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# MPs press for quick, massive reduction in expat numbers

Dragnet widens in visa trading case • Employer washes hands off Mahboula workers

By B Izzak and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Lawmakers are pressing the government for a definitive plan to substantially reduce the number of expatriates within one to two years, rapporteur of the National Assembly's human resources development panel said yesterday. MP Osama Al-Shaheen however said the government has so far refused to commit to such a plan and is seeking a loose "framework" that leaves details and figures to the government.

Expats at present form 70 percent of the population with 3.35 million residents, while Kuwaitis form just 30 percent with 1.45 million, according to official statistics. Shaheen said the prime minister has pointed out that the ideal situation is by reversing the percentage to 70 percent citizens and 30 percent expats, while the government in studies talks about a 60-40 ratio in favor of Kuwaitis.

But the reality is far from the two proposals, said

Shaheen, adding that the government opinion on this issue must be united before even debating the required plan. Reducing expats to just 30 percent of the population means making them around 700,000, which is impossible by all counts simply because the number of domestic helpers currently stands at 750,000.

Shaheen said what is important now is "to begin in a real and effective way", which has not happened until now, adding that the number of illegals who left voluntarily was only 29,000 out of 150,000, "so what can be done with those living legally in the country?" Shaheen said the Assembly panel has given the government ample time to study proposals submitted by lawmakers, adding that MPs are hoping for a resolution to this issue within a year or two at most. But he acknowledged that the problem, which has been accumulating for the past 50 years, requires a longer time to resolve.

Head of the panel MP Khalil Al-Saleh said in

press statements yesterday that Kuwait can reduce the number of expats by one million within three months after resuming commercial flights. He said this number includes around 168,000 illegals - 500,000 "roaming workers" who have no fixed jobs, in addition to expats who would be laid off from government jobs.

MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said yesterday that the increasing number of violations against marginal expat workers and trafficking in persons are the main reasons for asking the minister of social affairs to prepare a report on measures taken against violators. He said the request, which was approved by the Assembly, calls on the minister to submit the report within just one month and should include names of those involved.

In a related development, the issue of the Bangladeshi MP detained in Kuwait on human trafficking and money laundering charges appears to be snowballing to include several leading officials



MP Osama Al-Shaheen

and lawmakers. Footage posted on social media yesterday showed the Bangladeshi lawmaker speaking in the Bangladeshi parliament and claiming that he was making some KD 100,000 daily in Kuwait.

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KUWAIT: A health ministry worker conducts a random test for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Dasma on Saturday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Global virus cases exceed 10 million

BEIJING: Global coronavirus cases exceeded 10 million yesterday according to a Reuters tally, marking a major milestone in the spread of the respiratory disease that has so far killed almost half a million people in seven months. The figure is roughly double the number of severe influenza illnesses recorded annually, according to the World Health Organization.

The milestone comes as many hard-hit countries are easing lockdowns while making extensive alterations to work and social life that could last for a year or more until a vaccine is available. Some countries are experiencing a resurgence in infections, leading authorities to partially reinstate lockdowns, in what experts say could be a recurring pattern in the coming months and into 2021.

North America, Latin America and Europe each account for around 25 percent of cases, while Asia and the Middle East have around 11 percent and 9 percent respectively, according to the Reuters tally, which uses government reports. There have been more than 497,000 fatalities linked to the disease so far, roughly the same as the number of influenza deaths reported annually.

The first cases of the new coronavirus were confirmed on Jan 10 in Wuhan in China, before infections and fatalities surged in Europe, then the United States, and later Russia. The pandemic has now entered a new phase, with India and Brazil battling outbreaks of over 10,000 cases a day, putting a major strain on resources. The two countries accounted for over a third of all new cases in the past week. Brazil reported a record 54,700 new cases on June 19. Some researchers said the death toll in Latin America could rise to over 380,000 by October, from around 100,000 this week.

Continued on Page 16

## Curtailed hajj adds to Saudi economic woes

RIYADH: Vacant religious sites. Abandoned pilgrim tents. Lifeless hotels. A stunning emptiness - and fears of economic ruin - haunt the usually bustling city of Makkah after Saudi authorities curtailed the hajj pilgrimage over coronavirus. Islam's holiest city usually hosts millions of pilgrims for the annual rite, but the kingdom has barred overseas visitors from this year's event, scheduled for late July.

The hajj and the lesser umrah pilgrimage together rake in some \$12 billion, keeping the economy humming in Makkah, home to two million people and marble-bedecked skyscrapers towering over Islam's most sacred sites. A construction boom in recent years has added shopping malls, apartments and luxury hotels, some offering spectacular views of the sacred Kaaba, a cube-shaped structure in the Grand Mosque towards which Muslims around the world pray.

