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Labor offices in Jleeb, Farwaniya to assist workers

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and State Minister for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel yesterday announced that offices of the Public Authority for Manpower will be opened in areas locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic to receive labor complaints in case of disputes or if employers do not give workers their rights. Aqeel said the move was coordinated with Deputy Premier, Interior Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh to set up offices of the manpower authority and the investigations department in labor accommodations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Farwaniya.

She said the manpower authority listens to workers' complaints and deals with them according to the law to guarantee their rights. She said many complaints led to companies suspected to be involved in human trafficking and legal action was taken against them. Aqeel said many financial guarantees were liquidated and overdue salaries were paid to workers to help face the COVID-19 crisis.

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NEW DELHI: This photograph taken on June 25, 2020 shows cardboard beds installed inside the campus hall of spiritual organization Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB), which is being converted into a coronavirus care center. — AFP

NEW DELHI: India now has more than 500,000 confirmed coronavirus cases, according to government figures released yesterday that showed a record daily leap of 18,500 new infections. Authorities said a total of 15,685 people had died after another 385 fatalities were added to the toll in 24 hours. Meanwhile, Israel and the United Arab Emirates will cooperate in the fight against the coronavirus, the two countries said, a possible boost to Israeli efforts to normalize relations with Gulf Arab countries.

The pandemic is not expected to peak in India for several more weeks and experts say the number of cases could pass one million before the end of July. Some state governments are considering imposing new lockdowns. A hard-hitting nationwide lockdown that started March 25 is gradually being eased because of the damage caused to the economy. The virus has particularly hit India's densely populated cities and there are now major concerns for New Delhi which has overtaken Mumbai with nearly 80,000 cases.

The city's government has predicted it will have 500,000 infections by the end of July. It is already using railway carriages to house patients and has taken over hotels and banquet halls to relieve the pressure on hard-pressed hospitals. The government has been criticized over a lack of testing that experts say has hidden the true number of cases in India, which now stands at 509,000.

The country is currently fourth in the world for the number of infections, behind the United States, Brazil and Russia, though it has a much lower death toll.

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Miner becomes millionaire over tanzanite find

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: A Tanzanian small-scale miner has become a multi-millionaire after uncovering two of the biggest of the country's precious tanzanite stones ever found and selling them to the government. Saniniu Kuryan Laizer, 52, found the stones weighing 9.27 and 5.1 kg respectively in the northern Mirewani hills, an area which President John Magufuli had fenced off in 2018 to stop smuggling of the gem. He sold them to the government for 7.7 billion Tanzanian shillings (nearly \$3.3 million).

Tanzanite was first found in the foothills

of Kilimanjaro in 1967, and the northern Tanzanian region of Manyara is the only known place where the stones, coveted by jewelers by their remarkable violet-blue sparkle, are found.

At a function celebrating the find in Manyara on Wednesday, mining minister Dotto Biteko said the stones were the biggest ever uncovered in the country. "Laizer is our (shilling) billionaire and let us make sure that he is safe," he said. "We are now moving from a situation where the small miners were smuggling tanzanite, and now they are following the procedures and paying government taxes and royalties."

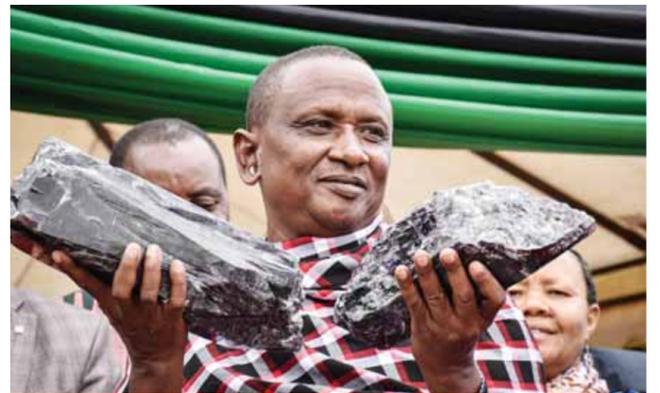
Laizer said he hoped to use the money to develop his community. "I plan to build a mall in Arusha and a school near my home," he said. "I thank God for this achievement because it's the first time to get this size. When I found these, I notified government officials who valued the stones and today

they called me for payment."

Jewelers Le Vian, which during the 1980s and 1990s acquired half the entire production of Tanzanite, said the amount paid to Laizer was only a fraction of its retail value. "While the \$3 million paid to the miner has undoubtedly changed his life forever, it is only a twentieth of the potential retail value of the gemstones he discovered," said chief executive Eddie LeVian in a statement.

"The miner Saniniu Laizer defied all odds to unearth these world record-busting gemstones. The artisanal miner dug out these stones by hand and they remained intact. Mining can be a very rough process with enormous amounts of breakages along the way." However it appears the stones will not be destined for the market, as the government wrote on Twitter they would be placed in the national museum.

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MANYARA, Tanzania: Tanzanian small-scale miner Saniniu Kuryan Laizer poses with two of the biggest tanzanite stones as a millionaire during a ceremony for his historic discovery on June 24, 2020. — AFP

Unilever to rename Fair & Lovely, pulls ads from Facebook

NEW DELHI: The Indian and Bangladeshi arms of consumer giant Unilever said they will rename their locally marketed "Fair & Lovely" skin-lightening cream in the face of global anti-racism protests. The Anglo-Dutch firm — which reportedly raked in some \$500 million in revenue from the product in India last year — said it would stop using the word "Fair" in the name as the brand was "committed to celebrating all skin tones".

The obsession with fair skin is deeply entrenched across Asia, and in some cities it can be difficult to find cosmetics that do not contain some kind of whitening product. In South Asia in particular lighter tones are assumed to reflect higher social class, especially within the India's complex caste hierarchy.

"We are making our skin care portfolio more inclusive and want to lead the celebration of a more diverse portrayal of beauty," Sanjiv Mehta, head of Hindustan Unilever, said in a statement.

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Low-key Biden strategy vexes adrift Trump

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's bungled coronavirus response and crackdowns on protesters have thrust Joe Biden into the driver's seat of the US presidential election, but the Democratic challenger must decide when to start campaigning in earnest and battle his opponent head on. Polls show American voters have little faith in Trump's ability to defeat the pandemic, and 130 days out from November's election Biden has surged into a commanding lead despite holding few in-person events since mid-March.

But with campaign inflection points fast approaching — notably his pick of a running mate, expected in early

August, and the Democratic National Convention later that month — Biden must consider how to balance adhering to coronavirus safety measures and appearing as more than just a virtual candidate. Hurling criticism at the president from his Delaware home is not a viable long-term strategy for Biden, common sense and experts dictate.

"I don't see how that's sustainable through the fall election," professor Barry Burden, director of the Election Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, told AFP. "There will come a point where Biden will need to be a physical presence on the campaign trail, if only to reassure voters he is a real person, in good health and ready to serve."

That coming out should occur in July, Burden said, so Biden can start honing his public messaging before sharing a stage with his new vice presidential pick.

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LANCASTER, Pennsylvania: Democratic presidential candidate and former Vice President Joe Biden speaks to families who have benefited from the Affordable Care Act during an event at the Lancaster Recreation Center on June 25, 2020. — AFP

Local

Govt sector to abide by health conditions when work resumes

Expats replaced with Kuwaitis in public sector within five years: CSC

KUWAIT: Ministries and government institutions should abide by the health conditions when they resume work on Tuesday, June 30, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) said. The public sector should limit use of papers as well as personal delivery of documents within, or between, the institutions and to communicate through the government-to-government (G2G) system. CSC Undersecretary Bader Al-Hamad told an online news conference following a Cabinet meeting Thursday. The Cabinet, during an extraordinary meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, decided to move to the second phase of a plan aimed at restoring normal life amidst the coronavirus pandemic. The government decided to start the second phase on Tuesday with the curfew shortened to be between 8:00 pm until 5:00 am.

Employees will be allowed to return to their offices with a maximum of 30 percent of the total workforce. Hamad said the Ministry of Health would be exempted from this decision because they needed to be fully operational to confront the pandemic. State departments, he added, should carry out regular disinfections and inform the employees about instructions issued by the health authorities. Employees should limit their movements among departments and offices, he said, and a limited number of people should use elevators to guarantee physical distancing.

Restaurants inside the government buildings will not offer any services, said Hamad, noting that a ban would be imposed on gatherings, smoking or praying halls. Hamad said employees should be apart by two meters. Hamad, meanwhile, said the government was replacing expatriates with Kuwaiti nationals at the

public sector as part of a five-year plan, which was in its third year now.

Back to normalcy

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said meanwhile that the success of the second stage of the plan to go back to normalcy in Kuwait will be in the hands of citizens and residents. In a press conference after the meeting, the Health Minister said that Kuwait had improved its position on curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) from the previous period especially during Ramadan and



Back to normalcy in people's hand

Eid Al-Fitr when the load on hospitals was at 85 percent. Thanks to the lockdown, the load was decreased to 40 percent in ICUs during this month and 30 percent in hospitals nationwide, he indicated.

The three-week second phase of national plan to bring back life to normal will be less restrictive; however, people of Kuwait will now have the increased responsibility to combat the spread of COVID-19, approaching the matter with a cautious optimism. The second phase will witness the opening of commercial

complexes, malls, parks, and other places of leisure between 10:00 am and 06:00 pm. The minister urged people to become more responsible in the upcoming period for their sake so that all of society could overcome this pandemic. Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said that though restrictions were being eased, the fact of the matter is that it was time to be more vigilant to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus.

Health situation assessment

The decisions made during the meeting as part of the second phase of returning back to normalcy include appointing Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah to continue assessing the health situation in the lockdown areas of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Mahboula, and Farwaniya to better handle the situation and curb the spread of COVID-19. A report on the situation will be relayed to the Cabinet, government spokesperson Tareq Al-Merzem said during the press conference.

He added that the Cabinet had decided to form a main committee, headed by the Health Minister and a number of fellow officials, to follow up on health measures regarding curbing the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). The committee will be task with holding entities responsible for not abiding by anti-COVID-19 health regulations.

Merzem urged citizens and residents alike to abide by health and safety regulations in the upcoming period to prevent the further spread of coronavirus in society. The Cabinet had to assign concerned bodies to take necessary measures to ensure that the economy would recover, providing assistance to the private sector to revitalize the work market. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Volunteers fumigated the Hawally Governorate's Citizenship and Travel Documents Department building recently, in anticipation of the return of employees on Tuesday. The operation was done in cooperation with the Interior Ministry.
— Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

In my view

The fight goes on

By Abdellatif Sharea

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Over the weekend, I decided to watch the news from various parts of the world, and the prominent subjects were the United States' various elections and polls. But that is not my concern at the moment - obviously the COVID-19 situation is of the utmost concern. Maybe it's boring to keep repeating the word COVID-19, but believe me it should not be at all!

The new thing in it is that places where the number of cases was going down are now seeing the virus making a comeback. I discovered that my dear city of Dallas, Texas is now reporting record numbers of cases, after being relatively in good shape. In South America, the virus is wreaking havoc, and Brazil is a good example that seems to have lost it. If we go north to Europe and take Sweden as an example, cases made neighboring countries close their borders.

This makes it very clear that the fight is still raging on and it is extremely fierce. This virus is the most opportune thing on the face of earth and what happened proves this fact. Cities of the world started to open up as permitted by concerned authorities and stipulations were being made, but unfortunately, people were lax and complacent - no social distancing, no masks, no this and no that... against the advice of the medical community.

People were told to stay home, but they did not, us included. People were asked to keep a distance between each other, but they did not, us included. They were told to wear masks, but they did not, us included.

Maybe some people did not realize the mistake made by the World Health Organization (WHO) when it said that those who are asymptomatic will not transfer the virus to others, then retracted this claim an hour later, but those who I call social media operatives kept spreading the first claim and ignored the retraction.

It is understood that human beings cannot stand confinement and being in the same place for prolonged periods. Even fugitive criminals who are keen to keep a low profile and stay in hiding will come out every now and then. We are not criminals but victims of something called a COVID-19 invasion, and the irony is that to defeat it, or at least fight it off, we must stay at a distance from each other and not gather in numbers.

Life must go on - this is a given fact! The country as a whole cannot stay locked down for longer periods because the wheels of the economy must keep rolling, and that is why conditions, stipulations and instructions are given to be followed during the phased return to normal life. Please follow what the authorities say. Stay safe!

Finally, Allah says in the Holy Quran: "And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]. And do good; indeed Allah loves the doers of good!" (2:195)

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has recorded 43,703 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Friday, in addition to 341 deaths. With the exception of 162 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 39,969 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,393 people receiving treatment and 23 quarantined.

Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31 (from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am), as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The curfew hours were later reduced to start on 7:00 pm and end at 5:00 am, starting from June 21, 2020. The first phase also includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, and Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier. The lockdown ended in Hawally and Khaitan on June 21, 2020. Activities resumed in the first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops.

The government decided to move to the second phase starting from June 30, 2020. The second phase will see the curfew shortened to be between 8:00 pm and 5:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, pickups from restaurants, as well as reopening of commercial complexes, malls, parks, and other places of leisure between 10:00 am and 06:00 pm.

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

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

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

Earlier, Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to

6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Before that, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

Precautions

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

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

Hotlines

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

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:
• 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
• 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)

- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Medicine delivery

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

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

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

Mental health assistance

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

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

Local

Rent relief helped many expats in Kuwait survive COVID crisis

Tenants still holding out hope for government waiver of rents

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The effects of the global pandemic were certainly unthinkable for many expatriates and citizens in Kuwait and around the world. Little did we know COVID-19 could cripple the economy, take thousands of lives and that millions of others would suffer. In Kuwait alone, many expats were terminated from their jobs and companies closed down. Many of those without work or pay ultimately succumbed to fear and death brought about by the deadly virus.

Expatriate families have also suffered greatly because many breadwinners were unable to send money home as they were unable to work, and therefore received no salary during the months of lockdowns and curfews. Some got a reprieve after landlords waived or reduced rent. Other tenants said despite their appeals, owners required them to pay the full rent every month.

"How can we pay if we have no work and no pay?" asked Elvie, who resides in a furnished apartment in Salmiya. "Maybe the building owner was struck by his conscience, and so he came back

required to pay the whole amount," she noted.

Another tenant said her building owner told him to pay the full amount mentioned in the contract. "We were informed to pay in full every month because our mode of payment is through the bank. We were specifically advised to pay regularly, because they told us in case the government waives the rent, they would comply with government rules, and that if they are required to return the money, the company would do so," he said.

"We got a discount of KD 100 on our KD 350 rent for the months of April and May. But I don't know why they have not given us a receipt - maybe the haris is hiding something, but I care less as long as I have a discount," another tenant said.

Some of those whose rents were waived helped others. "The discounts I got from my landlord were shared with my fellow Filipinos who badly need help, especially food," a tenant said. "We help others so they can also survive the crisis. My building gave us two months of free stay - April and May - during the lockdowns and curfew. But from June, they told us to pay the full rent; it's okay - at least we were able to help others," he said.

So far, there's no law in Kuwait obliging building owners to provide discounts or any reprieve in consideration for the loss of jobs or income during the pandemic, despite recommendations from Kuwaiti citizens, lawyers and MPs to do so on humanitarian grounds.



Waivers allow tenants to help others

to us the following week - not to spare payment or give a discount - but to announce he will accept delayed payment. Maybe he realized that tenants will not be able to pay any longer. But we are still

'Lucky tenants'

But there are some lucky tenants too. "For the months of March, April and May, we were given a 50 percent discount; for June and July, we were told to pay 60 percent only, and from August to December, we were given a 25 percent discount," an elated tenant told Kuwait Times. "Our landlord has a heart of gold. He knew we are unable to pay, so he offered discounts generously," he added.

Local Spotlight

Phase two



By Muna Al-Fuzai
Muna@kuwaittimes.net

The Cabinet approved the second phase of the country's plan for the gradual return to normal life, while maintaining the partial curfew with a minor change in timings - from 8:00 pm to 5:00 am. The new phase will begin on Tuesday. The plan, as announced by the government in May, includes five phases, each lasting three weeks. Now, we will enter the second phase this week in preparation for the gradual return to normal life as before. Inshallah.

The second period will include the re-opening of government agencies and the private sector with less than 30 percent of their capacity, in addition to construction and building works and the opening of commercial malls for specific hours according to regulations. It also includes the opening of retail stores, restaurants and cafes, but dining will not be allowed. All public parks will reopen as well. I know it's extremely hot, so I don't know who would want to visit parks in this weather - maybe those who like walking or jogging.

This was good news for most people, but not everyone. There are still areas under isolation. With most areas of Kuwait entering the second phase of easing of restrictions, the Ministry of Health will continue its evaluation of the health condition of some areas that have been isolated for months - Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula - along with Farwaniya, to review the rates of recovery and infections during the isolation period. The Interior Ministry will present a comprehensive report to the Cabinet at its next meeting for taking appropriate measures in this regard. I hope the ministers decide to ease the lockdown in these areas, especially Mahboula.

Since March 22, Kuwait has been under lockdown - both comprehensive and partial. Yet Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula remain under total lockdown. I sympathize with the residents of these areas because of the long period of sitting at home without being able to go to work. Recently, some psychologists and MPs warned against the negative impacts of the long curfew, psychologically and socially. I can add financially as well.

I think it is an appropriate opportunity to review the condition of the labor market in the private sector by proposing legislations to address the economic condition, as a lot of workers, whether expatriates or citizens, have been affected by the spread of the virus and isolation measures. So a reconsideration of isolation measures is important.

I hope that the numbers of visitors to malls will be limited through a mechanism of reserving an entry date and ensure that everyone wears masks. According to the data of the Ministry of Health, the total number of infected people in Kuwait since the beginning of the crisis reached 42,788 people with 339 deaths, while the number of recoveries reached 33,367. I hope that in the coming days, the numbers of recoveries will be higher.

The Cabinet urged everyone to adhere to health regulations to ensure the safety and health of all. I think the total curfew was a harsh lesson for everyone. Many businesses have shut down and many people have lost their jobs, so extensive media campaigns to wear masks and gloves and use sanitizers to avoid infection are important, so we can all be healthy and go back to our lives as before.

Firemen battle 2,000 square meter blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen from four different fire stations worked together Friday to put out a blaze that burned animal feed stacked up in a 2,000-square-meter open area on the side of Salmi Road near the Jahra cemetery. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire, which had left no human injuries. Occupational Jahra, Tahreer, Ardhia and back-up fire stations responded to the call reporting the fire.

Separately, Salmiya firemen responded to an emergency call re-

porting a traffic accident on Arabian Gulf Road Friday morning. Firemen used special equipment to free a person who was trapped in his wrecked vehicle, then handed him over to paramedics who rushed him to hospital. An investigation was opened into the accident.

Drug possession

Drug Control General Department officers arrested a man with possession of seven kilograms of a type of synthetic marijuana known with the street name 'chemical' in Kuwait, as well as drugs paraphernalia. The arrest came following investigations after detectives were tipped off about a person selling drugs, the Interior Ministry said in a statement to the press.

In a separate case, police arrested two men who were spotted in a co-op society's parking lot waiving to people and apparently offer-



KUWAIT: A fireman battles the blaze reported on Salmi Road.

ing to sell them drugs. The two were under the influence of narcotics at the time of arrest, the Interior Ministry said. In the meantime, a health ministry bus driver was found drunk at a police checkpoint, and he was

placed under arrest. Officers found several liquor bottles inside the bus, and the Indian man confessed to selling the banned material. He was sent to concerned authorities for further action.



A fire engine drives through smoke at the fire's site.



A vehicle stuck under a truck's bed following an accident reported on the Arabian Gulf Road.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The sun sets behind the skyline of Kuwait City on June 25, 2020. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KRCS delivers 1,500 food baskets to workers in Jahra



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society distributed 1,500 food parcels and 1,500 milk cartons to workers and residents in Al-Jahra Governorate, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. KRCS Director of Disaster and Emergency Management Yossef Al-Maraj said, on the sidelines of the distribution process Friday, that the society is intensifying its efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to workers and families in need inside Kuwait, particularly to those affected by the lockdown in the areas isolated by the health authorities. Maraj added that the society distributed 1,500 food baskets and 1,500 milk cartons to workers in Jahra Governorate in cooperation and coordination with the Jahra Governorate and the

Ministry of Interior. Maraj stated that the basket is enough for a full month and contains basic materials such as rice, flour, dates, oil, sugar, tea, milk, beans and pasta.

The KRCS official said that the society is doing this to limit the movement of residents and workers, in line with the preventive measures taken by the country to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. He explained that the distribution of the food baskets, milk and meals is a national duty to contribute to overcoming this crisis, noting that KRCS is working hard during this period to stand side by side with state institutions and other concerned authorities to confront this crisis. —KUNA

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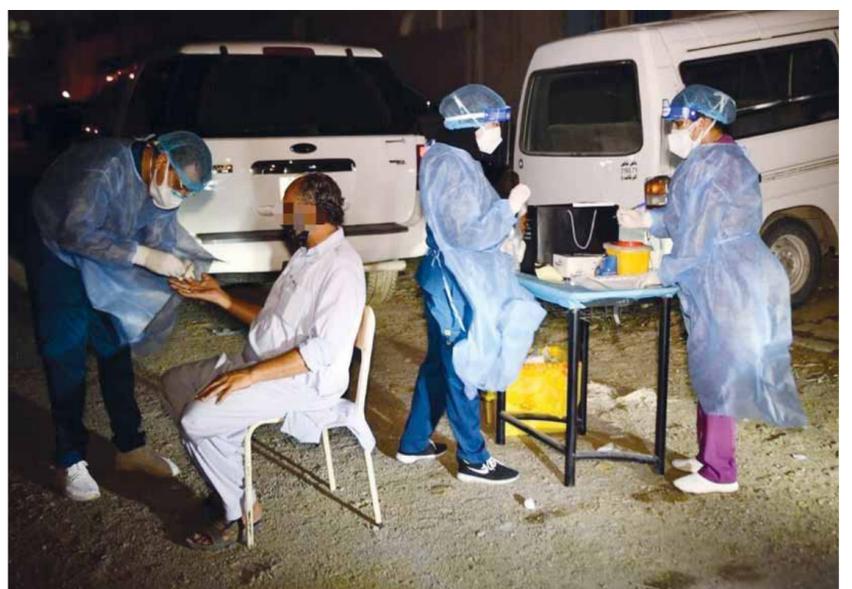
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KUWAIT: Medical teams conducted tests for residents in several areas over the weekend, as the Ministry of Health continues to carry out random testing for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) around the country.



