mind, now it could make you a bit nervous. When you find everyone looking at you and expecting you to say something, say it, keep it short, and then withdraw. You aren't in the mood. Visit your favorite online sites and read about subjects that interest you to relieve the stress.

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

You're likely to want to be left alone with your own thoughts today. Relaxing with a good book might be at the top of your agenda, Aquarius, and you aren't liable to want to be interrupted. Noise and requests that don't usually bother you might tick you off, so it's best to try to spend some time alone. Also try to be your usual considerate self. To release tension, take a walk.

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

Worries over money could have you edgier than usual, Pisces. While you may be doing well, you still could be insecure and think your funds might not stretch far enough. Try to consider the situation objectively. You'll probably be relieved by what you find. Others' demands on your time might irritate you more than usual. The best way to escape this kind of tension is to go for a workout or walk.

Country Codes

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

Business

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BANGKOK: The children of a fruit juice vendor play next to her cart in Bangkok yesterday.— AFP

COVID sinks global economy

IMF warns of economic carnage

WASHINGTON: The global coronavirus pandemic has sparked an economic “crisis like no other,” sending world GDP plunging 4.9 percent this year and wiping out \$12 trillion over two years, the IMF said Wednesday. Worldwide business shutdowns destroyed hundreds of millions of jobs, and major economies in Europe face double-digit collapses in the worst crisis since the Great Depression nearly a century ago.

The prospects for recovery post-pandemic - like the forecasts themselves - are steeped in “pervasive uncertainty” given the unpredictable path of the virus, the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook. “The COVID-19 pandemic has had a more negative impact on activity in the first half of 2020 than anticipated, and the recovery is pro-

jected to be more gradual than previously forecast,” the fund warned. While businesses are re-opening in many countries and China has seen a bigger rebound in activity than expected, a second wave of viral infections threatens the outlook, the report said. World GDP is expected to rebound by just 5.4 percent in 2021, and only if all goes well, the IMF warned.

Poor most vulnerable

IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said under current forecasts, the crisis will destroy \$12 trillion over two years, and cautioned, “we are not out of the woods.” She warned governments against withdrawing the stimulus too quickly. “This is a crisis that requires all hands on deck,” she told re-

porters. While governments and central banks have gone to extraordinary lengths so far to provide support for workers and businesses, “more will be needed.” “It’s important not to back off very quickly, but to do so only gradually, because this crisis is not over,” Gopinath said.

The downturn is particularly damaging for low-income countries and households, and threatens to endanger the progress made on reducing extreme poverty, the Washington-based crisis lender said in its report. The fund made drastic downward revisions to most of the April forecasts made in the early days of the pandemic, and IMF economists fear the coronavirus will leave lasting scars on employment, businesses and trade. Hanging over the predictions are the bills for massive government

stimulus plans, fueled by extremely low interest rates and likely preventing the recession from turning into another depression, even as they created huge and ever-increasing debt levels.

Drastic, downward revisions

The damage is nonetheless stunning, and more widespread than any downturn in recent decades. China will eke out growth of one percent this year, the only positive figure on the long list of key economies the IMF tracks. The United States will shrink eight percent and Germany slightly less, while France, Italy, Spain and Britain will suffer double-digit contractions. Japan makes out a bit better with a drop of just 5.8 percent, according to the forecasts.—AFP

Business

Stocks sell off as coronavirus surge knocks recovery hopes

AxJ down 0.7%, falls over 1% in Japan and Australia

SINGAPORE: Asian stocks posted their biggest drop in eight sessions, bonds rose and the US dollar was firm yesterday as surging US coronavirus cases and an International Monetary Fund downgrade to economic projections knocked confidence in a recovery. MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan fell 0.7%, Tokyo's Nikkei slumped 1.1% and Australia's ASX 200 tumbled 2.1%.

US stock futures declined 0.4%, suggesting Wednesday's Wall Street slide might have further to run. In Europe, however, where strong data has supported risk appetite this week, futures were only marginally in the red. German DAX futures were down 0.1% and EuroSTOXX 50 futures were off 0.3%. Britain's FTSE futures fell 0.4%. Florida, Oklahoma and South Carolina reported record increases in new cases on Wednesday. Seven other states had record highs earlier in the week and Australia posted its biggest daily rise in infections in two months.

The governors of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut ordered travellers from eight other states to quarantine on arrival, a worry for investors who had mostly been expecting an end to pandemic restrictions. Disney has delayed the re-opening of theme parks and resorts in California, while Texas is facing a "massive outbreak" and considering new lo-

calized restrictions, Governor Greg Abbott said in a television interview. Australian airline Qantas said yesterday it doesn't expect sizeable international operations until at least July 2021, as the carrier announced plans to sack a fifth of its workforce and raise \$1.3 billion to stay afloat.

The International Monetary Fund said it now expects a deeper global recession, with output to shrink 4.9% this year, much sharper than the 3% contraction predicted in April. "There is a little bit of reality bites coming," said Damian Rooney, senior institutional salesman at stockbroker Argonaut in Perth. "I don't think there was a particular straw that broke the camel's back, but people are a little bit twitchy - there are a lot of reasons to be pretty cautious." The dollar clung on to broad overnight gains which had lifted it from near a two-week low. Yields on benchmark 10-year US Treasuries fell to a ten-day low of 0.6692%. Markets in Hong Kong and mainland China were closed for public holidays yesterday.