But most premises have lain empty since the pandemic reached the kingdom. The virus, which hit Makkah hard, has also battered pilgrimage-reliant businesses that support hundreds of thousands of jobs, from travel agents to street barbers and souvenir shops. Many have reported sweeping layoffs, pay cuts or delayed salaries. "Zero sales, zero income," said Ahmed Attia, a 39-year-old Egyptian who works for a travel agency in the city.

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## China had sent martial artists to India border

BEIJING: China reinforced its troops near the Indian border with mountain climbers and martial arts fighters shortly before a deadly clash this month, state media reported. Tensions are common between the two nuclear-armed neighbors in the mountainous border terrain, but this month's fighting was their deadliest encounter in over 50 years.

Five new militia divisions including former mem-

bers of a Mount Everest Olympic torch relay team and fighters from a mixed martial arts club presented themselves for inspection at Lhasa on June 15, official military newspaper China National Defense News reported. State broadcaster CCTV showed footage of hundreds of new troops lining up in the Tibetan capital.

Tibet commander Wang Haijiang said the Enbo Fight Club recruits would "greatly raise the organization and mobilization strength" of troops and their "rapid response and support ability," China National Defense News reported, although he did not explicitly confirm their deployment was linked to ongoing border tensions.

Chinese and Indian troops clashed later that day in the most violent confrontation between the two pow-

ers in decades, in the Ladakh region 1,300 km away. India says 20 of its own soldiers were killed in brutal hand-to-hand combat that day, while China suffered an unknown number of casualties. Both sides have blamed each other for the battle, which was fought with rocks and batons without any shots fired.

India said Thursday that it had reinforced troops in the contested Himalayan border region, saying it was matching a similar buildup by China. Chinese state media have in recent weeks highlighted military activity including high-altitude anti-aircraft drills in the Tibet region bordering India. The new troops were recruited with the aim of "strengthening the border and stabilizing Tibet," China National Defense News said.

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## Workers stuck in Iraq with no pay and no way home

BAGHDAD: For years, Rajib Sheikh wired money to his native Bangladesh from his day job in Iraq. But now, stuck without wages, he's asking his family back home for help. The 26-year-old patisserie chef has gone three months without wages, and his Iraqi employer just stopped paying for his food stipend, too. He is one of thousands of foreign migrant workers now stranded in Iraq with no income or way to get back home, watching the economy around them collapse.

"We're used to sending money back to our country, but now I had to ask my cousin to transfer me money," said Sheikh, who arrived in the south-

ern oil-rich Basra province seven years ago. "We hope we can go back to our jobs because it's not just us who are starving, but our families back home, too," he said.

The world economy has seen a dramatic slowdown due to the spread of COVID-19, but Iraq - OPEC's second-largest crude producer - was also hit hard by a collapse in oil prices. That has sent the country spiralling into its worst fiscal crisis in years, with the World Bank estimating GDP will shrink by 10 percent this year. Informal workers, it noted, were at a higher risk of falling into "deep

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BAGHDAD: Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers work as tailors in a small factory in Karrada in the central area of the Iraqi capital on June 23, 2020. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait reports 551 new COVID-19 cases, four deaths

## Total recoveries 35,494 compared to 44,942 infections

**KUWAIT:** The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infected 551 people in Kuwait during the past 24 hours, official spokesperson of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday. Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, speaking during his daily update about the pandemic status locally, said the total number of infection cases with the contagion climbed to 44,942.