Local

Kuwait hails coordinated efforts to help Sudan overcome all challenges

Kuwait reiterates support for Palestinians' rights



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with UAE's Ambassador Saqer Al-Raisi. —KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Serbia's Ambassador Vladimir Kohut.

KUWAIT: Kuwait expressed appreciation and gratitude for tireless efforts exerted by UN, Sudan, Germany, and the EU with Sudan Friends' Group during the past months which transformed the first phase of Sudan's transition into a reality. It also asserts the status of Sudan, regionally and internationally, Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah made the remarks when he headed the Kuwaiti delegation, on behalf of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, into Sudan Partners virtual Conference held Thursday. Sheikh Dr Ahmad added Kuwait and Sudan have enjoyed a strong and distinguished relationship and managed to overcome several obstacles and challenges throughout the years. The minister noted that Kuwait Fund has been operational in Sudan since 1962 and after 58 years with more than 30 projects worth more than \$1 billion, "we renew the Kuwaiti Fund's readiness

to discuss more development projects." The progress made by the transitional government in the peace talks and subsequent discussions with partners in various fields, show a promising future for the Republic of Sudan and its people, Sheikh Dr Ahmad said. The foreign minister participated in the conference, held by a joint invitation by Germany, the Commission of the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN). The aim of this conference was to launch a political and financial partnership to support the transitional process in Sudan, and support the transitional government's agenda and programs for achieving economic stability through economic reforms and rehabilitation of infrastructure, and reconstruction programs, to ul-

timately enabling Sudan overcome challenges it is going through.

Palestinians' rights

In other news, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah on Friday received a call from Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi. During the call, the two sides discussed the Israeli decision to annex Palestinian lands, and the flagrant violation of international legitimacy resolutions and the disruption of the peace process represented by that decision. Sheikh Dr Ahmad affirmed the Kuwaiti supportive position of the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab peace initiative

and its complete rejection of the Israeli decision.

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted on Friday a telephone call with his Iraqi counterpart Dr Fuad Hussein, during which he clarified that Kuwait has been following up with deep alarm on latest developments in Iraq, affirming its full siding with Iraq with respect of any measure it may opt to take for safeguarding its security and stability. The Iraqi foreign minister expressed meanwhile appreciation for the gesture that depicted the deep-rooted brotherly relations between the two countries and their keenness on bolstering them in all domains.

Separately, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Thursday the outgoing ambassadors of the UAE and Serbia, Saqer Al-Raisi and Vladimir Kohut respectively. In separate meetings, Sheikh Dr Ahmad lauded the two envoys' efforts in bolstering bilateral relations. Several officials from the Foreign Ministry attended the meeting. — KUNA



Foreign Minister receives outgoing envoys

Sheraton Kuwait celebrates 54 years of remarkable excellence



Fahed Abushaar

KUWAIT: Sheraton Kuwait Hotel is celebrating its 54th anniversary since its inception in 1966, the first five-star hotel in Kuwait to open outside North America and the Middle East, managed by Marriott International. Recognized as the pioneer for the hospitality industry, both locally and regionally and as Kuwait's Enduring Social Icon, Sheraton Kuwait continues to deliver its legendary hospitality and excellent service. Throughout the hotel's exceptional history, it has been acknowledged for its remarkable admiration from global leaders and has received numerous esteemed awards from prestigious organizations. Furthermore, Sheraton Kuwait has been recognized for eight consecutive years as 'Kuwait's Leading Hotel' by the World Travel Awards (WTA).

The Sheraton Kuwait Hotel takes pride in its accomplishments, which have won the approval and praise from world leaders, celebrities and numerous companies. From successful hosting of international summits, regional conferences, weddings and company meetings, it has presented Kuwait as the best civilizational images of the country's renaissance and development. On this special occasion, Complex General Manager of Sheraton Kuwait Hotels Fahed Abushaar expressed his gratitude for the confidence of the people of Kuwait in the services and skills provided by the hotel over these years which has already exceeded half a century, a real partnership that "we are proud of." Abushaar also noted that the Sheraton Kuwait Hotel is in the process of renovation and modernization work to pave the way for new guestrooms and suites that will provide the finest comfort and luxury for the people of



Kuwait, their guests and visitors. During this special occasion, Abushaar expressed his delight at the exceptional performance of the hotel. Stating, "I am delighted to know that our Sheraton family has progressed through another magnificent year with 54 years of excellence. We are also extremely proud to be known as a complex property with a comfortable gateway to the best of Kuwait, alongside with Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait which has never ceased to shine after its brilliant beginning and throughout its expansion." "I would like to take this opportu-

nity to express my personal appreciation and congratulate all the associates for their amazing effort, their hard work and determination to ensure that the unequalled hospitality and distinctive service are bestowed to each and every guest which has truly played a large role in the success of the hotel. My sincerest appreciation goes to all those who have supported us during the last 54 years. Your loyalty is absolutely timeless and enduring like the memories that we have created and continue to make, right here at the Sheraton Kuwait," he concluded.

Defense Minister, US envoy discuss common issues



US Ambassador Alina Romanowski and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah discussed with US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski issues of common interest, said a statement Thursday. In a press state-

ment, the ministry's Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations said that Sheikh Ahmad praised, during a video call meeting with Romanowski, the historical relations between the two friendly countries. — KUNA

Kuwait envoy meets Indonesia court rep



JAKARTA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Indonesia Abdulwahab Al-Saqer receives a draft memorandum of understanding for cooperation between Indonesia's Supreme Court and Kuwait's Supreme Court. — KUNA

JAKARTA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Indonesia Abdulwahab Al-Saqer met a representative of Indonesia's Supreme Court on Friday to discuss judicial cooperation. The ambassador was handed a draft memorandum of understanding

for cooperation with Kuwait's Supreme Court, reads an embassy statement. The two sides also discussed means the Indonesian court could benefit from Kuwait's expertise in Islamic economics, according to the statement. — KUNA



A Brazilian pastor's double COVID life

Pakistan's airline under fire in fake pilot licence scandal



LOS ANGELES: An aerial view of people in cars lined up to be tested for COVID-19 in a parking lot at Dodger Stadium amid the coronavirus pandemic in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

US, Europe battle fresh virus surges

Warnings mounting worldwide over lifting lockdowns too soon

WASHINGTON: The United States and Europe battled a resurgence of coronavirus cases Friday, with Texas ordering bars to close and warnings mounting worldwide over lifting lockdowns too soon. Britons were told to avoid packed beaches while a major Australian city faced a surge in infections that prompted a warning against the hoarding of toilet roll.

But Sweden lashed out at the World Health Organization for listing it among at-risk European countries, in a sign of the sensitivities at play as countries try to manage the pandemic. More than 480,000 people worldwide have died from COVID-19 since it emerged in China late last year and cases are expected to reach 10 million across the globe within the next week. Countries have been balancing the need to reopen economies shattered by coronavirus shutdowns with the need to maintain sufficient measures to prevent a feared second wave.

'Corral the spread'

In the United States, after hitting a two-month plateau, the rate of new cases is now soaring in southern and western states. Texas governor Greg Abbott ordered bars to close on Friday, further halting the phased reopening of the second most populous US state after California. Texas was among the most aggressive states in reopening in early June under Abbott, a Republican ally of President Donald Trump, who has faced sharp criticism for his handling of the crisis. "This temporary pause will help our state corral the spread," said Abbott.

The United States recorded 37,667 cases and 692 deaths in 24 hours, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, with nearly 122,000 lives lost overall - by far the highest confirmed toll in the world. US health officials now believe based on antibody surveys that some 24 million people may have already been infected - 10 times higher than the officially recorded figure of around 2.4 million. In Latin America, Brazil, the hardest-hit country in the region, had close to

55,000 deaths and 1.2 million infections, while Mexico on Thursday surpassed 25,000 fatalities.

'Total mistake'

The World Health Organization warned Thursday that Europe is not yet in the clear, saying 11 nations faced a "very significant resurgence" that could push health systems "to the brink once again." Sweden on Friday however accused the WHO of a "total mistake" by listing it along with 10 other countries that are mostly poorer nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which is included in the WHO's European region.

The Scandinavian country has made headlines for its high death toll after it opted not to introduce strict lockdowns. "We have an increase in



COVID leaves over 480,000 dead globally

cases because we have begun testing much more in Sweden the past week," said Swedish state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, adding that "all the other parameters" showed the number of serious cases was falling.

In Britain, people were urged to abide by social distancing rules after tens of thousands swarmed the seaside resort of Bournemouth during a heat-wave. Police also criticized fans who gathered outside Liverpool's Anfield ground Thursday night after the club secured the English Premier League football title for the first time in 30 years.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said people were "taking too many liberties with the guidance". Britain has Europe's highest death toll with

43,230. Ukraine meanwhile reported a record daily increase in coronavirus cases as authorities warned lockdowns might have to be re-imposed if people continued to flout restrictions. "People have ceased to comply with restrictions," Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said.

'Stop it, it's ridiculous'

In Australia, supermarkets imposed purchase limits on toilet paper across the country Friday following panic buying by people rattled following a surge in coronavirus cases in Melbourne, the country's second-biggest city. "Stop it, it's ridiculous," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told his compatriots.

The early stages of coronavirus lockdowns in many countries were marked by panic buying of toilet paper and other supplies. However the pressure to reopen badly-hit economies and limit what promises to be a historic global recession remains immense. European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said Friday that the economy has "probably passed the lowest point", while warning that "of course there could a severe second wave if we learn anything from the Spanish Flu" of 1918-19.

Airlines have suffered particularly badly, with the Dutch government announcing a 3.4 billion euro (\$3.8 billion) bailout for Air France-KLM. Australia's Qantas announcing it was cutting 6,000 staff and Germany's Lufthansa getting the EU's green light for a \$10 billion state rescue. The world meanwhile awaits a vaccine or treatment that authorities say is likely to take until at least early next year and probably longer.

The WHO said a global initiative to speed up the development of tests, treatments and vaccines would require more than \$30 billion over the next year - of which just over one tenth had been pledged. But in one piece of good news, fewer than one in a hundred children who test positive for COVID-19 die although a small but significant percentage develop severe illness, according to a new study led by experts in Britain, Austria and Spain. —AFP

Crashes deadlier as drivers speed during lockdowns

LONDON: Coronavirus lockdowns led to huge reductions in traffic and fewer car crashes this spring, but as drivers sped up on quieter roads, the collisions became deadlier in several cities, a Reuters analysis shows. In New York City, the ratio of fatal crashes to all collisions rose 167% in April from a year ago. The increase was 292% in Chicago and 65% in Boston. Across the ocean, in Madrid, Spain, the rate of fatal collisions was 470% higher. Even as traffic plummeted across the United States, roads became more lethal, with a 37% increase in fatality rates per miles driven in April, compared to the same month last year, the National Safety Council said this week.

Last month, the group said in a statement that the lockdowns and reduced road congestion had created an "apparent open season on reckless driving." In Britain, police documented instances of people driving at what they described as exceptionally high speeds of over 130 miles per hour. In the US state of Ohio, researchers found that while average speeds were up only slightly from March 28 to April 19 in Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus, the amount of extreme speeding increased dramatically. "The level of extreme speeding is really shocking," said Harvey Miller, professor of geography and director of the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis at the Ohio State University. "What we're seeing here - the fact that there's less traffic and more speeding - I think that's evidence that traffic is a great controller of speed." Similar increases in speeding have been reported in Australia, Belgium and Denmark, according to reports compiled by the European Transport Safety Council.

The road death toll, to be sure, has fallen as traffic ebbed in many places. In New York City, collisions plummeted in April to 4,103 from 16,808 a year ago, a 76% drop. During the same period fatal collisions decreased from 20 to 13, a smaller 35% decrease. But the number of fatal collisions per 1,000 crashes increased from 1.2 per 1,000 crashes to 3.2 per 1,000 crashes. —Reuters

Six injured in Glasgow stabbing, suspect killed

GLASGOW: Scottish police on Friday shot dead the suspect in a multiple stabbing at a Glasgow hotel housing asylum seekers that wounded six people, including an officer. Police Scotland said the incident at the Park Inn hotel in the city's centre was not being treated as terror-related and urged people to avoid speculation about the motive of the apparent attack. "Depressingly yet predictably some are using (this) horrific incident to further their far-right agenda," Scotland's justice minister Humza Yousaf said in a tweet.

"Glasgow won't stand for your divisive hatred, so don't even try it." The police said the wounded 42-year-old officer was in a critical but stable

condition. The five other victims were all men, aged 17, 18, 20, 38 and 53, the police said. All have been hospitalized. One man who said he lived on the hotel's third floor told Sky News television he heard a man shouting for help and a woman screaming. He went to investigate and found the lift was "covered in blood" then saw two people "gasping for air" after being stabbed.

'Dumped' into hotels

Britain's interior ministry has been using empty hotels across the country to house asylum seekers and refugees during the coronavirus pandemic. The Park Inn hotel was being used to house asylum seekers during the outbreak, homelessness and human rights charity Positive Action in Housing tweeted. The Kurdish Scottish Association was quoted as saying by the Glasgow Times newspaper there were about 100 asylum seekers in the hotel at the time. Residents had complained about being kept inside and a lack of money, while some had mental health problems, it said.

Positive Action in Housing has previously voiced concerns about single men, women, families and pregnant women - many of them vulnerable - being "dumped" into hotels. "During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the hotel has been occupied for temporary housing," said Radisson Hotel Group spokesman Tom Flanagan Karttunen. Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon thanked the emergency services for ensuring that "a very, very serious incident didn't become much worse".

UK interior minister Priti Patel called it "deeply alarming" and Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted that he was "deeply saddened by the terrible incident". It came less than a week after three people were stabbed to death in a park in Reading, southeast England, that police were treating as terror-related. A 25-year-old man widely said to be a Libyan asylum seeker was arrested in connection with the random stabbing that killed three friends. —AFP



GLASGOW: Police attend the scene of a fatal stabbing incident at the Park Inn Hotel in central Glasgow on June 26, 2020. —AFP

International

In first, Iraq forces detain pro-Iran fighters accused of anti-US rockets

Elite Counter-Terrorism Service storms a base in southern Baghdad

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces were Friday interrogating pro-Iran fighters detained for planning a rocket attack in the first such raid in a country caught in the tug-of-war between Tehran and Washington. Since October, nearly three dozen deadly rocket attacks have hit US military and diplomatic installations in Iraq, with the US blaming pro-Tehran faction Kataeb Hezbollah.

Infuriated, Washington has demanded Iraq take tougher action to hold the perpetrators accountable and Thursday's unprecedented raid appeared to be a response to this call. Just before midnight Thursday, the elite Counter-Terrorism Service stormed a base in southern Baghdad used by Kataeb Hezbollah, also known as Brigade 45 of the Hashed al-Shaabi force, Iraqi officials and security sources said.

They told AFP that more than a dozen Kataeb fighters were arrested, but an official statement from Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC) on Friday did not specify which group had been targeted. It said the operation was based on intelligence about a planned attack on the Green Zone, where the US embassy and other foreign missions, government buildings and UN offices are located. "Fourteen people were arrested and evidence of the crime confiscated, including two rocket launchers," the JOC statement said.

'We lie in wait'

The raid is the boldest act yet against Tehran-

backed groups based in Iraq, which has long had to walk a fine line between its two main allies, Iran and the US. Washington is pursuing a "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran and sees groups like Kataeb Hezbollah as a dangerous extension of Iran's influence.

The US has blamed Kataeb for rockets that have

Hashed deputy chief Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis in January. "This monster called Kadhem wanted to shuffle the cards to hide his participation in the criminal murder of two martyrs and their comrades, presenting a new token of his collaboration with his American overlords," Kataeb spokesman Abu Ali Al-Askari said after Thursday's raid. "We lie in wait," he warned. Following the raid, "government vehicles" had attempted to surround CTS headquarters, according to the JOC statement.



US wants Iraq to take tougher action

killed several UK, American and Iraqi forces since October. But Kataeb has been nominally integrated into the Iraqi state, and former prime minister Adel Abdel Mahdi hesitated to take strong action against the group. Such calculations appear to have changed under new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi, seen by Washington as a friendly figure but despised by Kataeb.

The group accuses Kadhem of complicity in the US killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and

Interrogations begin

The JOC statement also said Iraq's judiciary had issued arrest warrants for Thursday's operation under the counter-terrorism law, which carries the death penalty. But it remains unclear exactly which authority will be responsible for bringing to trial or sentencing the suspects. "They are being interrogated by the Hashed security apparatus and will appear before a Hashed judge," a source from the Hashed's security force told AFP. "They are pressuring us to release them," the source said.

There was no comment from Kadhem's office or from the US, but Iraqi expert Hisham al-Hashemi said Washington and the anti-jihadist alliance it leads in Iraq would be pleased. "The international coalition is happy with this step. Just storming these headquarters is enough for it," he said. He said Kadhem would also restore some of his public ratings, which had plummeted in reaction to unpopular austerity meas-

ures aimed at fighting off the economic collapse triggered by a crash in oil prices.

Kataeb Hezbollah first began fighting US troops in 2003 during the American-led invasion to topple Saddam Hussein and is the top armed Iraqi ally of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, according to specialist Michael Knights. The CTS, meanwhile, was set up by US occupation forces following 2003 and is largely seen as a pro-US force. In one of his first acts as premier, Kadhem reappointed Abdulwahab al-Saadi, also seen as US-friendly, as CTS head.

Kadhem then launched a strategic dialogue with Washington to discuss military, economic and culture issues. As part of the talks, the US pledged to continue reducing the number of US troops in Iraq, based there to lead a global coalition helping fight jihadist sleeper cells. Iraq, meanwhile, promised to hold the perpetrators of the rocket attacks accountable and Kadhem recently convened his national security council to draw up a plan.

The start of the talks coincided with a significant spike in missile attacks, with six incidents targeting American installations over the last two weeks. The escalation shattered the relative calm that had settled in since March, after a period of particularly high tensions between Iran and the US split over into Iraq. Following the US strike on Soleimani, Iraq's parliament voted to oust foreign forces, Iran launched ballistic missiles against American troops and the Hashed vowed revenge. — AFP

US restricts visas in latest move on Hong Kong

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's administration said Friday it was restricting US visas for a number of Chinese officials for infringing on the autonomy of Hong Kong, announcing action as Congress seeks tougher sanctions. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States would curb visas for unspecified current and former officials of the Chinese Communist Party "who were responsible for eviscerating Hong Kong's freedoms."

The officials who were targeted were "responsible for, or complicit in, undermining Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy," which Beijing promised before regaining control of the territory in 1997 from Britain, Pompeo said. "The United States calls on China to honor its commitments and obligations in the Sino-British Joint Declaration," Pompeo said in a statement, urging protections of "freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly." A State Department spokeswoman declined to say how many people were affected or even if they would all be denied entry to the United States.

"Individuals subject to this visa restriction policy will be evaluated for their eligibility under this policy when they apply and may be refused visas," she said. China is moving forward on a security law that would enforce punishment for subversion and other offenses in Hong Kong, which saw massive and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests last year. Activists say the law would effectively undo the freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong, one of the world's premier financial hubs.

Jihadist bloodshed brings Burkina Faso to its knees

OUAGADOUGOU: Little more than five years ago, Burkina Faso was on the up, priding itself as a favored tourist destination for well-heeled Europeans. Today, the country seems to be visibly sinking, battered by a jihadist revolt that has swept in from neighboring Mali, rolled into Niger and cast a shadow on the countries to the south.

More than 1,650 civilians and soldiers have died since 2015, according to a local monitoring group, the Observatory for Democracy and Human Rights (ODDH) - a figure that some say is probably just a fraction of the real tally. Nearly a million people have fled their homes and nowhere in the country rates as safe, under travel recommendations issued by Western governments.

The country, one of the poorest in the world, is scarred by stories of tragedy. "My wife was killed in an attack in Arbinda in December, leaving a two-year-old baby," said Aly Sidibe, a 42-year-old former herder displaced in the northern city of Kaya. "The child is in Ouagadougou. He is being taken care of by social services." Sidibe said he had lost his entire herd. "I had more than 50 cattle. I don't even have a sheep anymore," he said.

'Lazy king'

Burkina Faso lies in the heart of the Sahel, whose leaders have joined a French-backed effort to roll back jihadism in the vast semi-desert region. President Emmanuel Macron will join his five allies in the Mauritanian cap-



HONG KONG: People are detained as pro-democracy protesters gather in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong. — AFP

But the Chinese embassy in Washington insisted in a statement that "no one has any legal grounds or right to make irresponsible comments on Hong Kong affairs citing the Sino-British Joint Declaration. "We urge the US side to immediately correct its mistakes, withdraw the decisions and stop interfering in China's domestic affairs. The Chinese side will continue to take strong measures to uphold national sovereignty, security and development interests," it continued.

'Not nearly enough'

Pompeo's action comes one day after the US Senate unanimously approved a bill that would impose mandatory economic sanctions in the United States against Chinese officials and Hong Kong police identified as hurting the city's autonomous status. In one element of pressure that could have far-reaching consequences, the Hong Kong Autonomy Act would also punish banks that do "significant transactions" with identified violators.

Supporters of the bill, which needs to be

passed by the House of Representatives, say they want to impose real costs on Chinese officials rather than just issue condemnations. Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen, who teamed up with Republican Pat Toomey on the act, said the visa action announced by Pompeo was insufficient. "Visa restrictions are not nearly enough to deter China from continuing its crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong," Van Hollen said.