Anxiety is likely to remain heightened ahead of US data, including jobless claims figures due at 1230 GMT, as well as the latest coronavirus numbers. Confidence could be dented by disappointment on either count. "Any improvement in jobs might be counteracted if there is another pickup in the case load in the United States," said Kyle Rodda, market



NEW YORK: Golden retrievers Buddy and Barley greet customers at the Six Harbors Brewing Company in Huntington, New York. Long Island begins Phase 3 of reopening, allowing restaurants to seat inside at 50 percent capacity and nail salons to open by appointment only. — AFP

analyst at brokerage IG in Melbourne. "It's a potential handbrake on the growth rebound story." Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane is also due

to speak about the future of society at 1700 GMT. Haldane argued against last week's increase to the bank's bond-buying programme.—Reuters

Madagascar unveils new domestic vehicle, eyes export market

ANTANANARIVO: Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina on Wednesday unveiled prototypes of a new brand of locally-made cars and motorbikes which are expected to hit the roads in three years. GasyCar is the second brand of automobiles manufactured in the Indian Ocean island nation after Karenjy, which was launched by the government in 1984. "We will sell in the national market, but we are also thinking of exporting to Africa and around the world," Rajoelina said. A GasyCar plant is to be built this year and the first models are expected to reach the market by 2023. Prototypes of GasyCar motorbikes and SUV models were shown at the launch. Madagascar's local car industry hit the global stage in 1989 when Karenjy produced two popemobiles for Pope John Paul II's visit.

Another popemobile was built for Pope Francis in 2019. But Karenjy can only make a dozen cars a year. The starting price is around 6,500 euros (\$7,300). The hand-made vehicles are rustic and lack conveniences such as electric windows or airbags, making it hard for them to compete with imported brands despite their affordability. Rajoelina vowed to boost Madagascar's limited industrial capacity after his election in 2018. The island is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 90 percent of the population surviving on less than two dollars per day. — AFP

Relief for Lufthansa after top shareholder backs rescue deal

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Lufthansa's top shareholder on Wednesday said he would back a nine billion euro government rescue package, removing the threat of a last-minute veto that could have plunged the German airline into bankruptcy. "I will vote for the agreement," German billionaire Heinz Hermann Thiele told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper on the eve of an extraordinary general meeting where investors will decide on the fate of the coronavirus-hit giant.

Chief executive Carsten Spohr has warned that "the future of the company" is at stake after the pandemic throttled Lufthansa's usual flood of passengers to a trickle for several months this year. Spohr will address the online meeting set to begin at 1000 GMT, urging investors to back the plan he hammered out over weeks of talks with ministers and the European Commission. The nine billion euro (\$10 billion) plan includes the state claiming a 20 percent stake.

Thiele, who made his fortune in the rail and auto industries and owns 15.5 percent of Lufthansa's stock, had repeatedly voiced scepticism about the deal - to the dismay of Lufthansa management, employ-

ees and unions. But he told the Frankfurt newspaper insolvency had to be avoided even if he still had doubts about the bailout, in a nod to his concerns about the government climbing on board. "It is in the interest of all Lufthansa employees that management can quickly begin talks about the necessary restructuring," Thiele said. Even with the government aid, Lufthansa has said it may have to slash thousands of jobs as travel demand is expected to stay below pre-pandemic levels for years.

But in another boost for the airline, it struck a deal with German flight attendants' union UFO late Wednesday to cut 500 million euros in costs by 2023 while avoiding cabin crew layoffs. The savings would be achieved through measures including pay freezes, reduced flight hours, early retirement and unpaid leave, both sides said in a joint statement. The deal still needs to be approved by union members. But UFO spokesman Nicoley Baublies said it "brings urgently needed job security" for Lufthansa's 22,000 flight attendants as the company weathers an unprecedented crisis. Lufthansa shares jumped more than 16 percent at 2300 GMT in after-hours trading as in-

vestors digested the latest developments.

Veto power

Lufthansa's board warned shareholders ahead of Thursday's vote that insolvency was "unavoidable" if the bailout was rejected. Given that shareholders representing just 38 percent of the capital have registered to participate, Thiele held the power to singlehandedly torpedo the deal. The 79-year-old's motivations for building up his own stake in Lufthansa remain murky. "I will continue to exert influence on the development of Lufthansa," he told the FAZ, declining to elaborate. Bracing for a worst-case scenario, Spohr on Sunday said Lufthansa was "prepared" to keep flight operations going even if the vote goes against the board. Before launching insolvency protection procedures, bosses would "use the time to talk over alternatives with the government," he added. The powerful Verdi union welcomed Thiele's green light. "This ends an existential threat for almost 140,000 employees globally and their families," it said in a statement. "Other shareholders must now follow Thiele's example and agree to the rescue package."—AFP

Business

Qantas cutting 20% of workforce and raising capital in virus battle

15,000 employees to remain stood down temporarily

SYDNEY: Qantas Airways Ltd is axing at least 20% of its workforce and intends to raise up to A\$1.9 billion (\$1.3 billion) of equity under a sweeping cost-saving plan prompted by the coronavirus pandemic. The Australian airline also said on Thursday it will ground 100 aircraft for up to 12 months and retire its remaining Boeing Co 747 fleet immediately, six months ahead of schedule, given travel restrictions imposed by the global health crisis.