"The administration must impose additional sanctions, and now that the Senate has acted, the House must pass our Hong Kong Autonomy Act, and the president should sign and implement it fully without delay," he said. Trump has not publicly said if he would sign the Hong Kong Autonomy Act into law, but in the past, he has criticized legislation that ties his hands. Led by Pompeo, the Trump administration has furiously denounced China on issues from its initial handling of the coronavirus pandemic to human rights to its military spending. — AFP



Soldiers of the French Army patrol the village Gorom Gorom in Armoured Personnel Carriers during the Barkhane operation in northern Burkina Faso. — AFP

ital of Nouakchott on Tuesday to debate the state of the campaign. Burkinabe General Moise Miningou, speaking to AFP, hit out at perceptions that the armed forces were failing. "People who talk like that do not know the real situation," he said, pointing to a strategy of "liberating axes (and) securing populations." (...) The battle is hard but we will shortly get results," he said, noting that the country would have five operational combat helicopters by the end of the year.

Security sources say the armed forces have been a casualty of Burkina's political turmoil. For several years, Burkina Faso seemed immune to jihadist attacks - the result, according to some analysts, of a secret deal between the then president, Blaise Compaore, and militant groups. After Compaore was ousted in 2014, the armed forces were essentially muzzled, deprived of funding, equipment and training, according to the sources.

The transitional government that took over and the government of President Roch Marc

Christian Kabore, who took power in 2015, were afraid of coups. "We had an army without weapons, an army without ammunition and not trained at all," said one source. As the jihadist attacks mounted from 2015, the security forces became overwhelmed, said Mahamoudou Savadogo, a Burkinabe researcher specializing in armed Islamism. "The army was never equipped, and there was never an appropriate strategy," Savadogo said.

As a result the armed forces went from defeat to defeat, sometimes masking shortcomings with announcements of spectacular victories. In the long term, the territory over which the state exercises its authority is shrinking and the army, police, teachers and administration are absent from whole swathes of the country. Some say Kabore has done little to quell the relentless jihadist attacks. "He's a kind of lazy king who holds more and more audiences and listens in his chair without making any decisions," a diplomatic source in Abidjan said. — AFP

After good start, California loses ground on virus

LOS ANGELES: When the coronavirus pandemic first snowballed in the United States, California was hailed for its handling of the crisis. But now, the Golden State - like many others across the nation - is facing a worrying uptick in the number of cases, especially among young people. California was the first state to order a sweeping lockdown in mid-March and moved quickly to ramp up its testing capabilities - a key to keeping the virus in check, experts say.

Since the start of the crisis, some 3.7 million Californians out of a total of about 40 million have been tested for the new coronavirus. This week, the state did about 100,000 tests a day. Is that significant increase in testing the explanation for the virus's seeming resurgence? Experts say it only paints part of the picture. "The fact that there's also an increase in the number of hospitalizations suggests that it's not just because of the testing," said Lee Riley, an epidemiologist at the University of California, Berkeley.

Facebook ramps up efforts to curb 'hateful content'

WASHINGTON: Facebook said it would ban a "wider category of hateful content" in ads as the embattled social media giant moved to respond to growing protests over its handling of inflammatory posts. Chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said Facebook also would add tags to posts that are "newsworthy" but violate platform rules - following the lead of Twitter, which has used such labels on tweets from President Donald Trump.

The initiative comes with the leading social network facing a growing boycott by advertisers - with soft drink behemoth Coca-Cola and Anglo-Dutch giant Unilever joining Friday - as activists seek tougher action on content they deem to promote discrimination, hatred or violence.

The new policy on hateful content in ads will "prohibit claims that people from a specific race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, caste, sexual orientation, gender identity or immigration status are a threat to the physical safety, health or survival of others," Zuckerberg said. "We're also expanding our policies to better protect immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum

"That means that there are more transmissions occurring." Governor Gavin Newsom says the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, jumped 32 percent in the last two weeks, to more than 4,200. The specific reasons are hard to pinpoint, but experts say the likely culprit is quarantine fatigue and a relaxing of behaviors meant to curb the spread, among young people.

As lockdowns have been gradually lifted, more and more people are gathering without respecting social distancing guidelines or wearing face masks. "We cannot continue to do what we have done over the last number of weeks," said Newsom, who made wearing masks in public spaces obligatory last week. "Many of us, understandably, developed a little cabin fever. Some, I would argue, have developed a little amnesia. Others have just frankly taken down their guard."

Officially, members of different households in California are still not supposed to mingle in close quarters indoors. But as the state's massive economy has reopened, with stores, restaurants and gyms all ready for business, residents have been getting together once again for birthday parties, summer barbecues and beach trips. "I'm not naive - people are mixing," Newsom said. "And that is increasing the spread of this virus." — AFP

seekers" from hateful ads, he continued.

Facebook has underscored its moves to stem racism in the wake of civil unrest triggered by the May 25 killing of African American George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. "We invest billions of dollars each year to keep our community safe and continuously work with outside experts to review and update our policies," a spokesperson said. "The investments we have made in (artificial intelligence) mean that we find nearly 90 percent of hate speech" and take action before users report it.

'Newsworthy' exception

Zuckerberg said the "newsworthy" exemption normally occurs "a handful of times a year," when Facebook decides to leave up a message that would ordinarily be removed for rule violations. Under the new policy, Zuckerberg said, "we will soon start labeling some of the content we leave up because it is deemed newsworthy, so people can know when this is the case." He said users will be allowed to share the content "but we'll add a prompt to tell people that the content they're sharing may violate our policies." Twitter in recent weeks has labeled at least one Trump tweet misleading and has flagged others as violating platform rules, accessible only when users click through a warning. The move has angered the president and his allies. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: A giant digital sign is seen at Facebook's corporate headquarters campus in Menlo Park, California. — AFP

International

Pakistan's airline under fire in fake pilot licence scandal

Nearly a third of its pilots holding fake or dubious licenses

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's national airline is taking heavy flak after it emerged that nearly a third of its pilots were holding fake or dubious licenses, with some observers wondering if the struggling national carrier can survive the scandal. Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) this week said it would immediately ground 141 of its 434 pilots after a government review found them to have obtained "bogus" credentials or cheated on exams by having someone else take them. The scandal comes in the wake of a crash in Karachi last month that killed 98 people - and which authorities have essentially blamed on the two pilots.

Investigators said the aviators were chatting about the coronavirus while they attempted to land the Airbus A320 without putting its wheels down, catastrophically damaging the engines. The plane lost power and plunged into houses near the airport as it went around for a second landing attempt. According to a government review last year, details of which were revealed Thursday, 262 of Pakistan's 860 active pilots hold fake licenses or cheated on exams.

More than half of them were from state-run PIA. Until the 1970s, Pakistan's largest airline was considered a top regional carrier but its reputation plummeted amid chronic mismanagement, frequent

cancellations and financial woes. So far, authorities have started dismissal proceedings against 28 of the 262 pilots and subsequent criminal charges are likely, Pakistan's aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan said Friday.



PIA grounds 141 of its 434 pilots

PIA will bring reforms aimed at restructuring the airline, he told reporters, adding the "clean-up process" should be completed by the end of the year. "People are saying this (revelation) will have a negative impact. But when you try to save a patient, you have to do major surgery, radiation - and even chemo," the minister told a press conference. He sought to blame PIA's problems on "the wrongdoings

of previous governments". "God willing, 2021 will be the year of the betterment of Pakistan's institutions and, God willing, PIA will become the PIA of good times - the 1960s, '70s and '80s".

'Tarnished' image

But several observers did not share the optimism, and doubt whether the public will trust any promised reforms. The scandal will "prove the last nail in the coffin of PIA," predicted Ijaz Haroon, who was managing director at the airline until he resigned in 2011 amid a union protest. "The world is not going to trust us anymore. No one would like to fly with pilots who have bogus licenses. (Khan's) statement has further tarnished the image of the airline". Shahzad Chaudry, a retired Pakistan air force air vice marshal, said the government was unfairly scapegoating PIA, as it is Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority that issues licenses.

"We not only need a complete overhauling of PIA but CAA as well, as both go hand in hand," Chaudry told AFP. The government said Friday it had suspended five CAA officials in the scandal. PIA, which is helmed by a serving air force officer, currently has a fleet of 31 planes and a payroll of about 14,500 workers. The high staff-to-plane ratio has seen long-

standing accusations the government and the military use the airline to dish out jobs to cronies and retired military officers.

"The current PIA economic model is under the vested interests of political parties and different pressure groups," Chaudry said. "No airline has 500 staff per aircraft. Our economic model right from the foundation is unsustainable." Three current PIA pilots who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity outlined a series of issues, including pilots being forced to work lengthy shifts of up to 24 hours. A PIA spokesman said there was "no such case". Pakistan has a chequered military and civilian aviation safety record, with frequent plane and helicopter crashes over the years.

In 2016, a PIA plane burst into flames after one of its two turboprop engines failed during a flight from the remote north to Islamabad, killing more than 40 people. Qasim Qadir, the joint secretary at the Pakistan Airline Pilot Association, called for a transparent and thorough final investigation into the May 22 Karachi crash that killed all but two of the 99 people aboard and a child on the ground. "Blaming (the pilots) is one thing but ... we want the system to become safer for us and the passengers. So please make it a fair investigation," Qadir said. — AFP

A Brazilian pastor's double COVID life

MANAUS: By day, he dons his protective suit to help poor families bury loved ones lost to COVID-19. By night, he is an evangelical pastor, holding services in the homes of the faithful to try to help them get through the pandemic. Nascimento, 49, lives and preaches in Manaus, the biggest city in the Brazilian Amazon, and one of those hit hardest by the new coronavirus. In his day job, he works for a municipal program called SOS Funeral. Created to help families living in poverty hold funerals for their relatives, it is also helping hospitals and cemeteries handle the surge in deaths caused by COVID-19.

Nascimento's job includes going to hospitals or homes where victims have died, bringing their remains to the public cemetery and helping lower their coffins into the mass graves the authorities are using to cope with the outbreak. It is hard work in a pandemic. He typically starts his 12-hour work day at 7:00 am. At the height of the outbreak

in Manaus, "we never rested," says Nascimento, a solidly built man with brown skin and an easy smile.

The city's health system was on the brink of collapse in May, when the number of daily deaths jumped by 200 percent. Nascimento's team, one of eight operated by SOS Funeral, was performing up to 10 burials a day, he says. In recent days, the pace has slowed to about three a day. Still, with nearly 70,000 infections and 3,000 deaths, Manaus is one of the cities suffering most from COVID-19 in Brazil, the country with the second-highest number of cases and deaths in the world, after the United States.

'Calling from God'

By night, Nascimento has a different calling - though lately, it overlaps with his day job in many ways. At 7:00 pm, he heads home, disinfects himself and has dinner with his family. Then he goes back out to hold services a pastor for Reaching Lives Pentecostal Church, one of many evangelical churches that have taken hold in traditionally Catholic Brazil in recent years. Four years ago, he says, he got a message from God. "You are going to care for my children when they are in need of a friendly word," he says he heard in his prayers. — AFP

New Delhi association bans Chinese guests

NEW DELHI: One of Delhi's main hotel associations said that its members are barring Chinese guests, as calls for a boycott of Chinese goods gather pace following a border clash that killed 20 Indian soldiers. The June 15 battle was the first time troops have died in combat along the Asian giants' Himalayan border in 45 years, and has been followed by a build-up of forces even as talks continue. Sandeep Khandelwal, president of the Delhi Hotel and Restaurant Owners Association, said the decision covering 75,000 hotel rooms in the Indian capital was to "support our government in this war-like situation with China".

"Why should we allow them to earn money from India?" Khandelwal told AFP. The association, which represents mostly three- and four-star hotels, will also encourage members to stop using Chinese products. Although almost 300,000 Chinese visited India in 2018, the boycott is largely symbolic as travel restrictions because of the coronavirus have seen foreign visitor numbers dwindle. Some hotels remain shuttered despite a lockdown being gradually eased.

The move, however, demonstrates growing anti-China sentiment in India - particularly on social media, which has been swamped with calls to spurn Chinese products. There have also been small demonstrations with Chinese



NEW DELHI: Anti-China protesters display placards urging citizens to boycott Chinese goods during a demonstration in New Delhi. — AFP

flags burned. E-commerce giants including US giant Amazon - which sell huge volumes of Chinese-made electronic items - have agreed to display the country of origin of goods for sale on their platforms, media reports said Thursday.

Earlier this week Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government ordered all sellers to do the same on its GeM portal, which is used for tens of billions of dollars worth of state purchases. China's Xiaomi - India's top cellphone brand which has factories in the country - is covering its logo on shopfronts in major cities, with banners reading "Made in India". "The company officials told us to do this to protect us from protesters or politicians who could

damage the property as anti-China sentiments are on the rise," said Jignesh, the owner of one Xiaomi shop in Mumbai.

"But demand has not come down for smartphones at all and people are still buying these gadgets," he said. Goods made in China, including some raw materials vital to Indian pharmaceutical firms, are also starting to pile up at Indian ports and airports because of more stringent customs checks, media reports said. Despite long-prickly relations, India and China have steadily built up strong economic ties in recent years. Annual bilateral trade is worth some \$90 billion, with a deficit of around \$50 billion in China's favor. — AFP



MANAUS: Brazilian evangelical pastor Izaías Nascimento, 49, carries a coffin for a COVID-19 victim before a funeral service in Manaus. — AFP

Mexico police chief shot in assassination attempt

MEXICO CITY: Mexico City's chief of police was shot and injured and two of his bodyguards killed in a dramatic assassination attempt early on Friday that he quickly blamed on one of Mexico's most powerful drug gangs, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). The city's public security chief Omar Garcia Harfuch suffered three bullet wounds as he and bodyguards came under heavy fire around dawn in an upscale Mexico City neighborhood, where the attack was captured on security cameras. Some three hours later, apparently from his hospital bed, Garcia sent out a message on Twitter blaming his injuries and the death of two bodyguards on a "cowardly attack" by the CJNG, a gang notorious as one of the most violent in Mexico.

A 26-year-old woman traveling in a car with relatives to sell street food nearby was killed in the gunfire that ripped through the Lomas de Chapultepec neighborhood. The area is home to many wealthy people and has ambassadorial residences. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said the attack showed that authorities were putting pressure on criminal gangs in the

capital, which has rarely witnessed such brazen outbreaks of violence. "There will be no turning back," Sheinbaum told a news conference. Still, the early morning mayhem was the latest in a series of public security lapses that have raised tough questions about the president's ability to control gang violence.

Rainy security camera footage broadcast on Mexican television showed a group of heavily armed men in an open-backed truck disguised as a work vehicle, and an SUV blocking off a road to open fire on Garcia's automobile. Separately, fast-arriving police could be seen shouting and moving towards the high caliber gunfire that rang out for several minutes just after 6.30 am local time. Television footage of Garcia's armored SUV showed a vehicle riddled with bullets cordoned off by police. Garcia was wounded in the shoulder, collarbone and the knee, Security Minister Alfonso Durazo told a news conference. Late on Friday evening, Garcia wrote on Twitter that he had come out of surgery and was well.

The assassination attempt served as a warning that "nobody is off limits" and was reminiscent of previous attacks on officials during Mexico's drug war, said Gladys McCormick, a security analyst at Syracuse University in New York. It fit the CJNG's modus operandi "to a T" and had the hallmark of the cartel staking out its turf, she said. Led by a former police officer and based in the western state of Jalisco, the CJNG has been blamed for fueling record levels of violence in Mexico during its battles to eliminate rivals for control of drug trafficking and crime rackets. — Reuters

Hotels, ashram repurposed for virus surge

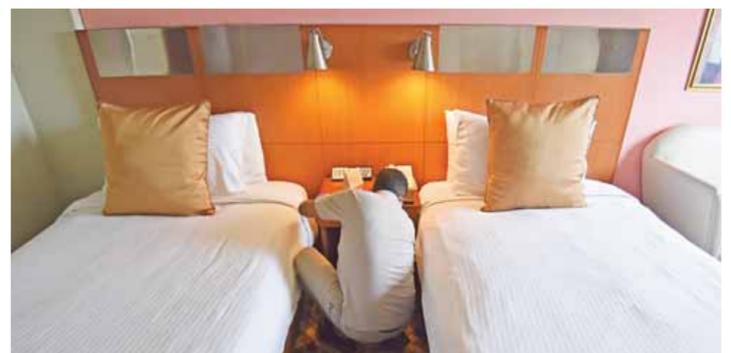
NEW DELHI: Staff at the luxury Suryaa hotel used to wear bright saris as they welcomed guests. Now they must don medical suits and handle gurneys as New Delhi desperately prepares for a predicted surge in coronavirus cases in the coming weeks. The pandemic is still raging in India with more than half a million cases. The capital, home to 25 million people, is the country's worst-hit city - its hospitals at breaking point and authorities reaching deep to confront the crisis. "For doctors and nurses it is a part of their lives. For us this is a totally new experience and a very difficult one at that," said Ritu Yadav, operations manager at the five-star Suryaa, as staff in masks rush to deep clean the building.

"We have got training from the hospital on how to wear the PPE and then take it off but this is something I never thought I would have to do when I chose hospitality as my career." Delhi, home to some of India's most crowded slums, has around 75,000 cases so far, but the city government predicts this will soar to half a million by the end of July. With newspapers full of reports about patients being turned away from overflowing hospitals, Delhi told the city's hotels earlier this month they would be roped in to provide hospital care.

It is also converting wedding halls, and has several hundred repurposed railway coaches standing by - without air conditioning despite outside temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit). The Delhi authorities have even started converting a spiritual centre or ashram into a coronavirus isolation facility and hospital with 10,000 beds, many made of cardboard.

'Hospitality, not hospital'

But for hotels, the move triggered out-



NEW DELHI: A housekeeping employee of the Suryaa hotel cleans a room in New Delhi. — AFP

rage in an industry already reeling under losses because of travel restrictions. The owners of Suryaa and four others approached the court, arguing many staff were over 50 and therefore were high-risk themselves, with no experience of hospital care or handling bio-medical waste.

"It came as a shock because we were not spoken to about it, we got to know through the press," Greesh Bindra, a top executive at the hotel, told AFP. "It's like you are sleeping in a hotel and the next morning when you wake up you are told your hotel has become a hospital. Your first reaction will be how is this possible. We are hospitality, not a hospital." The hotel won a reprieve from the court - of sorts. Instead of becoming a hospital, it could act as a covid care centre, housing patients on their way to recovery with mild to moderate symptoms.

It and around 30 other hotels in Delhi are set to be attached to hospitals which will provide staff to deal with any emergency. The hotels can charge a maximum \$66 a day, including meals. But they and their employees, used just to changing bedsheets and providing room service, have had to improvise and innovate. From using disposable plates and drawing red lines to ensure social distancing, they have minimum contact with their special guests. "You have

to keep your staff safe as after all they are your people," said Bindra, whose hotel will be offering 200 beds.

Cardboard beds

But whether the efforts of the Delhi government - which is squabbling with the federal government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi - will be enough is unclear. Delhi has just over 13,000 beds for coronavirus patients in state-run hospitals with another 10,000 in private ones. The city government forecasts it will need 80,000 beds by the end of July. The government has cancelled leave of all healthcare staff and plans to rope in volunteers to fight the crisis. It has refused to reimpose a lockdown, as the southern city of Chennai has done.

Many in Delhi are worried and are taking matters into their own hands. Some resident welfare associations are buying oxygen cylinders and other equipment, while using vacant flats as isolation wards - exposing the lack of trust in authorities. "One of our residents lost his life just because he couldn't get a bed in time. Then we thought we should do something at our level," said Lokesh Munjal, the head of a west Delhi housing society. "We don't want to be at the mercy of government and hospitals." — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2020

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KIB signs a bilateral Murabaha financing facility with EQUATE

\$150m facility for partially refinancing an existing facility

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced signing of a bilateral Murabaha financing agreement with EQUATE Petrochemical Company. The transaction, valued at up to \$150 million for a tenor of three years, will be used to partially refinance an existing facility previously extended by a consortium of banks for business expansion.

Raed Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO of KIB, complimented both KIB and EQUATE on the successful closing of this financing and said: "We are delighted to have structured and arranged this Islamic facility for EQUATE, a major global player in the petrochemical sector. We look forward to continue supporting the company's growth, which is underpinned by its strong business model, management team and shareholders. This transaction supports the diversification of the Bank's financing portfolio." Bukhamseen added: "This transaction also underscores KIB capability of leading,



Transaction boosts bank's portfolio

arranging and accommodating large ticket transactions on a bilateral basis which has now become easier following the successful closing of our perpetual Sukuk issuance last year, which further strengthened the Bank's capital ratios."

Commenting on the successful closing of this transaction, Mohamed Khadiri, Acting General Manager of International Banking & Large Corporate Dept. said: "This is a significant transaction for KIB, which

demonstrates our business focused culture, quick turnaround and collaborative approach with our customers. The new facility is well structured to suit the liquidity requirements of EQUATE and clearly enhances our relationship." Khadiri added: "We are extremely proud to be a part of this milestone in EQUATE's financing agenda and I commend the hard work, effective collaboration and dedication that KIB and EQUATE teams have exhibited in the past couple of weeks into making this transaction come to fruition. We are very pleased to have EQUATE as one of our Large Corporate customers and this is only the beginning of a long standing and mutually beneficial partnership. This deal adds up to KIB's outstanding achievements and strong track record in providing custom made solutions, leading products and services across Sharia compliant financing and financial advisory to the corporate sector."



Raed Bukhamseen

Mohamed Khadiri

Canadian visa program may lure tech workers

TORONTO/OTTAWA: A fast-track visa program that Canada launched in 2017 has attracted a growing number of tech workers, and US President Donald Trump's latest immigration crackdown is set to further boost intake once COVID-19 restrictions ease, lawyers say.

The number of successful applicants to Canada's Global Skills Strategy (GSS) program rose five-fold over its first three years, with more than 23,000 workers approved under the top five tech categories, data provided to Reuters by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) shows. More than 2,300 applications for those same top five tech roles were approved from January to March 2020, ahead of the COVID-19 shutdowns that led to border closures and a sharp drop in immigration. The program boasts a two-week processing time.

Immigration lawyers told Reuters they were broadly in favor of the program, which some described as transparent and consistent, and an example of how Canada has been able to take advantage of Trump's immigration stance since he entered the White House in 2017.

"There are employers who have non-US employees in the US who are definitely looking seriously at Canada," said Kyle Hyndman, a partner with McCrea Immigration Law in Vancouver, who was contacted this week by a "major" company about bringing employees to Canada.

On Monday, Trump issued a presidential proclamation that temporarily blocks foreign workers from entering the United States on certain visas, which a Trump administration official said would create 525,000 jobs for US workers. "The fact that people started contacting me pretty much the next day is perhaps a suggestion that there are going to be more people interested," Hyndman said.

US technology companies including Amazon.com Inc, Alphabet Inc, Facebook Inc and Netflix Inc have in recent years expanded their Canadian operations, although most companies declined to comment on their GSS usage or how Trump's recent announcement will impact their hiring plans. Tobi Lutke, the chief executive officer of Canadian e-commerce company Shopify, was quick to tout the Canada's attraction following Trump's immigration move. The program "has made it possible to hire top talent beyond our borders," said Sandeep Anand, senior lead on the global mobility team at Shopify, adding that it has helped relocate employees to Canada.

The majority of approved applicants to the fast-track visa program were computer programmers and interactive media developers, followed by information systems analysts and consultants, the IRCC data shows. Indian citizens accounted for 62.1 percent of successful applicants to the fast-track program, followed by Chinese citizens. Nearly 1,000 US citizens also have seen their applications approved.—Reuters



Boursa Kuwait resumes operations

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait has obtained the approval of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) to resume some of its operations that were suspended due to the precautionary measures taken during the past few months. In addition to the ongoing trading on the exchange, the following suspended operations will be reinstated:

- Sunday, June 28, 2020:
 - Transfer of Ownership for listed securities: Transfer of Ownership will resume as usual, with the requirement of e-mail communication to submit the necessary forms and documents.
 - For listed securities: Trading@boursakuwait.com.kw
 - Thursday, July 9, 2020:
 - Over-the-Counter (OTC) Trading: Trading on the OTC platform will resume as usual and with no changes on trading hours.
 - Transfer of Ownership for OTC : Transfer of Ownership will resume as usual, with the requirement of e-mail communication to submit the necessary forms and documents.
 - For OTC: OTCTrading@boursakuwait.com.kw
 - Mandatory Executions: Mandatory Execution appointments will be reset and announced later. This operation is subject to the readiness of the General Directorate of Implementation at the Ministry of Justice.

Boursa Kuwait's announcement to reinstate suspended operations comes

as a boost to the investment sector and the economy as a whole and is in line with the Kuwaiti government's plan to resume life in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The bourse continues to limit the number of employees and utilize the number necessary to conduct basic activities and operations only, as well as activating a system of rotation within essential departments, with the rest of the staff working from home and following the Ministry of Health's precautionary measures.

Those infected with the COVID-19 virus will stay at home until they provide sufficient proof and documentation of their cure, as will employees living in quarantined areas and people who have debilitating illnesses and hereditary autoimmune diseases.

For the safety of its employees, and to provide a safe working environment for all personnel working in the building, the company will measure the temperature of employees and building personnel through thermal cameras, as well as re-arranging offices, raising awareness and providing instructions to ensure social distancing. Hand sanitizers and educational material will also be available in common areas.

Boursa Kuwait will continue canceling all its internal and external meetings, holding them only in cases of extreme emergency with adherence to preventive measures approved by the Ministry of Health. All internal and external meetings will be held via virtual platforms and video communications applications. For the safety of all market participants, the Boursa Kuwait building will continue to be closed to the public. Only those with a prior, documented appointment – and proof on their person – for Transfers of Ownership or Mandatory Executions will be allowed to enter the premises.

UK shopping mall giant Intu collapses

WATFORD: British shopping mall giant Intu, already struggling before the coronavirus lockdown in a tough retail climate, on Friday said it was going into administration after failing to secure a financial lifeline. The debt-laden firm, which owns 17 giant shopping malls including MetroCentre, the Trafford Centre in northern England, and Lakeside in the southeast, had been seeking to progress talks with creditors before a deadline.

"Discussions have been ongoing... However, insufficient alignment and agreement... has been achieved with financial stakeholders," it said in a statement.

"As such, application is being made for the administrators to be appointed to Intu and several other key central entities in the Intu Group."

The company said it has applied for KPMG to be appointed administrators, adding that its shopping centers remain open but its shares have been suspended. Shopping centers in Britain were forced to close for almost three months after the government imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 23 in a bid to halt the COVID-19 outbreak—further hurting Intu which has been in trouble for some time as people increasingly shop online.

Lockdown restrictions began to be eased this month but this was simply too late to save the group. At the Intu Watford mall, in the commuter town of Watford northwest of London, there was a steady stream of shoppers at its shops and food outlets on Friday, although restaurants remained shuttered.

Social distancing remained in place while all staff wore masks and dispensed hand sanitizer to customers.

'A shame if it shuts'
"It will be a shame if it is shut," said shopper Kate, 53, from nearby Hemel Hempstead, holding her shopping bag from cut-price clothing store Primark. "I've been coming here for years. It's not just the shops—you have the cinema now and lots of places to eat."

The centre, located not far from the football stadium of English Premier League football team Watford, is better placed than other Intu locations because the local authority owns a seven-percent stake and the freehold of the building.

The Watford Observer local newspaper reported this meant the shopping center would remain open at least in the short term, until a buyer is found. Administration is the process whereby a troubled company calls in independent financial help in a bid to restructure and remain operational until a solution is found.

At the Herbal Inn, a chain which specializes in traditional Chinese medicine, manager Amy said: "We reopened 10 days ago. "Before the lockdown we had more customers but now we can't do treatments, acupuncture and massage."

"Now we just do sales of products, which have been so-so," she told AFP as shoppers milled around the store.

The Intu group employs 2,500 staff across all its malls but another 100,000 people work at shops and restaurants inside its facilities. Another 30,000 are involved on the supply side. "This is a huge, significant event for the industry because Intu is the owner of some of the largest retail destinations... in the UK," said analyst Richard Lim at Retail Economics. "They have not responded quickly enough to the changing retail environment," Lim told AFP, noting the rise of online retail "was a prior underlying trend before COVID-19". Intu had said Tuesday that some of its centres "have reduced rent collections as a result of COVID-19", adding that some may be forced to shut for a period.—AFP



WATFORD: Shoppers walk outside the Intu Watford Shopping Centre in Watford, Hertfordshire on Friday. British shopping center giant Intu, already hit hard before the coronavirus lockdown, warned Friday that it was on the brink of collapse after talks failed to restructure its finances. — AFP

Business

NBK is the first to offer 'Garmin Pay' service on NBK debit cards in Kuwait

Service to meet customers' needs and expectations

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to provide innovative and leading e-payment solutions to its customers for faster and seamless payments, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced that "Garmin Pay" service is now available on NBK Visa Debit Cards, in addition to NBK Credit Cards.

NBK is the first bank to provide "Garmin Pay" service in Kuwait, in demonstration of its leadership in launching highly advanced digital solutions and providing innovative payment methods to its customers, reflecting its continuous efforts to deliver convenient and safe experience.

The NFC-based e-payment solutions have become essential during coronavirus crisis to avoid the use of cash, and NBK has always strived to launch these advanced payment solutions since the beginning of the year in order to provide easy and more convenient services to customers.

On this occasion Homoud Al-Nasrallah, Deputy Head- Domestic Branches at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We launched "Garmin Pay" service at the beginning of this year, which enables customers to make payments using NBK Credit Cards. Now, we have provided this service through NBK Debit Cards, as part of our efforts to develop contactless payment solutions, for more conven-

ient and easier services for our customers."

Al-Nasrallah pointed out that all new payment solutions and upgrades of existing services offered by NBK come as part of its aim to meet customers' needs and expectations. He added that the bank is always ready to provide services that suit customers' lifestyles through different communication

channels, which emphasizes the fact that NBK is closer to its customers. "We strive to provide cutting-edge contactless payment solutions to allow our customers make their seamless payments quickly, easily and safely, under the current social distancing instructions. We consider our customers' safety as a top priority, and these payment methods proved to be fully effective especially during the current health crisis," he added.

Al-Nasrallah concluded: "We promise to continue providing new and outstanding highly advanced contactless payment solutions and leading banking services. We also promise our cus-

tomers to always be the pioneer in launching such services in Kuwait, thanks to our advanced technological infrastructure, as well as our strong partnerships with leading international companies in this field."

"Garmin Pay" allows customers to make faster payments using their Garmin smartwatches that support the service, as they can activate the service by entering their NBK Credit Card or NBK Debit Card details to their Garmin smartwatch, and use it to make different payments through the smartwatch quickly and easily. "Garmin Pay" is also suitable for those who like to go out for daily tasks without keeping bank cards, and it is well-suited for shopping and daily purchases, as the service is available in all shops accepting contactless payments.

It is noteworthy that NBK was awarded the "Best Consumer Digital Bank" and the "Best in Mobile Banking" in Kuwait by Global Finance Magazine for 2019.

Simple steps to configure "Garmin Pay" service:

- Download the latest version of the Garmin Connect Mobile App on your Apple or Android smartphone or tablet and make sure your Garmin smartwatch is charged
- Open the Garmin Connect Mobile App on your device, tap "Garmin Devices" and select your Garmin smartwatch
- Select Garmin Pay and tap "Create Your Wallet"
- Create a 4-digit passcode to keep the wallet on your watch secure
- Enter your card details
- Read and accept the terms and conditions
- Enter the Authentication Code (OTP) sent by SMS to your registered mobile number
- Once you are done, the card will be added to your wallet and you're ready to use Garmin Pay.



Homoud Al-Nasrallah



Bank provides cutting-edge e-payment solutions

Nigeria asked to deepen reforms to boost growth

ABUJA: Nigeria needs to deepen economic reforms and boost government revenues in order to have a sustained recovery after a coronavirus-induced oil price shock that slashed income and weakened its currency, the World Bank's country director told Reuters on Friday.

Shubham Chaudhuri said Nigerians are aware they cannot simply wait for oil prices to recover as happened during the last crisis in 2016 to rebuild the economy, particularly with the health crisis caused by the pandemic. Africa's largest economy faces a situation similar to the 1980s when it rationed foreign currency amid shortages caused by a recession and currency weakness.

Nigeria's current case is worsened by revenues of around 5% of GDP, which is one of the lowest in the world for similar size countries. The ratio stood at 8% last year before the pandemic.

Chaudhuri said the World Bank is considering a \$3 billion budget support loan for Nigeria, which would cover around half of the country's external financing shortfall. He added that approval was expected within the next three to four months.

"To wait for oil prices to recover will be shortsighted and I think the government recognizes this. It helps us make the case for providing the kind of financing the government has requested," he told Reuters by phone in Abuja. Nigeria plans to spend 3 percent of its GDP to stimulate its economy this year, similar to what most sub-Saharan African countries are doing but far less than the G20 countries, due to low buffers.

Chaudhuri said the government had demonstrated transparency by disclosing how big a deficit it was expecting this year unlike in previous spending plans, which is a step in the right direction.

Also a decision to move gasoline and electricity prices to more market-reflecting tariffs is welcomed and would help free up funds for healthcare and infrastructure, Chaudhuri said, adding that more needs to be done. On the currency, the World Bank welcomed moves by the central bank to unify its multiple exchange rate which Chaudhuri said would be supportive of reforms and help attract foreign investment to boost sustainable recovery.

"Now is the time for political courage to be displayed in making the right trade-offs. We see the policy intent and commitment and we are hopeful," he said. —Reuters

Buyers of some ME crude are struggling to hedge risk

By Gurdeep Singh

Buyers and sellers of oil have been forced to adjust to unprecedented volatility as Covid-19 caused demand destruction on a scale never seen before. This has highlighted the need for regional benchmarks to have deep and liquid forward curves, allowing physical oil market participants to effectively hedge their risk.

Forward curves define the price at which an oil contract for future delivery can be concluded today, and are used for many reasons. These include refiners locking in their cracking margins and buyers and sellers of oil managing the risk of price fluctuations from the time an oil contract is agreed to when the physical oil is delivered months later.

Most Middle East oil sold to Asia is priced basis the Platts Dubai benchmark, either by itself or alongside Platts Oman or DME Oman. Crude oil from Oman and the Emirates of Dubai is priced basis average of DME Oman alone. Exchange-listed Dubai futures financially settle

on S&P Global Platts cash Dubai assessments.

Focus on liquidity in DME Oman's forward curve has grown, especially after Saudi Aramco adopted the contract in its crude price formula for Asia in late 2018. Both Saudi and Kuwait now sell their crude to Asian customers referencing the monthly average of Platts Dubai and DME Oman. Previously, both producers used monthly average of Platts Dubai and Platts Oman.

Trading activity on several latter-month contracts of DME Oman crude futures has come to a sudden halt in recent months, even as more Middle East producers began using the contract to price crude sales to Asia.

The DME Oman sixth-month, or M6, contract stopped trading at the end of December, around the same time Kuwait announced plans to begin using DME Oman alongside Platts Dubai for pricing its crude starting February. Similarly, the M5 and M4 contracts last traded in February and March, respectively, according to daily trading volumes reported by the exchange.

The sudden shortening of the DME Oman forward curve suggests the contract's appeal as a hedging and risk management tool remains limited despite recent increase in its use for pricing Middle East crude.

The lack of interest in forward month Oman derivatives stems from the well-established market practice where the forward curve for Dubai futures is widely used as the primary hedging instrument for Asian firms managing exposure to Middle East oil.

Companies with exposure to oil pricing against Platts Dubai/Oman or Platts Dubai/DME Oman commonly hedge their risk on the Dubai forward curve, taking on the basis risk that may arise from the spread between either of the Oman prices versus Dubai.



Gurdeep Singh

Dutch airline KLM to get \$3.8bn package

AMSTERDAM: The Dutch government said on Friday it would provide 3.4 billion euros (\$3.8 billion) in support to the Dutch arm of Air France-KLM, capping months of wrangling with France over the role each country should play in a coronavirus rescue deal.

The move comes after Paris announced a 7 billion euro bailout package for Air France in April and as governments look to shore up an industry hammered by a travel slump expected to last for years. As part of the package, the Dutch government will appoint an observer to KLM's board to ensure taxpayer money is spent only on the Dutch subsidiary, but won't have control of the business. It will also force painful reforms, including pay and spending cuts, a freeze on bonuses and dividends, as well as ambitious environmental targets that were sought by the Dutch parliament as a condition for aid.

"This package is needed to make sure that KLM and Air France can con-

tinue to fulfil the important role that they have in our economy," Finance Minister Wopke Hoekstra told a news conference. Reuters first reported details of the aid package on Thursday. Sources said The Hague had sought a seat on KLM's board, but was rebuffed by Paris. The countries' leaders met over the matter this month.

The French and Dutch governments have frequently been at odds over management and strategy at Air France-KLM, created by the 2004 merger between the two national airlines. Each holds a 14% stake in the group.

Job cuts

The Dutch aid will ensure KLM can continue to operate at least into 2021 and the government remains willing to provide further assistance if needed, Hoekstra said. KLM will receive 2.4 billion euros in bank loans with guarantees, and a 1 billion euro direct loan. A consortium of 11 foreign and domestic banks will provide the financing, Hoekstra said.

Air France is drawing up voluntary layoff plans which, combined with natural attrition, are expected to affect about 20 percent of its workforce, or 8,000-10,000 jobs.

KLM will present a draft restructuring plan in July. "The goal is to keep as



THE HAGUE: Netherlands Finance minister Wopke Hoekstra (center) and Dutch minister for Infrastructure and Water Management Cora van Nieuwenhuizen (left) arrives to speak about the financial support package to Air France / KLM in The Hague, The Netherlands, on Friday. —AFP

many jobs as possible, but we can't close our eyes to the reality that the airline and industry is facing," CEO Pieter Elbers told reporters on a call.

KLM has a voluntary redundancy plan for its 30,000 employees. Under the aid package, which must still be approved by the European Union, KLM pilots will have to take a pay cut of up to

20%, and the company as a whole will have to cut costs by 15 percent.

Other concessions that had been sought by Dutch parliament include fewer night flights and a 50% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2030, as well as executives surrendering bonuses, and a halt on dividend payments. —Reuters

US consumer spending rebounds

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending rebounded by the most on record in May, but the gains are not likely to be sustainable, with income dropping and expected to decline further as millions lose their unemployment checks starting next month.

The surge in spending reported by the Commerce Department on Friday is also under threat from a jump in coronavirus cases in many parts of the country, including densely populated California, Texas and

Florida. The rising COVID-19 infections chipped at consumer sentiment in the second half of June. Confidence in government economic policies dropped in June to the lowest level since President Donald Trump entered the White House. The economy has been showing signs of turning around after tough measures to slow the spread of the respiratory illness pushed it into recession in February. Hiring, homebuilding permits, industrial output and orders for manufactured goods rebounded in May, recouping some of their historic losses.

"There are still huge pitfalls ahead for the economy," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Commerce Department said consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, jumped 8.2 percent last month. That was largest

increase since the government started tracking the series in 1959. Consumer spending tumbled by a historic 12.6 percent in April.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast spending rising 9.0 percent in May. Spending was boosted by the reopening of many businesses after being shuttered in mid-March. Consumers stepped up purchases of motor vehicles and recreational goods. They also boosted spending on healthcare, and at restaurants, hotels and motels. But personal income dropped 4.2 percent, the most since January 2013, after surging by a record 10.8 percent in April when the government handed out one-time \$1,200 checks to millions of people and boosted unemployment benefits to cushion against the COVID-19 hardship. The payments are part of a historic fiscal package worth nearly \$3 trillion. —Reuters



SANTA MONICA: People wearing facemasks visit Santa Monica Pier which re-opened after closure for over three months due to the coronavirus pandemic, on Friday in Santa Monica, California. —AFP

Business

stc launches new video management and video surveillance solutions

Cloud tech apps VSaaS and VMaaS offer a multitude of benefits

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced the launch of its new Video Surveillance as a Service (VSaaS) and

Video Management as a Service (VMaaS) solutions. The cloud technology applications offer unparalleled benefits in cost, ease of implementation, maintenance, usage, scaling and higher levels of security.



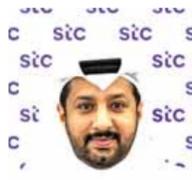
Services offered to businesses, firms in Kuwait

The services offered by stc to its wide network of relationships with businesses and companies in Kuwait, provide end-to-end video surveillance solutions, includ-

ing cameras, cloud storage, connectivity, cloud video management and an optional on-premises storage. Rising security concerns and surveillance needs in general have increased the demand for such solutions that not only offer on-premises surveillance but also remote management. The Company is offering these unique services through various payment structures to ensure that customers can utilize the Cloud Video Surveillance System in the most affordable way possible.

stc is launching these new services to provide a secure and safe platform for businesses to operate without worrying about constant security concerns. The new surveillance service is cloud hosted, which allows users to remotely store, manage, record, play and monitor surveillance footage from any location through stc's highly secure cloud video storage. The new systems are also designed to shift existing surveillance setups to the cloud, allowing clients to enjoy the new state-of-the-art VMaaS solution, while maintaining the highest level of cloud security and enjoying the premium video management software (VMS) that comes with it.

Commenting on this initiative, General Manager of Sales & Account Management at stc, Meshari Al-



Meshari Al-Hamad

Hamad, said, "stc has been a leader in offering new and innovative solutions to all its business customers to support operational continuity while simultaneously enhancing performance. With the new VSaaS and VMaaS, customers can exclusively benefit from the latest technology in security solutions that runs on a cloud infrastructure, while enjoying convenient maintenance plans, scalable cloud video storage and premium video management software for a worry-free experience."

He added, "We are committed to provide our enterprise customers with the latest technology solutions to optimize their operations and enhance their performance. These offerings follow our strategic approach towards enabling digital transformation in Kuwait by offering a wide range of advanced products and serv-

ices that cater to the needs of our wide customer base. We will continue to introduce such services that incorporate advanced features to assist business owners in improving their productivity while maintaining high-levels of security."

Al-Hamad also stated that stc has dedicated a technical support team equipped to respond instantly and diligently to any new customer requests. The technical team specializes in setting up the surveillance system to ensure that business premises are secured with remote technical assistance to adjust all features without any service interruptions.

In line with stc's vision to introduce holistic digital solutions, the Cloud Video Surveillance System also offers the flexibility to instantly increase retention periods and expand storage capacities when needed. The offering includes Video management software (VMS) licenses with stc Cloud storage capacity per camera, with the flexibility to increase or decrease the storage whenever required. This service also grants full support for thermal cameras and touch-free access control devices with integrated analytic used in temperature detection.



In this file photo, Aicha Evans who is the CEO of the self-driving technology development company Zoxx, talks about autonomous cars during a keynote session at the Amazon Re:MARS conference on robotics and artificial intelligence at the Aria Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Amazon drives into robo-taxi field, buys Zoxx

WASHINGTON: Amazon said Friday it was buying the self-driving car tech startup Zoxx, in an effort to rev up the drive for autonomous ride-hailing and compete against rivals like former Google car unit Waymo.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed, but a report in The Information said Amazon was paying more than \$1 billion for the California startup developing autonomous technology. "Zoxx is working to imagine, invent and design a world-class autonomous ride-hailing experience," said Jeff Wilke, who heads Amazon Worldwide Consumer. "Like Amazon, Zoxx is passionate about innovation and about its customers, and we're excited to help the talented Zoxx team to bring their vision to reality in the years ahead." The companies said Zoxx CEO Aicha Evans and chief technology officer Jesse Levinson would keep their roles at Zoxx "as a standalone business as they innovate and drive towards their mission."

"This acquisition solidifies Zoxx's impact on the autonomous driving industry," said Aicha Evans, CEO of Zoxx. "We have made great strides with our purpose-built approach to safe, autonomous mobility, and our exceptionally talented team working every day to realize that vision. We now have an even greater opportunity to realize a fully autonomous future."