"We have to position ourselves for several years when revenue will be much lower," Qantas Chief Executive Alan Joyce said of the three-year plan. "And this means becoming a much smaller airline in the short term." Along with other airlines around the world, Qantas is battling against a huge drop in demand after countries including Australia closed their bor-

ders to try contain the pandemic. Australian officials have said the country is likely to remain closed to the vast majority of international travellers until next year. Joyce said Qantas was taking a "realistic" view that there would not be international operations of real scale until July 2021, with a proposed "travel bubble" between Australia and New Zealand a potential exception.

The cost-saving plan, which along with reduced fuel expenses is expected to save around A\$15 billion, marks Qantas' first equity raising in just over a decade. It also coincides with what was supposed to be a celebratory 100-year anniversary for the airline. The capital raising, at a discount of 13% to the airline's last trading price, includes an underwritten A\$1.36 billion institutional placement and a A\$500 mil-

lion share purchase plan. "We view Qantas' adherence to its financial framework as highly supportive of its rating, as it ensures its capital structure remains robust and liquidity remains strong," Moody's vice president Ian Chitterer said. Qantas is one of only a handful of airlines with an investment grade rating.

Grounded planes

The 6,000 job cuts will come from across the airline's 29,000-strong workforce. Around half will be non-operational and ground operations staff, with the remainder a mix of cabin crew, engineers and pilots. A further 15,000 workers will remain furloughed until Qantas begins operating more flights. It has begun ramping up domestic flying as state borders reopen and expects to reach 40% of normal ca-

capacity in July, an average of around 70% next financial year and 100% in FY22.

With international operations on hold, Qantas will take an impairment charge of up to A\$1.4 billion, mostly due to its fleet of 12 Airbus SE A380s, which Joyce said were not expected to fly again for at least three years and would be sent to the Mojave Desert for storage. The carrier will initially use its smaller A330s and 787s when international operations resume, he said. Joyce, who has led Qantas since 2008, has agreed to remain chief executive until at least June 2023. "The last thing I wanted to do is leave when we are in the biggest crisis in our history," said Joyce, who oversaw a grounding of the airline's entire fleet in 2011 over a pay dispute and led a subsequent cost-cutting turnaround plan.— Reuters

Online shopping a steep learning curve for Cuba

HAVANA: When Jorge Noris first tried online shopping, Cuban-style, the products he bought never turned up. Like most people, the father of two living on the outskirts of Havana was seduced by the convenience of shopping over the internet. However, Cuba's catch-up with the world of e-commerce, encouraged by its communist rulers during the coronavirus lockdown, has left many users angry. "After a month, the store called me to ask if the order had arrived," said Noris, a 34-year-old technician. He was similarly stumped when he discovered he had to travel into the shop to be reimbursed.

Worldwide, the online food trade has been given a massive shot in the arm by the pandemic. With millions confined to their homes, online consumer activity soared by 300 percent in Italy and Spain, and 100 percent in France, according to pollsters Nielsen. But the experience is still a novel one in Cuba where 3G mobile internet was rolled out in 2018. The local online store Tuenvio has only just launched. Long queues outside food stores are a recurring feature of Cuban life because of shortages due to US sanctions. Tuenvio aims to make those grim lines a thing of the past. However, many online consumers are now lining up outside stores to file a complaint or recover missing products.

On television, President Miguel Diaz-Canel was forced to recognize the shortcomings of the new system. "We have had more complaints related to online shopping than about health care during the pandemic," he said. The island, with a population of over 11 million, has had relatively few coronavirus cases - 2,319 with 85 fatalities. "Reality has exceeded capacity," said Diaz-Canel. Noris, whose blog Tuandroid is devoted to new technology, translated Diaz-Canel's mea culpa into IT terms: "The servers were unprepared for the demand." The shock was severe for Tuenvio, which went from having hundreds of online visits a day to 8,000 after the government ordered a widespread lockdown, including the closure of many supermarkets. Orders soared from just over 1,300 in February to 6,000 in March, growing to nearly 79,000 in the first half of May.



HAVANA: A man wearing a face mask transports bags with vegetables for sale in Havana amid the new coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

"Tuenvio has to be put in context. It is a crisis solution for crisis moment, and executed fairly quickly - perhaps without the time or the thought necessary - without studying successful experiences elsewhere" said Juan Triana, a professor at the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy. "Online shopping will not necessarily solve the fundamental problem in Cuba, which is the supply deficit which is not linked to COVID-19 but existed long before." "Obviously, it could have been done better," he said, especially in terms of organization because "suddenly the delivery locations have multiplied - customers too - but without the logistics to guarantee distribution."

Outside the Cuarto Caminos supermarket in Havana, trucks, vans and even taxis are used to load orders for online customers, the goods sorted into large transparent plastic bags. Yahima De Los Santos, 43, comes to pick up her purchases. "I prefer to come to the store myself, it's safer to be sure that nothing is missing," she said, though she is delighted with the experience. "For me, it's one of the best things, because it's never easy to queue." "The only thing I don't like about it, and a few people complain about it, is that when you buy online you have to be very quick. When put a product in your basket, sometimes it's not there anymore by the time you pay." Faced with thousands of complaints, the military-owned distribution companies Cimex and Tiendas Caribe have shut down part of their sites for an overhaul.

And even the Communist Party-controlled state media have devoted long, critical articles to the problem. — AFP

S Africa economy to shrink 7.2%, deepest slump in 90 years

CAPE TOWN: South Africa's economy is projected to shrink by 7.2 percent in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the deepest slump in 90 years, the finance minister said Wednesday. Presenting a supplementary budget in parliament, Tito Mboweni said the pandemic had pushed the country's consolidated budget, including debt servicing costs, to a record of more than two trillion rand. He compared public debt to a "hippopotamus... eating our children's inheritance".

South Africa has the highest recorded number of coronavirus infections in sub-Saharan Africa, with 106,108 cases, including 2,102 fatalities. Its economy, the most developed in the continent, had already slipped into recession in the final quarter of 2019 before the virus arrived. The pandemic prompted President Cyril Ramaphosa to impose a strict lockdown, which kicked in on March 27 and has gradually been eased in phases since May 1 to allow economic activity to pick up. The lockdown pushed the annual rate of inflation in April to a 15-year low of 3 percent, pulled down mainly by an 11.1-percent drop in fuel prices.

The country's statistics agency announced on Tuesday that the unemployment rate rose one percentage point to 30.1 percent in the first quarter of this year compared with the last three months of 2019. The jobless rate is a record high, said statistics boss Risenga Maluleke. Commerce and industry experts have warned that the unemployment rate could rise as high as 50 percent because of the pandemic. The government in April released 500 billion rand (\$28.7 billion, 25.5 billion euros) in an economic and social relief package targeting health, social grants and subsidies for companies.

Part of the coronavirus relief aid will be sought from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB), Maluleke said. Raymond Parsons, professor of economics at South Africa's North-West University, warned that the country "has to break out of its low-growth trap without falling into a debt trap". — AFP

Business

Italy's 5G stumbles after a shining start

A fallen victim to sky-high costs and red tape

ROME: Italy's 5G project, launched to great fanfare in October 2018 with frequencies going for top dollar at auction, has since fallen victim to sky-high costs and red tape. The next generation wireless network technology will not only be faster and capable of handling more connected devices than the existing 4G, it's expected to fuel development of new technologies for consumers, businesses and defense alike. Keen to take advantage, Italy held auctions at the end of 2018 - two years before neighbor France - and raised over 6.55 billion euros (\$7.3 billion) - far above the minimum 2.17 billion euros Paris is hoping to bring in this autumn.

"The culture of mobile telecommunications in Italy has always been ahead of its time. The peninsula was the first country in the world to launch 3G," Andrea Rangone, a professor at the Polytechnic business school in Milan, told AFP. But the high prices paid for frequencies, coupled with Italy's slow bureaucracy, are proving a headache for operators. The auctions have led to "much higher costs for companies than in other countries", and "a sharp drop in profitability," said recently Enrico Barsotti, number two at mobile operator WindTre. "Investing in Italy is very difficult: the limits on electromagnetic emissions are among the strictest in the world, and there is no certainty about time frames because of bureaucracy," he said.

Permit problems

Getting the necessary permits "depends on rules that vary from one region to another, or even from one municipality to another," Barsotti said. Fastweb, a broadband operator that has partnered with WindTre for 5G, also told AFP the authorization process was "likely to slow down the deployment of 5G networks considerably".

Frustrated operators also fear damage from another quarter: fake news. They have urged the government to tackle reports 5G could be dangerous for customers, with Fastweb pointing out "the frequencies used are exactly the same as those used over the past 20 years for other mobile technologies". These issues have not stopped operators from commercially launching 5G with dedicated subscriptions. Telecom Italia (TIM) is already offering 5G in nine cities, including Rome, Turin, Florence and Naples, and will do so



GLENDALE: A sign in a store advertises 5G wireless at the Americana at Brand shopping, dining and entertainment mall complex in Glendale. — AFP

"soon" in other cities like Milan. The aim is "to cover the entire population by 2025/2026," it said.

Pick up in 2021?

Digital Transformation expert Gianni Ferranti said "there could be a resumption of 5G development in 2021, if the government maintains tax incentives for companies investing in digitization and automation, and if the average prices of mobile phones capable of connecting in 5G fall". A row over whether Chinese telecom giant

Huawei, the world's largest supplier of telecom network equipment, could pose a risk to 5G security in the West has been largely absent in Italy. "Italy has tried to remain as neutral as possible," professor Rangone said. Rome nevertheless decided in 2019 to exercise its "special powers" to verify trade agreements entered into by operators, in order to "protect national security". TIM said for its part it had "adopted a policy of having a diversity of suppliers, so as not to be dependent on any one company in particular" - a common policy among operators. —AFP

Huawei loses out in 5G bid in Singapore

SINGAPORE: Nokia and Ericsson have been chosen as Singapore's main 5G network providers, telecom operators said, leaving Huawei with only a minor role as the Chinese tech giant faces growing US pressure. Huawei has been dogged by allegations of stealing American trade secrets and aiding China's espionage efforts, with Washington pushing countries to bar the company from involvement in their next-generation networks. Huawei has denied ties with the Chinese government.

Singtel, one of the city-state's main telecom operators, on Wednesday said it had chosen Sweden's Ericsson to build its 5G network after the government gave final approval. A joint venture that includes the country's two other major telecom operators, M1 and StarHub, announced it had opted for Nokia to build its main 5G infrastructure. However both M1 and Starhub said that other firms, in-

cluding Huawei, could have some involvement in the project. Huawei only won the contract to be a provider for a smaller, local network system, operated by TPG Telecom, a more minor player.