Evans, a Senegal native, was named CEO in January

2019 of Zoxx, which had raised more than \$750 million and has some 1,000 employees.

'A good fit'

Technology analyst Richard Windsor said on his Radio Free Mobile blog that Zoxx is "a good fit for Amazon" and "has one of the better autonomous driving offerings but is currently suffering from its inability to forecast market readiness and demand for its product." Windsor said Amazon and Zoxx "will compete with robotaxi offerings from Waymo, Cruise, Uber and Mobileye rather than the other companies who plan to offer autonomous solutions for everyday vehicles."

The analyst added that Amazon is also likely to use Zoxx "to automate the last mile of its distribution network and make a vast cost saving."

The reported transaction is far below Zoxx's valuation of some \$3.2 billion estimated last year by the research firm CB Insights. Amazon's moves comes in the midst of a pandemic-induced economic slump which has strengthened some of the major tech firms and has led to increased antitrust scrutiny.

It comes with lawmakers poised to call Big Tech CEOs to testify about their dominance and with antitrust enforcers stepping up probes in the US and European Union. Amazon, which is the largest e-commerce operator and a major player in cloud computing and streaming media, has been ramping up its own logistics network in recent years with planes, drones and delivery vehicles.

It plans to deploy more than 100,000 electric delivery vans in the coming years. Waymo, a unit of Google parent Alphabet, has begun deploying fully autonomous rides to a small number of users. But analysts say wide deployment may take several years. — AFP

Microsoft to close its retail stores

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft said Friday it will close its stores around the world, moving its retail operations online and keeping only four locations that will be transformed into "experience centers."

The move means the estimated 100 Microsoft stores closed due to the coronavirus pandemic will not reopen as the tech giant enters "a new approach to retail," according to a statement. "Microsoft will continue to invest in its digital storefronts on Microsoft.com, and stores in Xbox and Windows, reaching more than 1.2 billion people every month in 190 markets," the statement said.

The four locations that will become Microsoft Experience Centers are in London, New York, Sydney and at the company's Redmond,

Washington headquarters. Retail team members will "serve customers from Microsoft corporate facilities and remotely providing sales, training, and support," the company said. Microsoft said it will set aside \$450 million to cover the costs of closing the locations. "Our sales have grown online as our product portfolio has evolved to largely digital offerings, and our talented team has proven success serving customers beyond any physical location," said Microsoft corporate vice president David Porter.

"We are grateful to our Microsoft Store customers and we look forward to continuing to serve them online and with our retail sales team at Microsoft corporate locations." Microsoft in recent years has been relying more on its enterprise services such as cloud computing, with the retail locations focusing on its Surface tablets and laptops as well as Xbox gaming gear. But the physical stores failed to gain the momentum of rival Apple. Independent technology analyst Neil Cybart said the closings are coming because "the Surface business increasingly looks to be losing momentum in the consumer space." — AFP



NEW YORK: A looted and boarded up Microsoft store is seen after a night of protest over the death of an African-American man George Floyd in Minneapolis in Manhattan in New York City. Microsoft said on Friday it will close its stores around the world except for four locations that will be transformed into "experience centers," moving its retail operations online. — AFP

Zimbabwe suspends stock exchange, mobile payments

HARARE: Zimbabwe on Friday suspended trade on the stock exchange and mobile phone-based payments to address what President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government called "criminality and economic sabotage."

The decision to suspend mobile payments will hit the economy hard as more than 80 percent of all transactions are conducted on phones due to a shortage of banknotes, according to central bank data.

In a statement on Friday, government spokesman

Nick Mangwana said the move, which takes immediate effect, was part of efforts to arrest the slide of the Zimbabwe dollar, which has sharply devalued since its reintroduction last year after a decade of dollarisation.

"Government is in possession of impeccable intelligence which constitutes a prima facie case whereby the phone-based mobile money systems of Zimbabwe are conspiring, with the help of the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, either deliberately or inadvertently, in illicit activities that are sabotaging the economy," the statement said.

The suspension of all mobile payments and the stock market was meant to allow "intrusive investigations". The government says mobile payment platforms were major drivers of a roaring foreign currency trade outside formal banking channels, with multiple listed stocks such as Old Mutual providing proxy exchange rates implied by their prices on foreign bourses such

Suicide of young trader prompts soul-searching at Robinhood

NEW YORK: The suicide of a young trader who thought he lost hundreds of thousands of dollars on Robinhood has intensified scrutiny of the online platform popular with millennials new to investing.

Alexander Kearns took his life on June 12 after his Robinhood account showed a negative balance of \$730,000 based on options trades. "The emotional stress from the exposure caused him to take his own life," tweeted Bill Brewster, a cousin of the 20-year-old Kearns and a financial analyst based in Chicago.

Kearns's family believes Robinhood did a poor job of explaining and accounting for complex financial trades, leading him to misinterpret the figures.

They think his account actually had a positive balance. Robinhood declined to comment directly on Kearns's account, but a source familiar with Robinhood's procedures said Thursday that during options trading, an account with a positive portfolio can show a negative cash position. In a blog post on June 19, Robinhood cofounders Vlad Tenev and Baiju Bhatt said they were "personally devastated" and promised to revise requirements for investing in options, bolster the platform's educational resources and improve the user interface.

Tenev and Bhatt also announced a \$250,000 donation to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Explosions of confetti

Robinhood was launched in 2013 with the stated goal of democratizing access to Wall Street trading and eliminating commissions on trades of stocks, options and exchange-traded funds. The platform also permits traders to buy fractions of shares of more expensive companies and grants free stock to new customers.

The company is among "fin tech" upstarts remaking finance with smartphone-oriented technology. Robinhood raised \$280 million in fresh capital in May. Users are humored by features like an explosion of virtual confetti after each transaction, and can keep lists of favored stocks to follow.

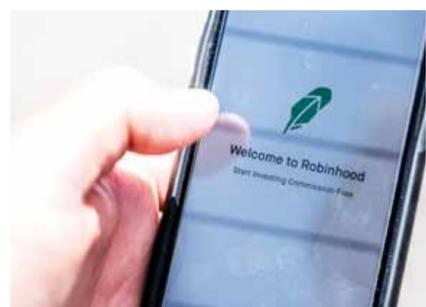
In early May, Robinhood reported 13 million accounts on the platform following a surge in new customers as a result of coronavirus lockdowns. That was a much bigger increase in new customers compared with Charles Schwab, TD Ameritrade and E*TRADE, even if the older firms had accounts with much higher values.

Many of Robinhood's new users are day traders attracted to penny stocks—a category shunned by big-time investors. A number of the fledgling traders have actually done well this year, according to an analysis by Societe Generale of trades since the beginning of the year. "Their timing back into the market looks impeccable with a significant pick-

up in holdings as equity markets bottomed in mid-March," the French bank said in a recent note.

Too easy?

But there were questions about Robinhood even before the Kearns tragedy. The platform's revenues are based on subscriptions to its premium service, as well as payments from market makers for routing their orders.



WASHINGTON, DC: The Robinhood investment app is seen on a smartphone in this photo illustration in Washington, DC. — AFP

The latter is often a source of compensation for brokerages, but it is controversial because of its opacity—seemingly contradicting Robinhood's commitment to transparency. The platform is vulnerable to technology outages and has also had some stumbles as it introduced new products such as a high-yield savings account.

But the biggest criticism has been the lack of protections for retail investors. "Robinhood makes it far too easy for young, inexperienced, low-account balance investors to get into risky investing behaviors that they are neither educated enough nor experienced enough to engage in," said Tara Falcone, a certified financial planner and founder of ReisUP, a financial literacy service.

Robinhood permitted investments in cryptocurrencies like bitcoin without warning of the risks involved, Falcone said, and though the company's statements since Kearns's suicide suggest progress, it needs to go much further. "Democratizing access to investing is a wonderful mission and they've clearly done a tremendous job in doing so," she said.

"But with that type of freedom comes a lot of responsibility. Some of that is on the shoulders of the individuals engaging in these acts, but I also believe that Robinhood has a responsibility to their stakeholders." — AFP

Plastic 'has entered' Antarctic terrestrial food chain: Study

PARIS: Scientists have found bits of polystyrene in the guts of tiny, soil-dwelling organisms in the Antarctic, raising concern that microplastics pollution has already "deeply" entered the world's most remote land-based food systems.

While the infiltration of microplastics throughout the oceans is well-known, researchers said their findings provided the first evidence of contamination in the Antarctic terrestrial food chain. "Plastics have therefore entered even some of the most remote soil food webs on the planet, with potential risks for the whole biota and ecosystems," said authors of the study, published Wednesday in the journal *Biology Letters*.

They warned this could also be a new stressor for fragile polar ecosystems already facing threats from climate change. Scientists focused on collembolan *Cryptopygus antarcticus*—small organisms commonly known as springtails that can jump in a similar way to fleas, although they are not classed as insects.

They are among the few organisms adapted to survive in the harsh Antarctic conditions and are "often the dominant species" in the few areas of the region not covered by ice, the study said. They mainly eat micro-algae and lichens. Researchers, led by scientists from Italy's University of Siena, collected the creatures from a chunk of poly-

styrene foam covered in a green layer of micro-algae, moss and lichens on King George Island in the South Shetland Islands. Human activity in the area including scientific research stations, airport and military facilities, and tourism have acted to make it "one of the most contaminated regions of Antarctica".

By examining the collembola using an imaging technique with infrared and comparing the images to fragments of the polystyrene, the researchers "unequivocally" detected traces of the plastic in their guts.

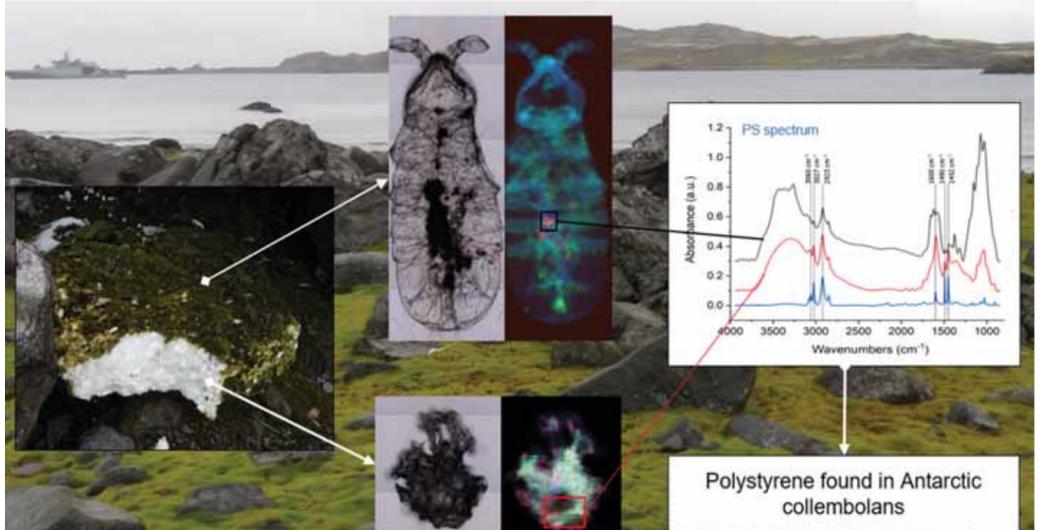
The authors said they believed the creatures ate the plastic fragments while grazing on their usual food.

Plastic pollution 'ubiquitous'

Elisa Bergami of the University of Siena said the study showed that plastic pollution is "ubiquitous" and had reached even remote polar regions. "Cryptopygus antarcticus has a key role in the simple Antarctic terrestrial food webs," she said.

"The implications of plastic ingestion by this species include the potential redistribution of microplastics through the soil profile and transfer to their common predators, the moss mites."

Bergami said contamination on land had drawn less attention than ocean pollution. She called for more research into the potential toxicity of exposure



A handout composite image made available by Elettra Sicrotone Trieste University of Siena, on Friday shows graphics of polystyrene found in Antarctic collembolans. — AFP

to plastic, which is associated with pathogens, contaminants and antibiotic-resistance.

Researchers also raised concerns about styrofoam, because its porous structure could encourage the formation of moss and other growth, thereby attracting organisms. In separate research, two different groups of scientists

from China and the US have reported discovering that manmade mercury pollution has reached the bottom of the deepest part of the ocean, the Marianas Trench in the Pacific.

The studies, reported at the Goldschmidt Geochemistry conference this week, found both manmade and natural methylmercury—a toxic form of

mercury—in fish and crustaceans in the trench.

Mercury, which can become concentrated in animals towards the top of the marine food chain, is poisonous at high levels and can harm a developing fetus. It can reach the oceans as a result of human activities like mining, as well as burning coal and petroleum. — AFP

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Lifestyle | Features

Kanye West inks Yeezy deal with Gap, whose shares surge

The struggling Gap brand has inked a deal with the mercurial Kanye West to produce a new line marrying its American clothing classics with the rapper's Yeezy designs. The retailer Gap Inc and West's Yeezy will introduce "Yeezy Gap" in the first half of 2021, the companies said Friday. Gap—which posted hundreds of millions in losses in 2020's first quarter and has flailed in recent years—saw its shares surge upon news of the partnership with one of entertainment's most bankable celebrities, up some 30 percent Friday morning.

Under West's creative guidance, the new line will include "modern, elevated basics for men, women and kids at accessible price points," the statement said. The companies noted that the deal brings West's rela-

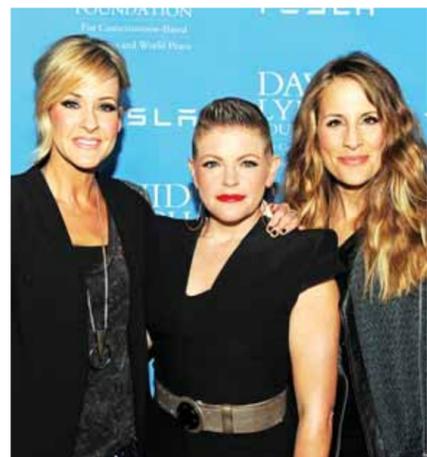
tionship to Gap "full circle," saying the billionaire entrepreneur, rapper, designer and most recently gospel singer worked at a Chicago Gap store as a teenager. "#WESTDAYEVER," the 43-year-old tweeted, with a logo combining "ZY" with Gap's signature navy blue and white.

It is a collaboration West has long waxed poetic on: "One of my dreams was to be the head creative director of the Gap," he told New York Magazine in 2015. "I'd like to be the Steve Jobs of the Gap." Latching onto the star power of West is a major marketing score for Gap, who has seen sales consistently decline since 2013 and has scrambled to remain relevant in a rapidly shifting ready-to-wear landscape. Yeezy will receive royalties and potential equity based on meeting sales targets.

Yeezy's sneaker side alone was valued as much as \$3 billion last year, according to Bloomberg. The 21-time Grammy winner West waded into the design world in 2007, when he launched his first line of high-end sneakers in collaboration with Nike. He severed ties with the American sports apparel company in 2013, saying his share of revenues was insufficient. He then launched a partnership with German sportswear giant Adidas and saw sales explode, hitting some \$1.5 billion in 2019, according to Forbes. In parallel the celebrity entrepreneur has presented eight Yeezy clothing collections, with financing from Adidas.—AFP



In this file photo US rapper Kanye West attends the WSJ Magazine 2019 Innovator Awards at MOMA in New York City.—AFP



In this file photo (From left) musicians Martie Maguire, Natalie Maines and Emily Robison of the Dixie Chicks arrive at the David Lynch Foundation Gala.—AFP

Dixie' nixed by Dixie Chicks: Band rebrands over links to Confederacy

The country trio Dixie Chicks are now simply The Chicks, dropping a nickname for the Confederation South from their band name. The stealthy switch saw the group amend their social media usernames and release a new song and accompanying video "March March" on Thursday. The song's lyrics reference current social unrest including anti-racism protests and police brutality, as well as fights to end gun violence, slow climate change and expand LGBTQ rights. "We want to meet this moment," the group wrote on its website, with no other explanation.

The move comes after another country group, Lady Antebellum, changed its name to Lady A to remove a slavery link. The term "antebellum" refers to a time period before a war, and is widely associated with the pro-slavery American South in the pre-Civil War years. That group faced backlash after it emerged that a black female blues singer in Seattle had been using the name Lady A for two decades.

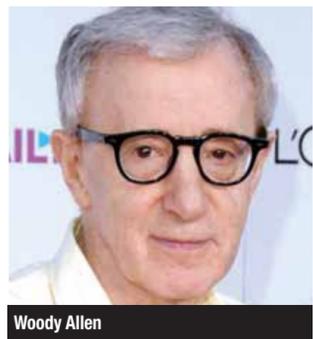
In a statement to the music outlet Pitchfork, The Chicks said they had checked with a New Zealand duo already using the name. "A sincere and heartfelt thank you goes out to 'The Chicks' of NZ for their gracious gesture in allowing us to share their name. We are honoured to co-exist together in the world with these exceptionally talented sisters. Chicks Rock!" the spokesperson told Pitchfork.

The Texas-based group formerly known as the Dixie Chicks soared to fame in the late 1990s, but essentially vanished from music's main stage after lead singer Natalie Maines told a show in London she was "ashamed" that George W. Bush hailed from Texas—and that the band did "not want this war, this violence," referring to the then-impending invasion of Iraq.

The comment went viral and many country radio stations quickly ditched their music—which included hits like "Wide Open Spaces," "Goodbye Earl" and a popular cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide." Country is considered by many as US music's most conservative genre. Many critics saw the trio's ouster as a turning point that emphatically erased any edge it had left, with artists fearing getting "Dixie Chicked" if they voiced opinions. But in March 2020 the group released a comeback single "Gaslighter" and said they would release their first new album since 2006, though its May 1 issue date was postponed due to coronavirus. The album is now expected to arrive July 17.—AFP

New Woody Allen film to open Spanish film festival

Woody Allen's new romantic comedy "Rifkin's Festival", is to open Spain's San Sebastian film festival in September, which will also be its international premiere, organisers said Thursday. Shot last summer in and around the northern seaside resort itself, the story centres on an American couple who come to its international film festival and are swept up by the fantasy of cinema and the charm and beauty of Spain. Characteristic romantic entanglements ensue when she has an affair with a brilliant French film director and he falls in love with a



Woody Allen

beautiful Spaniard who lives in the Basque city.

The film, which features Austrian actor Christoph Waltz and US actress Gina Gershon, is the latest project in the 84-year-old American director's cinematic love affair with major European cities. Produced by Mediapro, it also features French actor Louis Garrel and Spanish actors Elena Anaya and Sergi Lopez. Despite the uncertainty generated by the coronavirus pandemic, the film festival—the biggest such event in the Spanish-speaking world—is set to go ahead as planned, running from September 18-25.

It will be the second time that a Woody Allen film has opened the festival after his "Melinda and Melinda" did the honours in 2004 when the festival gave him a lifetime achievement award. The screening will be a significant moment for Allen who's seen his career stalled as a result of the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment, which revived decades-old allegations he sexually abused his adopted seven-year-old daughter in the early 1990s.

He has consistently denied the claims which were first levelled by his then-partner Mia Farrow and was cleared of the charges following two separate investigations. But the sexual harassment firestorm has fuelled a growing backlash against him and last year his most recent romantic comedy "A Rainy Day in New York" ended up being released in various European and Latin American countries rather than in the US.—AFP

Conan Doyle estate sues Netflix over 'emotional' Sherlock Holmes

Netflix is being sued by the estate of Sherlock Holmes creator Arthur Conan Doyle for alleged breach of copyright after a new film portrayed the famous detective as having feelings and respecting women. The movie, "Enola Holmes"—starring "Stranger Things" actor Millie Bobby Brown—is a Netflix adaptation of a series of Nancy Springer novels that imagines the detective has a teenage sister.

Although a separate court case established early Holmes novels are in the public domain, the lawsuit alleges the detective only developed feelings in the last 10 books, which remain under the control of Arthur Conan Doyle estate. "Holmes became warmer. He became capable of friendship. He could express emotion. He began to respect women," the suit, filed in New Mexico federal court on Tuesday, claimed.

The suit alleges Holmes only shows his feelings in the final novels, arguing that as a result Springer's depiction and Netflix's adaptation would violate their copyright. The lawsuit notes that when he wrote the later novels, Doyle had lost both his brother and his eldest son in the First World War: "It was no longer enough that the Holmes character was the most brilliant rational and analytical mind. Holmes needed to be human."



Conan Doyle

The suit says that as well as using publically available characters, Springer's "novels copy Conan Doyle's original additions in the Copyrighted Stories. "Among other copied elements, the Springer novels make extensive infringing use of Conan Doyle's transformation of Holmes from cold and critical to warm, respectful, and kind in his relationships." In addition to Netflix, the lawsuit also targets Springer, her publisher Penguin Random House and the producer of the latest film Legendary Pictures.—AFP



In this file photo actress Anika Noni Rose, the voice of Princess Tiana (at left on the poster), poses as she arrives for the world premiere screening of Disney's "The Princess and the Frog."—AFP

Disney rebrands 'Splash Mountain' ride with first black princess

"Splash Mountain" rides at Disney theme parks will be rebranded with a film featuring the company's first black princess, it said Thursday, after petitions drew attention to the log flume's racist history. The popular "Splash Mountain" attractions at Disneyland and Disney World are based on the controversial 1946 film "Song of the South"—a movie long accused of peddling racist tropes about the post-Civil War South. They will be "completely reimagined" to tell the story of 2009's "The Princess and the Frog," which starred an African-American Princess Tiana.

"The new concept is inclusive—one that all of our guests can connect with and be inspired by, and it speaks to the diversity of the millions of people who visit our parks each year," Disney said in a statement. The move comes at a time when historic statues and monuments are being removed across the country, as Americans grapple with the legacy of racism. Vast nationwide anti-racism protests followed African American George Floyd's death in police custody last month. Disney said the "retheming of

Splash Mountain is of particular importance today," but emphasized that it had been working on the changes since last year, and has a long history of updating attractions.