The Southeast Asian city-state tries to maintain good relations with both the US and China, and Information Minister S. Iswaran insisted that no company had been excluded in the selection process. "We have run a robust process spelling out our requirements in terms of performance, security and resilience," he said, adding that mobile network operators also had their own criteria. "There is a diversity of vendors participating in different parts of the 5G ecosystem, and... there remain prospects for greater involvement in our 5G system going forward."

Singapore is aiming to have ultra high-speed internet coverage for half of the country by the end of 2022, and expand it to cover the entire island by the end of 2025. The US government launched a worldwide campaign against Huawei, the world's largest supplier of telecom network equipment and the planet's number two smartphone maker, about 18 months ago. Washington essentially banned Huawei from the US market last year, although earlier this month it let the firm back into the fold when it comes to companies working together to set standards for 5G networks. — AFP

CBK's Najma and 'Your Salary & More' draws

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) conducted its Najma and 'Your Salary & More' draws with a draw made on June, 21 at CBK headquarters with the presence of MOCI representative, Abdul Aziz Ashkenani. The draws were posted live on social media networks. The winner of Najma weekly KD 5000 award was Mohammed Faraj Al-Mutairi and the winner of the 'Your Salary & More' campaign was Ibrahim Ismael Ali Taqi. 'Your Salary & More' campaign is designed to clients transferring their salaries to CBK, namely citizens and expats working for the government and oil sectors, companies listed with the bank and retirees.

"Any Kuwaiti citizen with KD 500+ salary can transfer his/her salary to CBK

and get KD 250-500 instant gifts or interest free loans equal to five times the salary with a maximum of KD 10,000 in addition to cash gifts", CBK explained - noting that a weekly draw is held for the account holders who are offered five-year valid Visa Signature cards free of charge with up to 3% cash back in addition to the e-gov account and creative solutions such as the T-Pay service.

CBK explained that Najma account prizes include a weekly KD 5000 award, a monthly KD 20,000 award, a biannual KD 500,000 award and the world's largest annual and Guinness world record certified award of KD 1.5 million. CBK explained that the Najma account can be opened by depositing the minimum of KD 100 but explained that the account balance must be at least KD 500 in order to enter all draws and that each KD 25 provides an entry chance in the draw in addition to other benefits such as ATM card and credit cards and other banking services. Najma account can be easily opened for all clients by simple steps through the CBK mobile App.

Sports

All Blacks could face Kangaroos in cross-code rugby blockbuster

Super Rugby's Rebels to leave Melbourne after virus outbreak

SYDNEY: Talks are underway to stage a historic cross-code rugby international match between New Zealand's All Blacks and Australia's Kangaroos, it was revealed yesterday.

Kangaroos coach Mal Meninga told Brisbane's Courier-Mail there had been "serious negotiations" to set up the clash for December as both rugby union and rugby league look for ways to recoup losses from the COVID-19 enforced shutdown.

"We are still in talks but obviously news of this has got out," Meninga said. New Zealand Rugby (NZR) boss Mark Robinson confirmed his team were in talks, although he said his priority was salvaging as many rugby union Tests as possible in 2020. "We've had an approach. We'll work that through and go through the proper process... if we feel it has merit to take further," Robinson told local media. Meninga said he was keen to pit his 13-a-side stars against the might of New Zealand's 15-a-side game. "I'm keen to make this happen. We want to play the All Blacks, hopefully we can get the concept off the ground," Meninga said.

"The best from our game versus the best from the New Zealand game... let's do it." The Test would be a 14-a-side match on December 5 in Australia and could potentially become a regular blockbuster biannual fixture.

"We've had the option put to us of this hybrid game with the Kangaroos," said Robinson.

"And it's one of many different scenarios in a

unique year like this that we are considering with being innovative and having a focus on trying to consider revenue-generating ideas at this time given the financial climate that we're in."

Both NZR and Australian rugby league have lost millions of dollars due to the coronavirus pandemic, with borders closed and Test matches cancelled.

If the clash goes ahead, it would likely attract significant interest. The All Blacks are a global brand while the Kangaroos are the current rugby league world champions. Meanwhile, the Rebels' preparations for their opening Australian domestic Super Rugby match have been disrupted by an outbreak of coronavirus in Melbourne, with the team moving to Canberra early for player safety.

Victoria state has seen a spike in COVID-19 cases over the past week with several new clusters emerging in its biggest city. The Rebels are due to kick off their Super Rugby AU campaign on July 4 against the ACT Brumbies in Canberra, but have decided to travel to the nation's capital a week early. "This is undoubtedly a very fluid situation and we are committed to keeping our people safe and healthy in accordance with government advice and regulations," Rebels chief Baden Stephenson said late Wednesday.

"We've been in constructive dialogue with Rugby Australia, (southern hemisphere governing body) SANZAAR and (players' union) RUPA for the last 24 hours and we have all agreed that deci-



HAMILTON: File photo shows Otere Black of the Blues (R) tackles Aaron Cruden of the Chiefs during the Super Rugby match between Waikato Chiefs and Auckland Blues at Waikato Stadium in Hamilton on June 20, 2020. — AFP

sive action is required."

A decision on where the team heads after the Brumbies clash has yet to be made. They are due to host the Queensland Reds in Melbourne on July 10. Stephenson said all players and staff returned negative tests for COVID-19 on Monday and will

be tested again on Thursday before leaving for Canberra on Friday. The five-team Super Rugby AU begins on July 3 with the Reds up against the NSW Waratahs after the original 15-team season across five countries was halted by the coronavirus pandemic.—AFP

Brogdon, Parker to play in NBA restart

LOS ANGELES: Indiana Pacers playmaker Malcolm Brogdon and Sacramento Kings forward Jabari Parker say they've tested positive for COVID-19, but expect to join their teammates when the NBA resumes play in Florida in July.