For instance, a scene depicting women on the auction block was recently removed from Disneyland's "Pirates of the Caribbean" attraction. "It is important that our guests be able to see themselves in the experiences we create," said Carmen Smith, creative development and inclusive strategies executive at Walt Disney Imagineering. No timeline was given for when the changes at Disney's California and Florida parks will be completed. Both are currently closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Disney World in Orlando is set to reopen mid-July, while the return of Disneyland near Los Angeles was indefinitely postponed Wednesday. "Song of the South," best known today for its Oscar-winning tune "Zip-a-Dee-Do-Dah," has never been released on home video in the United States. It was excluded from Disney's recently launched streaming platform Disney+. —AFP

Release of big summer film 'Tenet' pushed back again

The release of the latest, super-secret movie by director Christopher Nolan—touted as the summer hit that would bring audiences back to theatres after months of coronavirus lockdowns—has been delayed again, until mid-August. "Tenet," a thriller about an agency trying to ward off World War III, will now open on August 12, Warner Bros. said Friday, after scrapping July 17 and then July 31 for its debut. The studio said in a statement that it will only release the movie "when exhibitors are ready and public health officials say it's time." "In this moment what we need to be is flexible, and we are not treating this as a traditional movie release," the studio said.

The United States and Europe have slowly lifted restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the deadly virus, but new infection spikes are forcing some areas to clamp down again. Warner Bros. says the movie will be allowed to "play longer" in theaters, part of what the studio predicts will be a "very different yet successful release strategy." "Tenet," which has hints of the supernatural, combines the big-budget spectacle and inventive storytelling that have made Nolan one of Hollywood's most sought-after directors.

From "Memento" to "Inception" to "Dunkirk" by way of the Batman "Dark Knight" trilogy, the creative British filmmaker has carved out a singular niche on the industry. His clout is reflected in the colossal \$205 million budget that US media reported was lavished on "Tenet," which stars John David Washington ("BlacKkKlansman"), Denzel Washington's son.—AFP

Will streaming be theatre's death or its saviour?

As a metaphor for the desperate position theatre has been put in by the coronavirus, "Lungs" is hard to beat. On Friday Claire Foy and Matt Smith will step out onto a London stage to act in a socially distanced version of a hit play about how the world is going to hell in a handcart. The Old Vic hopes 1,000 people a night will pay between £10 and £65 (between 11 and 72 euros) to watch a live stream of the pair who have not acted together since they set the small screen alight as the young Queen Elizabeth II and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh in the Netflix series "The Crown".

Meanwhile, a few hundred metres (yards) down the road, Britain's National Theatre is streaming "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with "Game of Thrones" star Gwendoline Christie on YouTube for free. In normal times it would be a sell-out with a lucrative transfer to the commercial West End all but guaranteed. But instead the theatre is relying on donations from viewers.

Millions watching shows

Streaming may be a boon for opera, ballet and drama lovers desperate for their fix. But with 75 percent of British theatres saying they may not survive the year, many are questioning how good streaming can be for theatre's par-

lous financial health. While the National Theatre's online shows during the lockdown have been a roaring success with the public—more than 2.5 million people watched "One Man, Two Guvnors" starring James Corden in one week, and nearly a million more viewed "Jane Eyre" the following week—the viability looks a lot more shaky.



In this file photo Claire Foy accepts Britannia Award for British Artist of the Year presented by Burberry onstage at the 2017 AMD British Academy Britannia Awards Presented by American Airlines And Jaguar Land Rover.—AFP

Yet for venues that have been shuttered for three months or more, the attraction is obvious. "Millions of people are watching us," said Valery Gergiev, the legendary Russian conductor and head of Saint Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre. "Instead of 2,000 people at a concert, we have hundreds of thousands of viewers," he said. Ambitious companies like the English National Ballet have been able up their profile online, with director Tamara Rojo convinced that they may be creating a new audience for themselves when theatres reopen. "I want to believe this has given people who did not have the courage to go into a theatre in the past a window into our world," she said.

But the head of the Bolshoi in Moscow warned that while that was all very wonderful, companies may be cutting their own throats. Although the Bolshoi too has jumped on the streaming bandwagon, Vladimir Urin said few companies appear to have a long-term strategy. "I am absolutely convinced that those who overuse this medium, broadcasting performances practically after every premiere, are losing audiences," told the Russian Kommersant daily. Streaming also lacks the "emotion and magic" between the performer and audience that makes the live experience unique, Urin argued.—AFP



Lifestyle | Features

'The Simpsons' ends white actors voicing characters of colour

The Simpsons will no longer use white actors to dub ethnic minority characters, the producers of the long-running animated series announced Friday. The decision includes a recurring character from the series, launched in 1989 — Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, a grocer of Indian origin voiced in the American version of the show by white actor Hank Azaria. The character has long been seen as problematic and conveying racist stereotypes. Last January Azaria announced that, in agreement with producers, he was abandoning the role. "Moving forward, THE

SIMPSONS will no longer have white actors voice non-white characters," Fox Studios said in a statement to AFP.

The change will also affect the character of Dr Hibbert, a black man dubbed by the white actor Harry Shearer who also lends his voice to many other characters on the series—from Homer Simpson's boss Mr Burns to the chirpy neighbor Ned Flanders. The announcement came as Mike Henry, the white actor who voices the black character of Cleveland Brown in Family Guy, another animated series produced by Fox, announced on

Twitter that he was giving up the role. "It's been an honour to play Cleveland on Family Guy for 20 years. I love this character, but persons of colour should play characters of colour. Therefore, I will be stepping down from the role," he wrote. Americans are in the midst of a reckoning on systemic racism and discrimination ignited by the killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by a white police officer in Minneapolis on May 25.—AFP



In this file photo Cartoonist Matt Groening, creator of "The Simpsons," poses with his characters Bart (left) and Homer Simpson as he is honored with the 2,459th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood. —AFP



These photos courtesy of Genichi Mitsuhashi (second right) shows his ninja training in Iga, Mie prefecture. — AFP photos

JAPAN UNIVERSITY AWARDS FIRST-EVER NINJA STUDIES DEGREE

Japan has produced its first ninja studies graduate after Genichi Mitsuhashi spent two years honing his martial arts skills and absorbing the finer traditions of the feudal martial arts agents. The 45-year-old completed the master's course at Mie University in central Japan, the region considered the home of the ninja. In addition to researching historical documents, Mitsuhashi told AFP he took the practical aspect of being a ninja to heart. "I read that ninjas worked as farmers in the morning and trained in martial arts in the afternoon," he said.

So Mitsuhashi grew vegetables and worked on his martial arts techniques, in addition to copious ninja study in the classroom. "With this combination, I thought I could learn about the real ninja," he said. Better known as black-clad assassins famous for secrecy and stealth, ninjas also had "comprehensive survival skills," he added. Mitsuhashi, who has also learned kung fu and a Japanese martial art known as Shorinji Kempo, teaches ninja skills at his own dojo and runs a local inn while pursuing his PhD.

The Mie University set up the world's first research centre devoted to the ninja in 2017 and opened a graduate course a year later. It is located in Iga — 350 kilometres (220 miles) southwest of Tokyo—a mountain-shrouded city once home to many ninja. Yuji Yamada, a professor of Japanese history at the university in charge of the ninja centre, was surprised at Mitsuhashi's devotion to the task. "We provide historical classes and courses on ninja skills. But I didn't expect him to engage to this extent" like a real living ninja, Yamada said.

To enrol, students have to take an exam on Japanese history and a reading test on historical ninja documents. "About three students enrol every year. I think there's demand," the professor said. "We get many inquiries from overseas but I have to say one thing: This is a course to learn about the ninja, not to become one."—AFP



Russia plans to take first tourist on space walk in 2023

Russia's Energia space corporation said Thursday it will take the first tourist on a space walk in 2023, under the terms of a new contract with a US partner. Energia has inked a contract with Space Adventures, which promises to take two space tourists to the International Space Station that year. "We plan that one of the participants of the expedition will do a space walk from the Russian segment, together with a professional Russian cosmonaut," said Energia, which is part of Russia's space agency Roscosmos.

The announcement comes days after NASA signed a deal with Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic space tourism company to promote private missions to the station after a special training program in the US. It also follows the first successful mission by Elon Musk's SpaceX last month to bring astronauts to the station on a reusable Crew Dragon spacecraft, ending nearly a decade of Russia holding a monopoly on shuttling humans to orbit. SpaceX in March announced its own space tourism trip for three people next year, on board of the Crew Dragon.

On its website, Space Adventures already advertises the space walk as a "rare and exhilarating experience," available only through the Russian programme. "If you choose to fly to space on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft, you have the opportunity to... conduct a spacewalk, accompanied by a professional cosmonaut," it says. The company together with the Russian agency previously took eight tourists to the ISS between 2001 and 2009.—AFP



This file photo shows the logo of the French fashion main house and luxury goods Hermes outside a shop in the fashionable and luxurious street "rue du faubourg Saint-Honore" in Paris. —AFP

Ex-Hermes workers risk prison over fake handbags

Paris prosecutors sought prison terms Friday for the leaders of a ring accused of making and selling fake handbags from iconic French luxury house Hermes, including some former employees. The network, which targeted Asian tourists in Paris but also clients in Hong Kong in 2013 and 2014, was uncovered when French police wiretapped the home of a man suspected of selling stolen handbags in Asia. An inquiry uncovered a clandestine operation in which the suspects at their homes allegedly crafted dozens of counterfeit "Birkin" bags, the most coveted—and profitable—item produced by Hermes.

Named for French-British actress Jane Birkin, the bags have long waiting lists for customers ready to pay 40,000 euros (\$45,000) or more for versions made with crocodile skin. Ten people went on trial this week, including seven former Hermes employees. Prosecutors said they took in around two million euros a year by selling the fakes for 20,000 euros to 30,000 euros each.

The Hermes workers would make the bags with crocodile skins from an Italian supplier, using zippers and other components smuggled out of Hermes workshops. A woman now aged 52, born in Cambodia but living in France since 1980, was tasked with selling the fake bags as well as genuine "Birkin" resold to clients at a markup. She told investigators her clients knew that they were buying fakes, the court heard this week. One of the employees, accused of orchestrating the counterfeiting ring, was just 18 when he began working at Hermes. "At the time, I didn't realise the seriousness of this," the now 45-year-old told the court.

As the trial wound up Friday, prosecutors sought prison terms of up to four years and fines of 100,000 euros to 200,000 euros for the three ringleaders, and suspended sentences and fines for the others. Hermes lawyers have also asked for two million euros in damages. The court is expected to announce a date for its ruling later Friday.—AFP

Volcanoes, glaciers, bookworms: 5 things to know about Iceland

From its volcanoes and glaciers to its passion for books, here are five things to know about Iceland, which votes in a presidential election on Saturday.

Land of ice...

A vast North Atlantic island of 103,000 square kilometres (almost 40,000 square miles) nestled just under the Arctic Circle, Iceland is home to just 365,000 people, making it the most sparsely populated country in Western Europe. Glaciers make up 11 percent of its surface, providing some of the country's most dramatic landscapes. But climate change is posing a threat, and in the past decade the three biggest glaciers have all receded almost yearly. In August 2019, Iceland mounted a plaque to honour the passing

of Okjokull, the country's first glacier lost to climate change. Scientists say 400 others risk the same fate by 2200.

...and land of fire

With the Mid-Atlantic Ridge slicing north-south across Iceland, the country is also a highly active geological zone, home to frequent earthquakes and active volcanoes that average one major eruption every five years. The most famous one in recent memory is that of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in 2010, which sent up a cloud of ash and smoke that paralysed air traffic for a month. The most recent volcanic eruption dates back to 2014 when Bardarbunga in the south caused Iceland's biggest lava flow in 200 years. Experts have predicted the subglacial Grimsvotn volcano, one of the country's most active, could erupt soon.

From Vikings to independence

The island was colonised 1,200 years ago by Vikings and its language is considered to be that closest to Old Norse. Its parliament, the Althing, was founded by a Viking assembly, making it the oldest parliament in the world. For centuries, Iceland was governed by the union of Norway and Denmark, and then by Denmark alone as of 1814. Iceland only gained independence in 1944, when Denmark was occupied by the Nazis. Iceland became a parliamentary republic,

with a largely ceremonial president and a government headed by a prime minister.

Fishing, tourism replace 'evil bankers'

Iceland has been a land of fishermen for centuries and six percent of its gross domestic product comes from fisheries. The other pillar of its economy is tourism, accounting for eight percent of GDP, with two million tourists last year. Among the world's richest countries per capita, Iceland's economy crashed during the 2008 financial crisis. Its three biggest banks collapsed, spelling the end of the reign of Iceland's finance tycoons.

Books and football

One in 10 Icelanders publishes a book over the course of their lifetime. With 83 libraries, the land of the Sagas—medieval literary masterpieces—is the country that publishes the most new books per capita in the world behind Britain, according to the International Publishers' Association.

Another "saga", in modern times: the national football team's unexpected success. After years of losses, Iceland stunned everyone at Euro 2016 when they famously beat England to make it to the quarter-finals, and qualified for the country's first ever World Cup in 2018.—AFP

Norway starts digging up first Viking ship in a century

Norway began work on Friday to excavate the first Viking ship to be unearthed in the country in more than a century, with experts hoping it will shed light on the era of the Nordic seafarers. Ground-penetrating radar detected the ancient vessel, buried about 50cm below ground in a mound covering a burial site, in 2018 in the south east near the Swedish border. Initial observations suggested the remains were in very bad shape, forcing the authorities to launch excavations quickly before the

ship was completely degraded.

Only three well-preserved Viking ships have been found in Norway, the last excavation dating back to 1904. All three are now on display in a museum near Oslo. "With so few ships discovered, a new Viking ship will have a great impact on understanding the ships themselves, but also provide valuable information to understand the historical era as a whole," said archaeologist Knut Paasche of the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research.

Viking warriors and merchants who sailed the seas between the eighth and eleventh centuries often buried kings and dignitaries with ships hoisted ashore. "The Gjelstad ship is a discovery of outstanding national and international importance," said Culture Minister Sveinung Rotevatn. The excavation is expected to last five months.—AFP



Norway's Minister of Climate and Environment Sveinung Rotevatn officially starts the excavation of Gjelstadskipet, a viking ship discovered in the ground near Halden, some 100 km south of Oslo.—AFP



A man dressed as a Viking stands at the excavation area of Gjelstadskipet.

High street to PPE: B'desh garment makers turn virus gloom into boom

SAVAR, Bangladesh: Facing ruin as orders from Western brands collapsed in the coronavirus pandemic, many Bangladeshi garment factories have been given a lifeline with orders to make protective masks, gloves and gowns for export. Nonetheless, hundreds of thousands of workers who used to work in export-oriented apparel factories in the South Asian country remain jobless despite the new orders and some recovery in Western markets.

At factories in the industrial town of Savar just north of Dhaka, thousands of workers are now working eight-hour shifts, six days a week, making personal protective equipment (PPE). On the factory floor, sewing machines operated by hundreds of workers whirled loudly beside huge stacks of white and light-blue gowns. "We saw the opportunity in February and immediately we switched to PPE manufacturing," said Syed Naved Husain, chief executive of Beximco, a major supplier to the owners of brands like Zara, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilffiger.

Beximco last month exported 6.5 million medical gowns to US brand Hanes and it expects to export some \$250 million worth of protective gear this year. "Now some 60 percent of our 40,000 workers are engaged in PPE making," he told AFP. "Coronavirus has changed the world." Sumaiya Akter and Rubel Miah, who lost their jobs making apparel for Western retailers, were among the workers making final amendments to the robes. "I feel lucky for getting work in this factory while many others lost jobs and are now facing difficulties," 34-year-old mother Akter told AFP. "At least I can feed my family and parents."

Bangladesh over the past two decades became the world's second-largest ready-made garment exporter after China, making clothes for the likes of Primark and H&M. Before the pandemic, it accounted for around 80 percent of the country's \$40 billion annual exports and employed more than four million people, many of them women from poor rural villages. But when the world started to go into lockdown, the country's 4,500 manu-

facturers saw shipments plunge by a staggering 84 percent in April.

About \$3.2 million of orders were either cancelled or withheld, according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Most factories — shut down from the loss of contracts and the country's own virus lockdown — sacked or furloughed hundreds of thousands of workers, sparking numerous protests. There has been some recovery in orders, but Khan Monirul Alam Shuvo, spokesman of the BGMEA, told AFP: "The amount is much lower compared with what we got last year. In June our factories operated at 55 percent capacity."

The resumption of work in Bangladesh — which is reeling from its own COVID-19 outbreak — means extra safety measures like social distancing and face masks. One factory owner admitted to AFP, however, that "distancing is almost impossible in the factories because of the nature of the job". Now, the BGMEA said, many manufacturers were becoming hopeful again as they

pivot towards medical wear. At least 30 factories have started manufacturing PPE since the start of the pandemic and the "number is growing", Shuvo said.

Other companies who had already made protective clothing on a limited scale quickly scaled up their plants to meet the demand when Western clients came knocking. "Just three days ago, we got an export order to make 20 million surgical gowns. All our factories are now booked for the entire year," said Fakir Apparels director Mashiur Rahman Shommo. Fakir has turned five of its factories into PPE plants and hired another 400 workers, and now expects to export \$200 million worth this year. "We have world-class manufacturing facilities," Husain said. "Bangladesh was well-positioned to become a new hub for PPE manufacturing."

Ahsan H. Mansur, a former International Monetary Fund executive now at the Dhaka-based Policy Research Institute (PRI), said with the industry running at 50-percent capacity, the move to PPE production will "bring some relief". — AFP

Low-key Biden strategy vexes...

Continued from Page 1

Biden must be wary of appearing contradictory if he were to hold crowded rallies after warning such gatherings are dangerous. Mocked by Team Trump for repeatedly broadcasting from his basement studio, Biden appears to be making a gradual shift toward in-person events.

On Thursday he travelled to Lancaster, Pennsylvania where he wore a mask and sat with families in a brick-lined garden to discuss health-care. In a speech minutes later, he savaged Trump for seeking to dismantle Obamacare. "We've seen that same callousness in his handling of the coronavirus," Biden said, evoking Trump's refusal to heed the advice of his own scientists and wear a mask, calling the disease the "kung flu", and saying he would like to "slow" down virus testing. "He's like a child who can't believe this has happened to him," Biden said. "His job isn't to whine about it, his job is to do something about it."

Trump is adrift in troubled waters. Scientists say his coronavirus strategy has largely failed, and his former national security advisor John Bolton just accused him of being unfit for office. The president was rebuked twice last week by a conservative-leaning Supreme Court on closely watched cases regarding immigration and gay rights. And criticism has poured in over his handling of coast-to-coast protests against racial injustice, and how his toxic rhetoric served to stoke divisions.

Miner becomes millionaire over...

Continued from Page 1

Magufuli made a call to Laizer during the ceremony that was broadcast on loudspeakers, to con-

Labor offices in Jleeb, Farwaniya...

Continued from Page 1

She said she will not hesitate to take stricter action against companies that do not pay employees' salaries.

India tops 500,000 cases, turns to...

Continued from Page 1

In a bid to boost tracing efforts, Delhi authorities have called in 33,000 health workers to screen about two million people in sealed off zones across the city of 20 million people. But cities across the nation of 1.3 billion people are braced for a huge wave of new cases in coming weeks.

India is deploying thousands of beds made of cardboard to makeshift medical facilities as it struggles to deal with the surging number of coronavirus cases. The low-cost beds are chemically coated to make them waterproof and can hold a 300-kg load, said Vikram Dhawan, who along with his brother came up with the design while they were stuck at home during the country's months-long lockdown.

"One person can pick it up very comfortably," Dhawan told AFP at his factory in the northern city of Bhiwadi which already makes cardboard products. "It's compact, lightweight and can be manufactured and assembled in minutes." The New Delhi government is installing 10,000 of the beds in a spirital center on the outskirts of the city that is being converted into a dedicated coronavirus facility.

Mumbai, which like the capital has seen its hospitals overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, is also using them. "The most important thing is that the virus only stays on the surface of cardboard for 24 hours," Dhawan said. "On any other surface, metal, wood or plastic, it stays for three to four days." A study published in March in the US journal NEJM showed the coronavirus can remain for up to three days on plastic but only for 24 hours on cardboard.

He has scorned Biden as a "puppet of the radical left" and said China wants Biden to win so they can manipulate a pliant Democrat. The attacks have fallen flat, largely because Biden is not out on the stump engaging in campaign combat. Trump is increasingly turning to the economy as a potential re-election savior. A mild turnaround before the election could help the president and complicate Biden's message, according to Burden. "Even if the economy is not doing well, if it's improved, then he will be able to tell a story about bringing America back," the professor said.

Meanwhile the parties' official nominating conventions near. While Trump is demanding a massive crowd at the Republican event, Biden is opting for safety, as the Democratic Party said this week it will hold a largely virtual convention. Biden can no longer count on a traditional overgrown spectacle, but opportunity exists, insists Amy Dacey, a Democratic strategist. The Biden campaign is "reaching people where they are and not always asking them to come to where he is," Dacey said. "That's a really important contrast."

Another is Biden's human touch, but the pandemic may erase that advantage. He can still be a consoling presence, however, a distinction from Trump who is often seen as insensitive to people's concerns. Trump is not widely popular, but if anything he has proven resilient. Suffering in the sharp media glare, he is annoyed that his opponent avoids it. Trump's campaign has taken to ridiculing Biden for remaining in the shadows, Kyle Kondik of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics wrote in a recent newsletter. "They need to draw Biden out and hope he makes mistakes, so Trump can make himself look better by comparison." — AFP

gratulate him. "This is the benefit to small miners and testifies to the fact that Tanzania is rich," he said. When the 24-km perimeter wall was unveiled around the mining site, Magufuli said that 40 percent of all tanzanite produced at the site was being lost to smugglers. Magufuli has taken multiple steps to regulate the mining sector, which has faced allegations of fraud and underreporting of production and profits. — AFP

Meanwhile, a high-ranking official at the interior ministry was banned from travelling after his name was mentioned during investigations and he will be questioned in a few days. The prosecutor general also asked the justice minister to ask for lifting the immunity of two MPs — one lawmaker received KD 50,000 to run for elections, while the other received KD 380,000 to process transactions, reported Al-Jarida daily. It was also reported that the National Assembly has agreed to publish the names of visa traffickers after Aqeel finalizes a report in this regard. — Agencies

Mattresses for the beds are supplied by Sheela Foam Limited, which teamed up with the Dhawan brothers earlier this year. "We typically associate beds with steel or wood but the requirement here was such that we needed a kind of disposable or sanitization bed," said Sudhir Varanasi, head of supply chain management at Sheela. "Both here have a protective coating so that they can be cleaned and not get spoiled after any accidental spillage," Varanasi said as workers set up the beds at the vast Radha Soami Spiritual Centre.

The Dhawan brothers have not publicly revealed the price tag of making each bed, but it reportedly costs around \$10. Once the coronavirus epidemic is over, they see a market for their product. "I think 50 to 60 of our own workers have taken it home and are very happy using it every day," said Dhawan. "It costs the amount you'd spend each time you go out to eat at a restaurant."

America's top infectious diseases expert has warned the United States is facing a "serious problem" from a resurgent coronavirus as the illness puts the brakes on reopening two of the country's largest states. Texas and Florida closed bars and reimposed other curbs on Friday as the number of infections in the US hit a single-day record with increases in 16 states, mostly in the south and west.

The contagion also continued its march through Latin America, where Brazil recorded another 1,140 deaths and Argentina toughened a lockdown in the capital Buenos Aires. In Europe countries wrangled over plans to partially reopen the EU border, with officials fretting over the reliability of virus data from abroad, notably China, where COVID-19 first emerged late last year. Much of the Western world is pressing ahead with lifting restrictions on daily life despite warnings from health officials that haste could cost more lives.

"We are facing a serious problem in certain

Unilever to rename Fair & Lovely, pulls...

Continued from Page 1

"The brand has never been and is not a bleaching product," the statement from Unilever Bangladesh said.

Several companies — including French cosmetics giant L'Oreal — have been criticized recently for skin-lightening products after the global rise of the Black Lives Matter movement following the killing in the US of African-American George Floyd. A L'Oreal spokeswoman later said the world's biggest cosmetics company will remove words referencing "white", "fair" and "light" from its skin-evening products. Johnson & Johnson said last week it would stop selling some Neutrogena and Clean & Clear products, advertised as dark-spot reducers in Asia and the Middle East.

Skin-lightening creams in India have long been endorsed by major Bollywood stars — including Shah Rukh Khan and Priyanka Chopra Jonas. Chopra Jonas, married to American singer Nick Jonas, has been pilloried on social media for apparent hypocrisy in supporting the Black Lives Matter movement as well as having served as an ambassador for lightening products.

Unilever's decision ignited controversy on social media, with users torn between praising the decision and condemning the "whitewash" that saw the name changed but left the product on the shelves. Speaking to the Financial Times, Bollywood actress and director Nandita Das said the move was a step in the right direction that would "trigger conversations" around beauty and color in India.

Unilever said the new brand name would be announced within two months. The Press Trust of India reported that Hindustan Unilever this month began proceedings to patent the name "Glow & Lovely". In 2018, the company also registered trademarks to market skincare and haircare products under the brand names "Even & Lovely", "Always Lovely", "Care & Lovely" and "I Am Lovely", among others.

Kavita Krishnan, an activist with the All India Progressive Women's Association, urged the company to acknowledge the "toxic culture" it promoted over decades by equating fairness with beauty, confidence and success. "They have to answer for all of this," said Krishnan, adding that her dark skin meant she often had shopkeepers try to push such products on her. "They should be dropping the product," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Kavitha Emmanuel, founder of India's Dark Is Beautiful campaign, welcomed the move, but said the battle was not over. "Is the narrative on skin whitening really being challenged, or is it just a surface level declaration? This we are yet to see," she said in emailed comments. "It takes more than a change of name to erase the damage."

"This is a big win, but it's only the beginning," Nina Davuluri, who in 2014 became the first Indian American to be crowned Miss America, told Reuters.

areas," leading US immunologist Anthony Fauci said at the first briefing in two months by the White House's Coronavirus Task Force. "The only way we're going to end it is by ending it together," he said of the outbreak. The US is recording more than 30,000 cases daily. With nearly 125,000 lives lost, it has by far the highest confirmed death toll in the world.

Panic-buying has also reared its ugly head again, with supermarkets in Australia imposing limits on purchases of toilet paper after people snapped up masses of stock, rattled by a surge in cases in Melbourne. "Stop it, it's ridiculous," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told his compatriots.

Companies in the United Arab Emirates and Israel will join forces to research and develop technology to fight the novel coronavirus, the two countries, which have no official diplomatic ties, said Thursday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu broke the news of an impending collaboration between the Jewish state and the Arab Gulf country, following "prolonged and intense contacts".

"This collaboration will be in the areas of research and development and technology, in areas that will improve health security throughout the region," Netanyahu said in a statement. Hours later the Emirati state news agency WAM confirmed the plan. "Two private companies in the UAE sign(ed) an agreement with two companies in Israel to develop research and technology to fight COVID-19," WAM said.

"This scientific and medical agreement forms part of constructive cooperation aimed at addressing the COVID-19 pandemic to safeguard the health of the region's peoples. As a result of the pandemic's spread worldwide, it is imperative to place the protection of humanity at the forefront of global action to overcome this unprecedented crisis," WAM added. The names of the companies were not

"While Unilever removing words such as 'fair, white, & lightening,' and changing the ... brand name is a step towards inclusion, it's only one piece of a much larger fight to end colorism." Davuluri on Tuesday wrote an open letter to Unilever CEO Alan Jope, urging him to stop production of the products.

Separately, Unilever, home to brands including Ben and Jerry's and Marmite, said Friday it will stop advertising on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in the US until the end of 2020 due to the "polarized election period" there. The Anglo-Dutch firm is the largest of a growing list of brands halting ads on Facebook over the social media titan's perceived failure to crack down on hate speech and incitements to violence.

"We have taken the decision to stop advertising on @Facebook, @Instagram & @Twitter in the US," Unilever said in a post on Twitter. "The polarized atmosphere places an increased responsibility on brands to build a trusted & safe digital ecosystem. Our action starts now until the end of 2020." Unilever, whose brands also include Dove soap, Magnum ice cream, Lipton tea and Knorr, is a major advertiser on social media in the United States.

Facebook said it was taking action against hate speech, adding that it had already banned 250 white supremacist groups, but had more work to do. "We invest billions of dollars each year to keep our community safe and continuously work with outside experts to review and update our policies," Facebook said in a statement. "We know we have more work to do, and we'll continue to work with civil rights groups."

US Telecoms giant Verizon announced on Thursday that it was "pausing" its advertising on Facebook, the latest company to do so after the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) called for the boycott as part of the "Stop the Hate for Profit" campaign. The Unilever move however goes beyond Facebook and Facebook-owned Instagram to take in Twitter.

A Unilever spokeswoman said that the company had committed to engage with Internet companies "but there is much more to be done, especially in the areas of divisiveness and hate speech during this polarized election period in the US". "Continuing to advertise on these platforms at this time would not add value to people and society. We will be monitoring ongoing and will revisit our current position if necessary," the spokeswoman told AFP.

Facebook is under increasing pressure for its hands-off approach to misinformation and inflammatory posts, particularly by US President Donald Trump. The social media company made an estimated \$70 billion annually from ads, the coalition — which includes the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) — behind #StopHateForProfit claimed in a statement on the ADL website.

Sporting goods makers Patagonia, North Face and REI, as well as the freelance staffing agency Upwork have all said they would boycott Facebook. Unilever has taken a series of steps in a bid to improve its image in recent months. The firm said in October it would cut its use of new plastic by half by 2025, while admitting the move was partly to appeal to young, more environmentally-conscious customers. — Agencies

immediately revealed and there were few other details.

Hind Al-Otaiba, director of strategic communications at the UAE foreign ministry, likewise reported that an agreement had been signed by firms in Israel and the UAE to develop research and technology to fight the virus. Jordan and Egypt aside, Arab countries have no official relations with Israel. But Arab states in the Gulf, including the UAE, have increasingly built informal ties with Israel in recent years amid shared concerns over Iran, which the Jewish state considers its arch-enemy.

"The stronger we are, the more powerful we are at deterring our enemies and bringing our friends closer," Netanyahu said in his statement. The Israeli premier's remarks came just days before the Jewish state intends to kick-start US-backed plans to annex settlements in the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley. That plan has sparked the fury of the Palestinians and drawn international condemnation.

On Wednesday the United Nations, European and Arab powers warned Israel that the annexation plan would deal a major blow to peace. Arab countries have repeatedly called for a settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a condition for normalizing ties with the Jewish state.

Earlier this month, a flight undertaken by Etihad Airways — the UAE's flag carrier — laden with Covid-19 related medical supplies for the Palestinians made a rare landing in Tel Aviv. But the aid was refused by the Palestinians as the UAE had coordinated with Israel rather than with the Palestinian Authority. Israel has confirmed more than 22,000 cases of coronavirus, including over 300 deaths, since reporting its first infection in February, and is now facing a new spike. The UAE has officially reported more than 45,000 cases, including 302 deaths. — Agencies

Stars

Daily SuDoku

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

very hard

Friday's Solution

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

hard

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today you might hear about opportunities to increase your income, Aries, either through your current employment, a new job, or perhaps a project of your own. You're likely to channel a great deal of energy and inspiration to this end. Others may want to pitch in and help you. You're liable to feel energetic and optimistic. This, in turn, can help you attract more opportunities. Go for it!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

A higher level of intuition and inspiration than is usual for you could enhance your artistic talents, Libra. A powerful drive to express the stories, pictures, or music that may be flooding your mind could result in your spending as much of the day as possible in seclusion, jotting down thoughts and ideas. By day's end, you might have spent most of your free time alone yet be very satisfied with the results.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

All your relationships could be enhanced today by your increased sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others, Taurus. You may provide a sympathetic ear to melancholy friends, help someone resolve problems, or both. Whatever it is, rest assured that your efforts won't go unappreciated. You'll probably grow closer to the ones who mean the most to you now, including a significant other.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Moving ahead is today's key phrase, Scorpio. You should be feeling very optimistic and excited about goals that you've set for yourself. You're probably confident that you'll reach them, and all will go well. This positive attitude spills over into your relationships. You should be in just the right frame of mind to encourage friends to go for their dreams and give them any assistance they need.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Expect to find yourself ministering to the needs of colleagues and family members today, Gemini. People around you might need to draw upon your insights into human nature in order to understand themselves and others. Your common sense could prove valuable to them. In the process of sharing your wisdom with others, you might also shed some light on emotional situations of your own. You could surprise yourself!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Inspiration is the keyword for the day, Sagittarius. You may be feeling highly motivated to move on with what others consider impossible dreams. "Impossible" has never stopped you before, and you aren't likely to let it stop you today. You're more likely to consider all contingencies carefully in order to make them work. Friends could be inspired by your vision and determination and follow your example. Go for it.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today you might feel especially intellectually and creatively inspired, and you could discuss your ideas with others. The process of communication could open new doors in your mind and result in some fascinating insights concerning whatever you're pursuing at this time. Sometime in the course of your conversations, Cancer, don't be surprised if you find that one of your friends needs a sympathetic ear. Enjoy your day.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Trying to get too much work done in the course of one day might prove self-defeating today, Capricorn. Your energy isn't what it usually is, and you're probably operating on nervous energy. Consider the situation and list your tasks in order of urgency. The world won't come to an end if you don't get them all done today. In the evening, rent a pile of DVDs, order a pizza, and relax.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

A close friend or member of your household could be having money problems, Leo, and want to draw on your good business sense in order to understand the situation and find ways to put it right. As you're likely to be feeling especially sensitive to the needs of others today, you could be of valuable help to this person and anyone else who might need some insights.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

The opportunity to increase your income could spur you to channel more energy and inspiration into career and business matters, Aquarius. Some vivid, intense dreams might reveal a lot about you and your motivations, which could increase your self-awareness and make everything easier for you. The drive to succeed in material and spiritual matters is likely to play a powerful role in everything you do today. Onward and upward!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

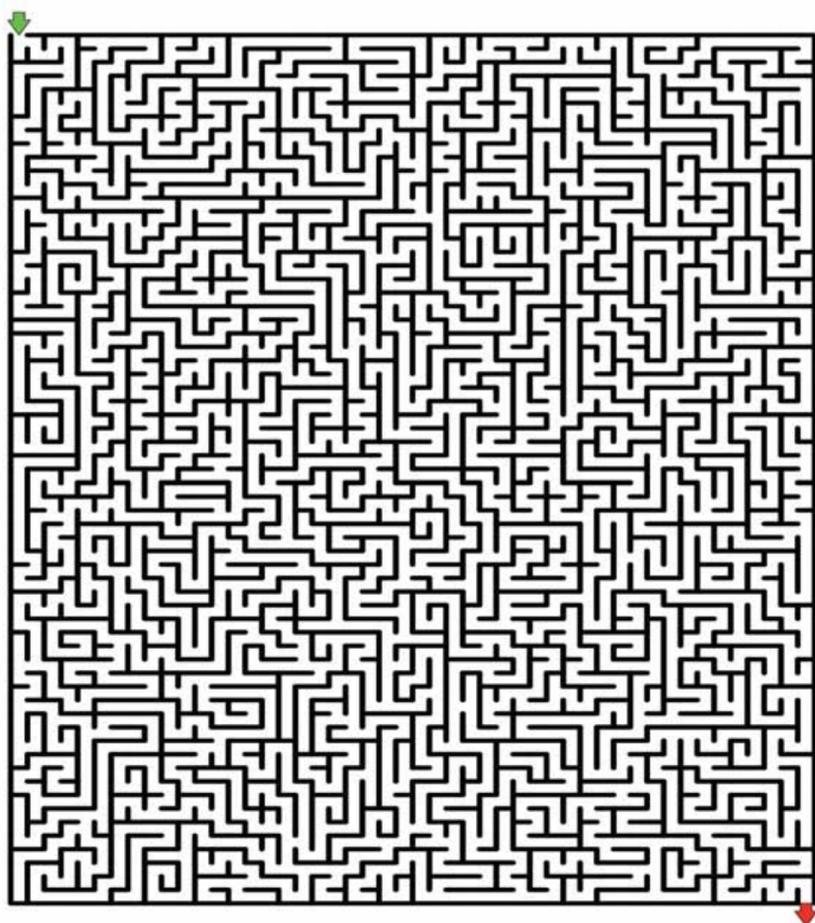
Heightened intuition and ESP could lead to some interesting conversations with others who are blown away by your insights into their thoughts, feelings, and desires. You could also be feeling more expressive than usual, Virgo. You might want to channel some of that inspiration into writing, speaking, or some other form of self-expression. Reading may also prove especially valuable at this time.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The desire for travel might hit you today, perhaps to visit a friend who lives far away, and you could set the wheels in motion to make it happen at some point in the future. Socializing could take up your evening, if possible, and you might talk to some interesting people. A friend may need a sympathetic ear. As you're especially sensitive to others right now, you're prepared to hear a sad story.

Find the way



Join the dots



Word Scramble



Football Word Scramble

DIRECTIONS: Unscramble the letters to form American football vocabulary terms. Watch out! A few have more than one word in the term.

1. GURAD _____
2. ULHDED _____
3. CREENT _____
4. ILETMHAF _____
5. UNPT _____
6. NALICBEKRE _____
7. AUACRETQBKR _____
8. WODN _____
9. ECORS _____
10. IVDER _____
11. DAOHNFF _____
12. TLACKE _____
13. UMLFBE _____
14. CKSA _____
15. ODNZNZEE _____
16. OPCINNIRTEET _____
17. FAIGEODLL _____
18. IKKOFCE _____
19. ITHTNDGE _____
20. SPAS _____

Sports

Photo of the Day



Cyril Despres of France performs during the fifth stage of Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in 2019. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Fudge to step down as British Athletics' Head of Endurance

LONDON: Barry Fudge will step down from his role as British Athletics' Head of Endurance at the end of the month, the governing body said on Friday. Fudge was appointed to the role in December 2013 and was part of the team that guided Mo Farah to four Olympic gold medals.

However, he had come under increasing pressure over his ties to Farah's former coach Alberto Salazar, who was given a four-year ban by the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) last year.

Salazar was banned for "orchestrating and facilitating prohibited doping conduct" as head coach of the Nike Oregon Project, a camp designed mainly to develop US endurance athletes.

Fudge was the point of contact between UK Athletics and the Nike Oregon Project. Farah and Fudge have not been accused of any wrongdoing. "The time is right for me to move on, and I am looking forward to watching our athletes progress and succeed at future championships," Fudge said in a statement.

"We'd like to thank Barry for his work for the organisation over the years. The recruitment of the new head coach and performance director will now take the organisation in to a new era," UKA chief Joanna Coates said.

Fudge's decision to step down comes a month after an independent review into UKA identified a "general culture of mistrust" within the organisation and concluded that the sport was not in a good position. — Reuters

Men's Davis Cup, women's Fed Cup finals postponed until 2021

'It's a huge disappointment for all of us'

PARIS: The men's Davis Cup and women's Fed Cup tennis finals have both been rescheduled for next year due to complications posed by the coronavirus pandemic, the ITF announced Friday.

This year's Davis Cup finals in Madrid, the second instalment of a new-look competition, were due to run November 23-29 while the revamped Fed Cup had been postponed indefinitely after April's finals were called off.

"It's a huge disappointment for all of us that the Davis Cup Finals will not be held in 2020," said Barcelona football star Gerard Pique, whose Kosmos investment group finances the competition.

"We don't know how the situation will develop in each qualified nation, or if restrictions in Spain will remain sufficiently eased, as such it is impossible to predict the situation in November and guarantee the safety of those travelling to Madrid."

The rearranged finals will comprise the 18 teams which qualified for the this year's edition. It will instead begin the week starting November 22, 2021.

"This is a tough decision to have to make, but delivering an international team event on this scale while guaranteeing the health and safety of all involved ultimately poses too great a risk," said ITF president David Haggerty.

Spain has one of the worst affected countries by the pandemic, suffering more than 28,000 deaths, but started reopening its borders at the end of last week.

The announcement capped a bad week for tennis after world number one Novak Djokovic's exhibition tournament in the Balkans led to him and other top players Grigor Dimitrov, Borna Coric and Viktor Troicki testing positive for COVID-19.

All professional tennis has been in cold storage since mid-March with Wimbledon cancelled for the first time since the World War II and Roland Garros moved back to September and October.

The US Open is going ahead as scheduled in New York from August 31, although the rash of positive tests at Djokovic's event has raised questions about the resumption of the season.

A number of Davis Cup qualifiers in March were played behind closed doors at the onset of the global

health crisis. World Group I and II ties scheduled for September will be pushed back until next year.

The revised 12-team Fed Cup finals were initially due to take place on indoor clay in Budapest from April 14-19 but were shelved in response to the virus outbreak. They have been reprogrammed for April 13-18, 2021.

"Due to the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to reschedule the postponed Finals in 2020," the ITF said Friday.

"In addition to the Laszlo Papp Arena being unavailable over the latter part of the year, there remain significant logistical and regulatory challenges that mean hosting an indoor mass gathering while guar-

anteeing the health and safety of all involved will not be feasible."



Tough decision

anteeing the health and safety of all involved will not be feasible."

'EXTRAORDINARY TIMES'

Eight Fed Cup play-off ties to be held at various venues around the world were also put on hold in March. They will be played next February.

"While it is regrettable that the Finals will not be able to take place this year, we are confident that we will be able to host a superb event in Budapest in April 2021," said Haggerty.

"In these extraordinary times, we believe that the best way forward in order both to protect the health and safety of all involved and to best respect the integrity of the competition is to extend this year's Fed Cup into 2021, with the event returning to an annual



MADRID: File photograph taken on November 24, 2019, (L/R) Spain's Pablo Carreno, Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut and Spain's Rafael Nadal pose with the trophy after winning the final tennis match between Canada and Spain at The Davis Cup Madrid Finals 2019 in Madrid. The Davis Cup finals due to take place in Madrid at the end of November were postponed on June 26, 2020, until 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic, the ITF announced. — AFP

basis the following year."

The move to reform the Fed Cup followed a similar overhaul of the Davis Cup, with Madrid hosting the inaugural finals won by Rafael Nadal's Spain in Madrid last November.

The previous format, which saw the eight-team World Group decided over three ties separated over the course of the season, was criticised for being too protracted and for not protecting player welfare which led many top players to stop representing their

countries.

The new-look tournament will offer a total prize pot of \$18 million with \$12 million going to players and \$6 million to national tennis associations.

The finals will feature four groups of three teams, with the winners progressing to the semi-finals and final. All matches will consist of two singles and one doubles.

France won last year's competition after beating Australia 3-2 in the final in Perth. — AFP

Japan's Momota fully recovered after crash

TOKYO: Japan's badminton king Kento Momota said Friday he had completely recovered from the eye injury caused by a car accident and vowed to bring home Gold at the postponed Tokyo Games.

"I can see without any problem while I'm playing," the world number one, who underwent surgery for an eye socket fracture in February after the car crash, told reporters.

"I've been able to give 100 percent in practice," he added. The accident, which happened hours after the 25-year-old won the Malaysia Masters, killed the driver of the vehicle taking him to Kuala Lumpur airport.

"I want to do my best every day towards the goal" of winning the Gold Medal at the Tokyo Olympics, he said. The coronavirus pandemic forced the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics by one year — unprecedented in peace-time.

The Games are now scheduled to begin on July 23, 2021 — though they will still be

known as the 2020 Games — but medical experts have raised concerns the delay is not long enough to contain the virus and hold the event safely.

Momota, who missed the 2016 Rio Olympics after he was suspended for visiting an illegal casino, admitted he was "upset" by the postponement.

"I only had six months after the surgery. I had no time to relax. I was trying to give my all every day (in training)," he said. "So it was difficult to process the feeling that I still had to do more."

Nevertheless, Momota said he has been training hard to stay positive and focus on victory at the Games. The car accident and the postponement of the Games "could not be helped," he said.