"I recently tested positive for the COVID virus and am currently in quarantine," Brogdon said in a statement issued through the team. "I'm doing well, feeling well and progressing well. I plan to join my teammates in Orlando for the resumption of the NBA season and playoffs." Parker confirmed his diagnosis in a statement posted on the Kings' Twitter feed, saying he had tested positive "several days ago" and had self-isolated in Chicago.

"I am progressing in my recovery and feeling well," Parker said. "I look forward to joining my teammates in Orlando as we return to the court for the resumption of the NBA season."

Before the NBA shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic on March 11, Brogdon was playing a key role in Indiana's push for the playoffs. The

Pacers are the fifth seed in the Eastern Conference as the league prepares to resume play in a controlled environment in a sports complex at Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

In recent weeks, he has been an active voice in the Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the killing of unarmed black man George Floyd by police in Minneapolis.

He is among the NBA players who believe they can use the platform in Orlando to take the Black Lives Matter message to a broader audience. In preparation for resumption of play, NBA teams this week began testing all players and some staff and a number have tested positive, although exact numbers have not been confirmed.

The Denver Post reported that Nuggets big man Nikola Jokic had tested positive and was in quarantine in his native Serbia, but the club declined to confirm the report, citing health privacy concerns. During this Phase 2 of the league's pro-Orlando health protocols, tests on players are to be repeated multiple times each week until teams arrive in Florida, where even stricter protocols aimed at slowing the spread of the virus will be in place.

The league has said that positive tests won't necessarily derail its plans to resume with 22 teams in the running to make the NBA Finals. Eight teams who were effectively eliminated from playoff contention when the hiatus began in March will not resume play. —AFP

Murray to return to 'high level' after injury woes

LONDON: Andy Murray insists he can still play at a "high level" after stepping up his return to fitness in a defeat against Kyle Edmund at the 'Battle of the Brits' event on Wednesday.

Former world number one Murray was playing just his second match since November following a bruised bone.

The two-time Wimbledon champion showed impressive movement and all of his usual tenacity to take the first set, but Edmund hit back to win 6-7, 7-6, 10/5 behind closed doors in Roehampton.

"To be honest, I am not bothered about the results of the match, after a match like that I hope my hip is OK, and I pull up well from it," Murray said.

"I know if my hip is good, my tennis will only improve and get better over the next few months. If I can get consistent practice.

"That is my hope. The hip feels good. If I play like that and do a few things better, sharpen up a couple of things, I will play high level tennis.

"My groin is a little bit sore today, I felt it in practice and at the beginning of my match, but as the match went on, it felt alright."

The often-injured Murray plays James Ward in his final group game, needing to win to make it through to the semi-finals.

But the Scot is already looking at the much longer term as he plots a schedule that will see him arrive at the US Open in the best shape.

The three-time Grand Slam champion is likely to return to the ATP Tour at Washington in August. "I am trying to avoid playing back-to-back events, my priority is to be fit for the grand slams," Murray said.

"After what I have gone through in the last few years, and not being able to compete at any of the majors, I want to have a few more cracks at them. Get to compete at them. Even if it is for one last time.

"So there would be more chance (of playing) in Washington than Cincinnati - or New York (where the Cincinnati event has been moved)." — AFP

Sports

Connor to be first female MCC president in 233 years

Set to take up her new post on October 1, 2021

LONDON: Former England women's captain Clare Connor is to become the first female president of Marylebone Cricket Club in its 233-year history.

Current incumbent Kumar Sangakkara, the first non-British MCC president, nominated Connor via video link from his native Sri Lanka during an annual general meeting on Wednesday.

Connor, now the England and Wales Cricket Board's head of women's cricket, is set to take up her new post on October 1, 2021, subject to the membership's approval.

Presidents of MCC usually remain in post for one year but Sangakkara's term is set to be extended by a further 12 months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

It was not until 1998 that MCC, which owns Lord's Cricket Ground, voted to allow women to become members.

Prior to that, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was one of the few women allowed in the Lord's pavilion.

"I am deeply honoured to be named the next president of MCC," said Connor in a statement.

"Cricket has enriched my life so deeply already, and now it hands me this wonderful privilege.

"We often need to look back to see how far we've come. I made my first visit to Lord's as a starry-eyed, cricket-obsessed nine-year-old girl at a time when women were not welcome in the Long Room (of the pavilion).

The 43-year-old Connor, now the chair of the International Cricket Council's women's cricket committee, added: "Times have changed. Now I find myself entrusted with this remarkable opportunity -- the opportunity to play a part in helping MCC, cricket's most influential club, to thrive and grow in an even more modern and inclusive future.

"MCC does wonderful work for communities in the UK and overseas. It stages the most uplifting events. It brings people together.

"And as we take small steps to emerge from this uncertain and difficult time, we are going to need the power of sport and strong sporting organisations like MCC more than ever."

Meanwhile Sangakkara said he was "thrilled" by Connor's latest cricket appointment, the Sri Lanka great adding: "The club has a significant role to play in cricket's global appeal and with her influence, I am sure she will make a considerable contribution to MCC."

Left-arm spinner Connor made her Eng-

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Times have changed

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Former England women's captain Clare Connor.

land debut aged 19 in 1995 and went on to captain her country in 2000 before retiring six years later.

Although MCC no longer runs English cricket, it has worldwide responsibility for the sport's rules. —AFP

Atalanta end Lazio's 21-match unbeaten run

MILAN: Title-chasing Lazio suffered their first Serie A defeat in nine months, falling 3-2 at Atalanta on Wednesday to stay four points behind leaders Juventus after surrendering a two-goal lead.

Lazio, playing their first game since February 29 after the coronavirus lockdown, thanked a Marten De Roon own-goal for putting them ahead after six minutes in Bergamo with Sergej Milinkovic-Savic adding a superb second from distance five minutes later.

But Robin Gosens headed fourth-placed Atalanta back into the game seven minutes before the break with Ruslan Malinovskyi rifling in the equaliser on 66 minutes.

Jose Luis Palomino then sealed the home win

10 minutes from time.

Lazio — bidding for their third Serie A title after 1974 and 2000 — have lost just three times in the league this season.

Their most recent defeat before Wednesday was 1-0 at the hands of Inter Milan on September 25.

"We knew that returning against Atalanta was one of the worst opponents to have," said Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi whose side were held 3-3 by the Bergamo side in Rome in October.

"Unfortunately the title race gets more complicated and we regret this, because we're coming off a long series of unbeaten games.

"I don't like losing and the lads are a little down."

Atalanta are four points behind third-placed Inter Milan, who were held 3-3 at home against Sassuolo earlier Wednesday.

Eight-time reigning champions Juventus were the only one of the top three to win this week with their 2-0 victory in Bologna on Monday. —AFP

Koepka, Simpson withdraw from PGA event

NEW YORK: Four-time major champion Brooks Koepka and past US Open winners Webb Simpson and Graeme McDowell are among six golfers who won't compete the US PGA Travelers Championship after three COVID-19 positive tests at the event.

US PGA commissioner Jay Monahan has tightened restrictions in the tour's health and safety plan in the wake of positive tests by US player Cameron Champ, McDowell caddie Ken Comboy and Koepka caddie Ricky Elliott.

"I haven't tested positive for COVID-19, but as I've said all along, I'm taking this very seriously," Koepka said. "I don't want to do anything that might jeopardize the health of any player in the field or his ability to compete.

Fourth-ranked Koepka is set to seek a third consecutive PGA Championship title in August.

"The right thing to do right now is get

home, support Ricky and feel confident that I'm doing what I can do protecting my fellow tour members," Koepka said.

Americans Cameron Champ, Nick Watney and Chase Koepka are the other golfers who will miss the event starting Thursday at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut, in the tour's third event back from a three-month coronavirus shutdown.

"We all need to learn to live with this virus. It's pretty clear this virus isn't going anywhere," Monahan said.

"We're going to have more positives going forward. We're just going to continue to refine (safeguards) and get better and better and find new ways to mitigate the risk."

Watney tested positive last week in South Carolina. Champ was positive on Tuesday. Comboy and Elliott tested positive after Koepka, his younger brother Chase and Northern Ireland's McDowell practiced together Tuesday.

"I have experienced some fatigue and muscle soreness myself," 2010 US Open winner McDowell said. "I didn't think of it as COVID related... but now that Kenny has tested positive... I have to take those symptoms more seriously. —AFP

Sports

Liverpool on brink of Premier League title, Man Utd make top four move

Solskjaer's men extend their unbeaten run to 13 games

LONDON: Liverpool are on the brink of clinching the Premier League title after the leaders powered to a 4-0 win against Crystal Palace, while Anthony Martial hit a hat-trick in Manchester United's 3-0 victory over Sheffield United on Wednesday.

Jurgen Klopp's side took control thanks to first-half goals from Trent Alexander-Arnold and Mohamed Salah behind closed doors at Anfield.

Fabinho and Sadio Mane netted after the interval and Liverpool will be crowned champions if Manchester City fail to beat Chelsea at Stamford Bridge. If second-placed City win in west London, then Liverpool could wrap up their first English title for 30 years in their next game — against Pep Guardiola's side at the Etihad Stadium on July 2.

After a drab goalless draw at Merseyside rivals Everton on Sunday, the champions-elect were far more vibrant and Alexander-Arnold opened the scoring with a superb free-kick in the 23rd minute.

Salah doubled the lead in the 44th minute, taking Fabinho's lofted pass and guiding in his 21st goal of the season. Fabinho scored with a thunderous 30-yard strike in the 55th minute and Mane capped a fine move in the 69th minute as Liverpool moved 23 points clear of City.

United are still far off challenging again for ti-

bles at the top of the table, but there are growing signs of momentum for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men as they extended their unbeaten run to 13 games.

Martial produced two predatory first-time finishes before half-time to put United in command at Old Trafford.

Sheffield United were riding high in March before football's shutdown for three months, but the Blades have now picked up just one point and failed to score in their three games since the restart. United could have piled on much more pain after the break, but were content with one more goal as Martial completed his first career hat-trick with a cheeky chip from Marcus Rashford's pass.

"Very happy for Anthony," Solskjaer said. "The third goal was a great goal, but for me the first and the second were better. "He's in the box, ready to go. We have worked on that, getting in the box in that situation more often. "I thought our performance deserved a win, definitely."