"I don't want to make excuses, saying I cannot do well because this or that happened."

Coronavirus did affect his training but he said he took the time to analyse his game and work on some weak points.

"I think I can improve my technique. I want to brush up my attacking skills."

In March, Momota said his "spirit was almost broken" after the accident and that the recovery process had been difficult.

He also suffered cuts and heavy bruising after the vehicle he was travelling in collided with a lorry. — AFP

Hamilton condemns Ecclestone's 'ignorant' racism comments

LONDON: Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton condemned Bernie Ecclestone for "ignorant" comments about racism after the sport had distanced itself from the 89-year-old former supremo.

Ecclestone had earlier told CNN in an interview that "in lots of cases, Black people are more racist than what white people are."

Formula One, whose chairman Chase Carey announced on Thursday a personal donation of \$1 million towards a foundation to promote diversity in the sport, responded with a stinging statement.

"At a time when unity is needed to tackle racism and inequality, we completely disagree with Bernie Ecclestone's comments that have no place in Formula One or society," it said.

"Mr Ecclestone has played no role in Formula One since he left our organisation in 2017, his title Chairman Emeritus, being honorific expired, in January 2020."

Six-times world champion Hamilton, who has launched a commission to help motorsport engage more young people from black backgrounds, said the "ignorant and uneducated" comments highlighted "exactly

what is wrong".

"It makes complete sense to me now that nothing was said or done to make our sport more diverse or to address the racial abuse I received throughout my career," added the Briton on Instagram.

"If someone who has run the sport for decades has such a lack of understanding of the deep rooted (sic) issues we as Black people deal with every day, how can we expect all the people who work under him to understand. It starts at the top."

Hamilton has criticised his sport for its initial silence over the killing of George Floyd, a Black man who died in Minneapolis last month after a white U.S. police officer knelt on his neck.

The 35-year-old also joined a "Black Lives Matter" demonstration in London last weekend.

"I will not stop pushing to create an inclusive future for our sport with equal opportunity for all," Hamilton said.

"I will continue to use my voice to represent those that don't have one and to speak for those who are underrepresented to provide an opportunity to have a chance in our sport."

Ecclestone, who made a fortune from the sport he ran for nearly four decades until he was ousted in 2017 when U.S.-based Liberty Media took over, said he was surprised Hamilton was concerned with racism.

"I'm really unhappy if he took it seriously," he said. "I'm surprised if anyone in Formula One, certainly the teams and the people like the promoters, have any concern about (racism)." — Reuters

Sports

How the Bundesliga became the first top league to restart

Ultra-rigorous testing helped convince players

BERLIN: When Christian Seifert, chief executive of the German Football League (DFL), hands the Bundesliga trophy to Bayern Munich, his gamble to restart football in Germany despite the coronavirus pandemic will have paid off.

Seifert will present the trophy to Bayern — champions for the eighth straight year — after their game at Wolfsburg when the league season finishes this weekend. It was Seifert's work behind the scenes — convincing politicians, the public and players alike — which enabled the Bundesliga to restart on May 16 and become the first top European league back in action following the shutdown.

"It was a massive challenge," Seifert admitted at a recent media event. He claimed "a third of clubs would have faced massive financial problems" had the season ended in March, forfeiting millions in television money.

With 56,000 jobs reliant on the league, "that was something worth fighting for. It was about securing the clubs and saving jobs." After a two-month hiatus due to COVID-19, the Bundesliga restart was marked by strict hygiene measures and stringent testing, with players' calls echoing around empty grounds, in order to complete the nine remaining rounds.

It was a bold gamble by Seifert, after the DFL fought to convince players it was safe to return and win over a public sceptical about top-flight football resuming at a time when even playgrounds were closed.

A factor in Seifert's favour was that the 36 clubs in Germany's top two tiers pulled together quickly. "We

had the full support of the big clubs, Bayern Munich and Dortmund, but also the others," he said.

"That put me in a very, very strong position when I spoke to top politicians and could make commitments with the league behind me." When the pandemic hit Germany, Seifert reacted fast after suspending league matches on March 13.

"We were very quick," he said. "We halted the league and the next night I started planning at home. "We started work on the 16th, making the first calls to set up a medical team capable of drawing up a protocol for the restart." At the end of April, the Bundesliga's medical guidelines were made public, the main fear being that an outbreak of the virus among players would abruptly end the season for good. "We set up a network of laboratories throughout Germany, with almost military logistics, to make sure that nothing would go wrong," Seifert explained.

However, the league's plans faced internal and external resistance. Players were concerned about the threat to their health, but the ultra-rigorous testing helped convince those who were worried that they would be safe to train and play. Moreover, economic arguments quickly overcame the reluctance of those clubs struggling in the table who would have welcomed the premature ending of the season to avoid relegation.

However, the problems were more difficult to manage externally. "We became a political issue," Seifert admitted. "We had to be honest and open. We had to fight against the fake news that we were diverting resources



DUESSELDORF: File photo shows Fortuna Dusseldorf's Kevin Stoger vies with FC Augsburg's Andre Hahn and Rani Khedira during the German first division Bundesliga football match Fortuna Dusseldorf v FC Augsburg on June 20, 2020 in Dusseldorf, western Germany. — AFP

needed by the medical profession."

Legions of fans were also unhappy about being locked out. "We made it clear that if we didn't play games behind closed doors then 10 to 15 clubs would file for bankruptcy sooner or later," said Seifert.

"It was about drawing a bigger picture." However, the

league's restart could easily have failed had the players not been disciplined. "They are young players who are used to being treated like superstars," said Seifert.

"Telling them for eight weeks what they should or shouldn't do was a challenge. "They understood. Without them it wouldn't have been possible." —AFP

WADA demands corrections to US anti-doping report

NEW YORK: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said on Friday it was blindsided by a US report that was riddled with misleading information and inaccuracies and which threatened to cut its funding.

In a strong rebuke to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) report to the US Congress made public on Wednesday, WADA president Witold Banka accused ONDCP director James Carroll of knowingly ignoring errors in the document.

"You chose not to incorporate our clarifications. As the saying goes, 'why let the truth get in the way of a good story?'," Banka said in the letter to Carroll seen by Reuters. "I should think that you would want the US

Congress, and/or the appropriations committee, to deliberate and decide on WADA funding based on accurate information," added Banka.

WADA produced a 46-page rebuttal to the ONDCP's 19-page report. Witold urging Carroll to make the necessary corrections and deliver the updated version to Congress and to let him know when done.

As the largest single contributor to WADA's \$37.4 million budget at just over \$2.7 million this year, the ONDCP expressed concern over how US taxpayer dollars were being spent and urged WADA to immediately act on badly needed reforms.

WADA insists the reforms are well underway and US approved. They include term limits for all members of the Foundation Board, executive committee and standing committees, formation of an Independent Ethics Board and the addition of two independent seats to the ExCo.

The US also complained that as WADA's major benefactor, outside of the International Olympic Committee which contributes half the agency's budget, it is under-represented and wanted a proportionate voice in the decision-making. Banka said he was taken com-

pletely off guard by ONDCP criticism given that the US in 2018 had approved WADA's proposed governance reforms and more recently voted in favour of a new strategic plan for 2020-2024.

"The US's behavior around the Board table over the past years is simply irreconcilable with the allegations outlined within the report," said Banka. WADA reminded Carroll that the US has a spot on the Foundation Board and that it was outrageous to think rich nations could buy seats on various committees.

Banka noted that the US government chose not to submit any nominations for the chairs to any WADA standing committees for 2020 yet still has greater representation (11) on governance bodies than any other nation. Banka also warned the US that before casting stones it should first get its own doping house in order, hinting the country has much work to do at home to ensure clean sport. "One obvious way for the US government to contribute more to the fight against doping in sport may well lie in increased efforts to protect young Americans that practise sport in an environment where the rules fall short of those established by WADA," Banka said. — Reuters

Pakistan set to arrive for England tour

LONDON: Pakistan will arrive for their tour of England at the weekend even though several potential squad members have tested positive for the coronavirus, cricket chiefs announced on Friday.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said earlier this week that 10 players had returned positive tests, plus a support staff member.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board said players would arrive for their summer tour today, with a virus testing programme in place.

It is understood those who have recorded positive tests — and anyone else who returns a subsequent positive finding — will not be allowed to travel, with the PCB due to confirm its advance party yesterday.

Pakistan all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez said Wednesday that a second test he commissioned himself proved he did not have coronavirus, a day after the PCB said he was among the players who had officially tested positive.

Hafeez, described by officials as asymptomatic, like the rest of those who tested positive, said he had immediately arranged a private second opinion.

"I personally went to test it again, along with my family, and here I, along with my all family members are reported negative," he tweeted. Pakistan's fragile health system is struggling to cope with the pandemic. There have been more than 190,000 confirmed cases in the country so far, with the death toll around 4,000. Britain has been one of the countries hardest-hit by the virus, with more than 43,000 deaths from COVID-19.

Besides Hafeez, Fakhar Zaman, Mohammad Rizwan, Wahab Riaz, Imran Khan, Mohammad Hasnain and Kashif Bhatti were diagnosed Tuesday as having the virus pathogens.

Shadab Khan, Haris Rauf, Haider Ali, and a team massage therapist tested positive on Monday. But of the positive Tests, only wicketkeeper Rizwan would be classed a first-choice Test player.

Pakistan's tour of England is set to include three Tests and three Twenty20 internationals. It is expected the first Test will take place in Manchester in August but the ECB said the behind-closed-doors schedule would be announced in "due course".

Pakistan will have a 14-day isolation period on arrival before continuing their preparations ahead of the first Test with two internal four-day warm-up matches.

England face the West Indies in a three-Test series starting at Southampton on July 8 — a campaign that will mark the return of international cricket from lockdown. — AFP



Phil Mickelson

Mickelson leads Travelers in search of 45th PGA title

NEW YORK: Phil Mickelson, making his first US PGA Tour start since turning 50, fired a seven-under-par 63 on Friday to seize the lead in the Travelers Championship in Connecticut. The five-time major winner was the star of a marquee group that also featured world number one Rory McIlroy and Bryson DeChambeau, shaking off an early bogey to card eight birdies and build a 13-under par total of 127.

He was one stroke in front of overnight leader Mackenzie Hughes of Canada and morning pacesetter Will Gordon. Mickelson finished in style, nearly holing his approach shot at 18 and tapping in for a closing birdie. It marks the first time in a career includes 44 PGA Tour titles that Mickelson has opened a tournament with two rounds of 64 or better.

"I've hit some good wedges, but more important than that I've given myself fair chances because I've hit a lot of fairways," Mickelson said. "I felt like I was playing aggressive because of that."

"I also made some good putts today," added Mickelson, whose birdies included three in a row at 13, 14 and 15 where he drained putts of six feet, 32 feet and seven feet. "I made some tough six-footers that really kept the round going," he said. "The birdies at 13 and 15 were not easy, there was a lot of break."

Hughes, who torched TPC River Highlands for a 10-under-par 68 and headlined a group on nine-under 131 that also included Americans Xander Schauffele, Brendan Steele and Brendon Todd and Australian Marc Leishman. Steele earned his share of fourth place with a sparkling 62. Todd and Leishman both signed for 65s while Schauffele carded a 68.

American Collin Morikawa, who made his first 22 consecutive cuts as a professional, missed the mark, ending the second-longest such streak in the last 30 years three shy of matching Tiger Woods with 25. Morikawa opened with a 72 and only managed a 71 on Friday. "It was bound to happen at some point," he said. "Now I guess we're going to stop talking about it." —AFP

NBA releases schedule, but Silver admits risk

LOS ANGELES: Even as the NBA was unveiling its schedule for the conclusion of the regular season, commissioner Adam Silver admitted Friday that the league's "bubble" in central Florida can't be made totally safe from the coronavirus pandemic.

The league is bringing 22 of its 30 teams to the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex near Orlando, Fla., for the resumption of play. Each team will compete in eight "seeding games" to complete the regular season, and the playoffs will follow, all at the Disney site.

Action will commence July 30 with the Utah Jazz opposing the New Orleans Pelicans, and the Los Angeles Clippers facing the Los Angeles Lakers in a doubleheader that will air on TNT.

The Jazz get to be one of the first teams returning after they were the team that prompted the NBA's shutdown when All-Star center Rudy Gobert tested positive for the coronavirus on March 11.

The season has been in hiatus since, but teams are set to arrive at the Disney campus for training by July 11.

Earlier Friday, the NBA and the National Basketball Players Association finalized the protocols for the Disney "bubble." The agreement comes at a time when COVID-19 cases are spiking in Florida.

Silver said on a conference call Friday, "We know that COVID-19 will be with us for the foreseeable future, and we are left with no choice but to learn to live with this virus. No options are risk-free right now. ...

"My ultimate conclusion is that we can't outrun the virus, and that this is what we're gonna be living with for the foreseeable future — which is why we designed the campus the way we did. And so it's a closed network; and while it's not impermeable, we are in essence protected from cases around us. At least, that's the model.

"So for those reasons, we're still very comfortable being in Orlando." The NBA and NBPA announced in a joint statement Friday that 16 of the 302 NBA players who were examined Tuesday tested positive for the coronavirus.

Silver added that Florida setting a record with around 9,000 new COVID-19 cases reported Friday is worrying.

"The level of concern has increased, not just because of the increased levels in Florida, but throughout the country," he said. "At least today, I believe, 29 of the 50 states have an increased number of cases. Of course, we designed our campus, in essence, to isolate ourselves from whatever the level of cases was in the surrounding community.

"But since we designed our initial protocol, we are continuing to work with Disney on the testing of at least a subset of their employees that could potentially be in the same room as our players, and anyone else who's tested daily on our campus. So we are satisfied that, once we work through those additional measures with Disney, we will continue to have a safe setting for us to resume our season."

The commissioner wasn't ready to reveal the NBA's intentions should a COVID-19 outbreak occur among players.

"I think we want to get down on the ground and start to see how our testing's working and how the protocols are working and then we'll make decisions as we go," Silver said. The league also will address the recent calls for social justice in the wake of George Floyd's death.

Oklahoma City Thunder guard Chris Paul, the NBPA president, told reporters, "We ... understand how powerful our voice is, and so even if we're back to playing, we understand that our voice can still be heard, our message can still be screamed loud and clear on an unbelievable platform." —Reuters

18 Men's Davis Cup, women's Fed Cup finals postponed until to 2021



19 How the Bundesliga became the first top league to restart



19 Mickelson leads Travelers in search of 45th PGA title



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool fans gather in celebration outside Anfield stadium in Liverpool, north west England on June 26, 2020 after Liverpool FC sealed the Premier League title the previous evening. Liverpool were crowned Premier League champions without kicking a ball. — AFP

Liverpool win first league title in 30 years

Liverpool fans turn the city red in celebration

LONDON: Thirty years of hurt came to an end for Liverpool when they were confirmed as Premier League champions courtesy of second-placed Manchester City's 2-1 defeat by Chelsea.

The result at Stamford Bridge means Liverpool have an unassailable 23-point lead over City with seven games left. Liverpool were last champions of England when they won the old First Division title in 1989-90 after which a decline in fortunes saw Manchester United and Arsenal, then Chelsea and Manchester City seize power.

Inspirational manager Juergen Klopp has rekindled the Anfield flame though and delivered the club's 19th top-flight title, one behind arch-rivals United's record of 20, after finishing runners-up to City in a thrilling race last season.

As the Chelsea game moved into stoppage time at an empty stadium in London, 350km away outside Anfield Liverpool fans began lighting red flares as the celebrations began in earnest. Also watching from afar was an emotional Klopp.

"I have no words, it's unbelievable and much more than I ever thought would be possible," he told Sky Sports after being congratulated by Liverpool great Kenny Dalglish, manager of the 1989-90 title winners. "It's easy to motivate this team because of our great history. It's pure joy for me to coach them."

HAPPY DAYS

In the last 12 months Liverpool have won the Cham-

pions League, the UEFA Super Cup and World Club Cup, but regaining their status as top dogs in England, something that was almost a given in the 1970s and 1980s, was the priority.

"Juergen has been fantastic and epitomises everything Liverpool Football Club stands for," Dalglish, told BT Sport. "And it's not just a one-off, last year they came within a point of it and this year they have only lost once."

"Onwards and upwards, I think they have a lot more happy days to look forward to now." Despite the COVID-19 pandemic forcing a three-month suspension of the season and delaying Liverpool's coronation, they have won the title with a record seven games to spare.

They eclipsed the mark jointly held by Manchester United (2000-01) and Manchester City (2017-18), who sealed their respective titles with five games left. City manager Pep Guardiola paid tribute to Liverpool.

"Big congratulations for Liverpool," said the Spaniard, whose title-winning side finished 25 points ahead of Klopp's team two seasons ago and pipped them by a point last term.

"After 30 years without the title they played every game this season like it was their last with incredible focus. We were not consistent enough," he added.

RECORD PACE

Had it not been for the unprecedented stoppage Liverpool were on course to smash the record for the earliest clinching of the league title. Instead, they are now the first team to lift the coveted trophy as late as June.

of her trademark tumbling backflip goal celebration, saying playing in a home tournament was "a dream come true". "We have seen great progress in the women's game and Australia-New Zealand will take the game to a whole new level," she said.

Socceroos great Tim Cahill said he was "lost for words", while Hollywood star Russell Crowe — who has links to both Australia and New Zealand — tweeted "Let's do this".

"I haven't slept, I'll have to do that another night, it's worth it though," New Zealand Football chief executive Andy Pragnell told AFP between what he called "well-timed coffees". New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern promised the ninth edition of the tournament would be the best ever.

"It will be a historic tournament of firsts that will create a profound and enduring legacy for women's football in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond," she said in a statement. The 2023 tournament will be the first co-hosted by cooperating nations, the first in the southern

Liverpool finished last season with nine straight league wins and, after claiming the Champions League by beating Tottenham Hotspur in Madrid, began the new campaign in relentless fashion to leave rivals trailing in their wake.

With 28 wins and one defeat in 31 games, Liverpool have set a record-breaking pace and were 25 points clear in February — the biggest lead in Premier League history. When they beat West Ham United that month it was their 18th successive top-flight win, matching Manchester City's record, before their hopes of an unbeaten season were dashed by a 3-0 defeat at Watford, a result that was merely a blip.

Leading the charge has been Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian forward who is the first Liverpool player to score at least 20 goals in all competitions in three consecutive seasons since Michael Owen at the start of the millennium. Salah scored on Wednesday as Liverpool thrashed Crystal Palace 4-0 at Anfield — a result that meant City had to beat Chelsea to delay the inevitable for a while longer. City were the first team to breach the 100-point barrier in the Premier League two seasons ago but Liverpool are on course to shatter that mark, as well as records for most points at home (55) and most wins in a season (32).

Meanwhile, thousands of Liverpool fans celebrated their Premier League title win outside the club's Anfield Stadium on Thursday as their 30 year wait for the league crown came to an end.

Juergen Klopp's side secured the title after second-

hemisphere and the first with 32 teams.

The bid's success completes a trifecta for New Zealand, which has already secured rights to host the women's cricket and rugby world cups next year.

It also helps ease painful memories in Australia of the failed bid for the 2022 men's World Cup, when the Australians lost out to Qatar after a process that triggered allegations of corruption.

Recalling that decision, made in 2010, football commentator Craig Foster offered commiserations to Colombia, which ended up being the joint bid's only rival for 2023 after a string of other countries dropped out.

"We know full well how it feels to lose," Foster said. "The tournament is an important and timely boost for Australia and NZ soccer and enhances the truly global nature of football." Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison hailed a "landmark decision" for sport in the region. "For the first time in history, Australians and New Zealanders will be able to experience a global football tournament, right here on home soil. How good!" he

placed Manchester City lost 2-1 to Chelsea in London meaning the Merseyside club could not be caught with a 23 point lead over City with seven games remaining.

Despite social distancing rules and restrictions on public gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Liverpool supporters flooded to Anfield to show their joy at the team's success.

Fans turned the sky red with flares and fireworks and sang the club's famous songs and chants, including the team's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone".

The celebrations also took over the city centre, with the Cunard Building, by the Pier Head, lit up in red for the night. Liverpool beat Crystal Palace 4-0 on Wednesday and the fans were not allowed in the stadium with all Premier League games since the restart being held behind closed doors.

Cars were kept out of the area by police but supporters blared their horns in jubilation. "We have all waited so long, everyone who has been involved in the club, they had been desperate to bring the title home for the supporters," former Liverpool captain Jamie Carragher told Sky Sports. "You see the scenes tonight."

The Liverpool players gathered at a local hotel and after watching the broadcast of the game from Stamford Bridge celebrated among themselves, away from the supporters. "We won't tell you the exact location but we are all in a hotel together as a team," said full back Andy Robertson. "We thought something hopefully special was going to happen and that's how it turned out." — Reuters

'Dream come true' as women's World Cup heads Down Under

WELLINGTON: Football lovers in Australia and New Zealand offered rare praise for FIFA's transparency Friday after the southern hemisphere neighbours won hosting rights for the 2023 women's World Cup. The decision, announced by Switzerland-based FIFA in what was the early hours of the morning in Australia and New Zealand, sparked emotional reactions among sleep-deprived players and fans. "I will never forget this moment," New Zealand captain Ali Riley tweeted alongside a close-up selfie showing tears in her eyes.

Australia's women's captain Sam Kerr posted footage

tweeted. The Sydney Morning Herald said the result was "a triumph of merit over politics".

"That the majority of FIFA's council members from all corners of the globe voted on the grounds of merit is a major boost to the organisation's damaged reputation," it said. "After allegations of collusion and corruption, (FIFA president Gianni) Infantino embarked on the most transparent process seen with the voting of a major tournament." Pragnell also praised the transparency of the bid process, saying it showed FIFA was moving in the right direction.

"This should be seen as a huge success for the reforms that have been made at FIFA and the global football community should be encouraged by the outcome," he said. Amid reports ahead of the vote that Colombia was gaining support, he revealed that Ardern had personally hit the phones lobbying to get the bid over the line. "We were cautiously optimistic but knew it could go either way... she made the calls and underlined the key messages of the bid," he said. — AFP