'DREAM BIG'

Fifth-place could still be good enough for a place in next season's Champions League depending on the outcome of City's appeal against a two-season ban from European competition.

And Wolves remain level on points with



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Fabinho slides in to tackle Crystal Palace's Dutch defender Patrick van Aanholt during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Crystal Palace at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on June 24, 2020. — AFP

United in fifth after continuing their perfect restart with a 1-0 win over Bournemouth. Just as in a 2-0 victory at West Ham on Saturday, Adama

Traore and Raul Jimenez combined to break the deadlock as the Mexican powered home a header for his 24th goal of the season. — AFP

Ramos free-kick sends Madrid back to top of La Liga

MADRID: Sergio Ramos' sensational free-kick helped Real Madrid move back above Barcelona to the top of La Liga as they defeated Real Mallorca 2-0 on Wednesday. Ramos brushed aside Gareth Bale to take the shot and justified his claim with a curling strike into the top corner after 19-year-old Vinicius Junior had put Madrid in front in the first half.

Madrid's victory at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium means they are level again on points with Barcelona but sit above their title rivals in the table due to a superior head-to-head record. "There are seven finals left," said Ramos. "There will be only one league in the year of coronavirus and we want to win it for the fans." Bale has been hardly used since La Liga resumed on June 11 but Zinedine Zidane continued his rotation policy and handed the Welshman his first start since February 16.

Yet an underwhelming display is unlikely to push Bale back into Zidane's preferred eleven as Vinicius enhanced his case with another lively, if erratic, performance.

The Brazilian also hit the crossbar in the first half. Ramos, though, stole the show with his brilliant free-kick, taking his personal tally to a career-best eight goals for the season, after he became La Liga's highest ever scoring defender on Sunday by scoring a penalty against Real Sociedad.

The only worry for Madrid was that Eden Hazard was taken off shortly after the hour, raising doubts over whether the Belgian is fully fit or completely confident in his troublesome ankle.

There was also time at the end for history to be made as Mallorca's Luka Romero became the youngest player ever

to play in La Liga, aged 15 years and 219 days.

Mallorca, who remain 18th in the table, always looked like one of Madrid's more straight-forward assignments during the run-in, even if they claimed a stunning victory over them in October to put Zidane under serious pressure.

But his team have been transformed since then and after Barcelona made hard work of beating Athletic Bilbao on Tuesday night, this was another win to suggest the momentum is now with Madrid. Bale tested Manolo Reina with an early shot from distance just after Karim Benzema was denied by Mallorca's goalkeeper after being allowed to control at the back post.

Hazard freed Vinicius, who took too long over his shot, but if that was the worst of Vinicius' finishing, the best was to come soon after. Dani Carvajal barged over Dani Rodriguez, fairly in the eyes of the referee, and Fede Valverde swept a long ball forward to Luka Modric, who waited before playing a cute reverse ball to Vinicius.

Bale stepped aside, allowing the youngster to lift a superb finish over Reina and into the net. Mallorca rallied with Takefusa Kubo, on loan from Madrid, particularly lively and Thibaut Courtois having to tip wide a bending effort from Iddrisu Baba. But Madrid never really looked likely to concede and Vinicius should have had a second when played through by Benzema but scooped a shot onto the bar.

A second eventually arrived just before the hour as Hazard won a free-kick 25 yards out, slightly left of centre. Ramos claimed the shot and made it count, whipping a curling effort over the wall and into the top left-hand corner.

Hazard was taken off after 62 minutes, replaced by Toni Kroos, as Zidane began looking ahead to tougher tests to come. In the 83rd minute, Romero was given a debut to remember. Earlier, Real Sociedad suffered a third consecutive defeat at home to Celta Vigo to leave their challenge for Champions League qualification in tatters. La Real have taken just a point from their four games since La Liga restarted on June 11 and now sit seventh, six points adrift of Sevilla in fourth. — AFP

Three Pakistan cricketers test positive for virus

KARACHI: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced that three players have tested positive for coronavirus ahead of the team's tour of England next month. The PCB said leg-spinner Shadab Khan, fast bowler Haris Rauf and teenage batsman Haider Ali had tested positive for COVID-19 despite showing no symptoms and would now go into self-isolation.

The first Test against England at Old Trafford is due to start on August 5. The PCB is testing its players and officials ahead of the much-anticipated tour, which will also see games played in Southampton.

Pakistan is experiencing a surge in coronavirus cases, with more than 180,000 so far including 3,590 deaths — though real numbers are thought to be much higher. The PCB also tested 23 players and 12 team officials on Monday, with results due.

Additional tests are planned for later in the week in Lahore, with only players testing negative allowed to fly to England. The PCB said anyone testing positive must remain in quarantine for two weeks.

After that period, they will only be allowed to rejoin teammates in England following two successive negative tests. Pakistan players will also be subject to mandatory quarantine upon arrival in England, as per current British government regulations. The team will eventually practice in what officials are describing as a "bio-secure" environment. Following the August 5 Test in Manchester, Pakistan will play the remaining two games in Southampton, starting on August 13 and 21 respectively.

Pakistan will also play three Twenty20 internationals in Southampton on August 29, 31 and September 2. Fortunately for the team, the three players who tested positive were not expected to play in the Test matches, only in the Twenty20 games. Team physio Cliffe Deacon and bowling coach Waqar Younis will fly directly to England from South Africa and Australia before taking their coronavirus tests. — AFP



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MCC president in 233 years**

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