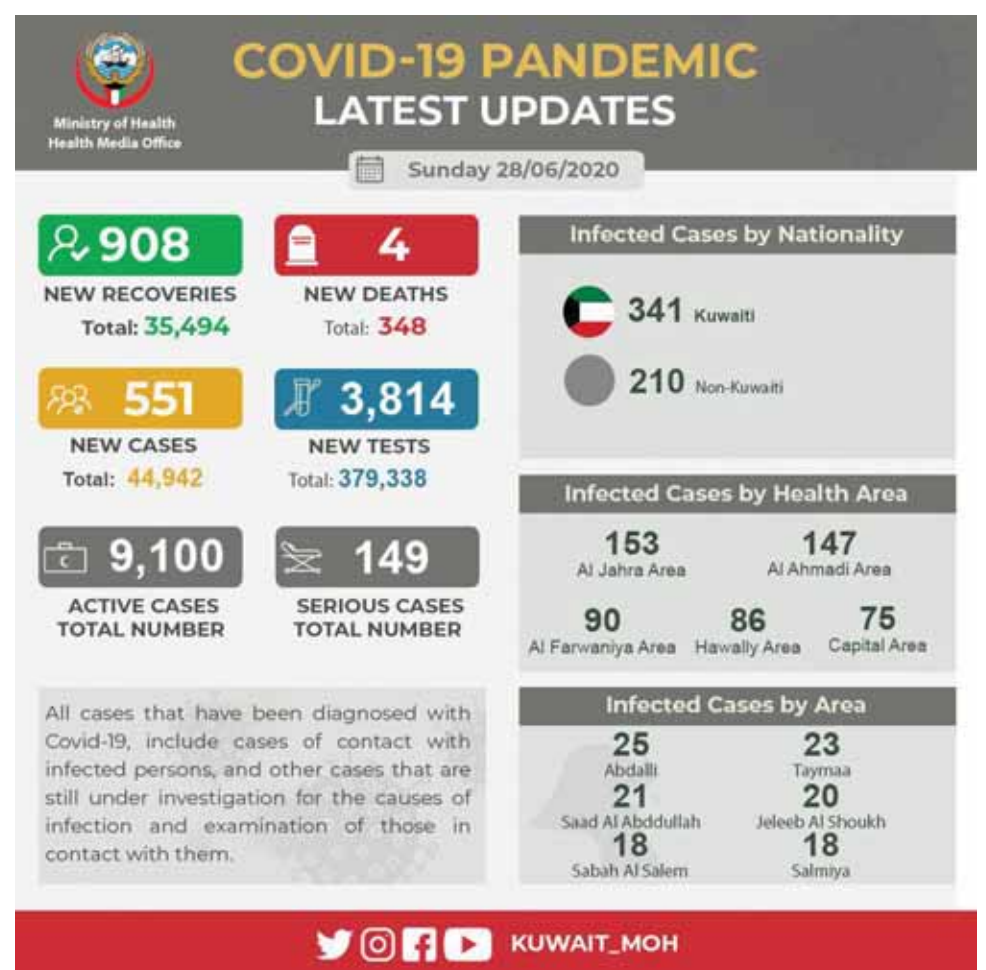
Moreover, the virus claimed the lives of four persons during the same period of time, raising the total tally of deaths from the fatal pathogen to 348. The confirmed cases included patients who had contracted the virus due to mingling with infected persons. Others remained under examination to determine the source of the contamination. The latest infections include 341 Kuwaiti citizens and 210 non-



Health Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad.

get medical care amounting to 9,100. Up to 47 patients were discharged from quarantines however they would sequester themselves at their houses for 14 days.

Dr Sanad revealed that more than 3,814 swab tests for the virus were conducted during the past 24 hours, thus the tally of these examinations exceeded 379,338 since breakout of the contagion in the country, months ago. He appealed, anew, upon citizens and expatriates to continue taking necessary precautions against the infectious disease, be keen on maintaining social distancing and examining online accounts of relevant authorities to remain acquainted with latest directions in this respect. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced earlier yesterday that 908 persons recovered from the coronavirus in the past 24 hours, with the overall count of the recuperated amounting to 35,494. —KUNA



**379,338**  
swab tests  
taken in total

Kuwaiti residents of the country, he said.

Dr Sanad said the cases were recorded in health districts as follows: 147 in Al-Ahmadi, 153 in Al-Jahra, 90 in Farwaniya, 86 in Hawally and 75 in the Capital. The number of cases undergoing treatment at intensive care units reached 149, with the total count of cases that continued to

In my view

## Attitudes matter

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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I was out on Saturday to run some errands. I stopped on my way from Abu Halifa to Shuwaikh at a Hawally coffee mill where I was very pleased to see how things were organized and health ministry stipulations were followed to the letter. Distance was maintained, masks were worn and employees were taking orders at a distance: until three people came in, did not care about the instructions that were written in various places and disturbed the order.

The manager told them politely to follow the requirements, so all obliged except for two who considered the manager's request as an insult and became very angry and almost turned violent without regard to the safety or health of everyone including themselves. So I decided to leave as did some others, only to find out that one of the troublemakers had blocked my car and was very impolite when I asked him to move his vehicle, as if it was all my mistake and I should not have been there to start with.

This is attitude, my friends! Attitude is defined as the mental state of individuals, which tends to act or respond or is ready to respond for or against objects, situations, etc with which their vested feelings or interests, liking, desire and so on are directly linked or associated. During the course of development, the person acquires tendencies to respond to objects. These learned cognitive mechanisms are called attitudes.

Our dilemma as human beings is that a significant number among us believe that we are always right and rarely make mistakes whatever the situation may be - no tolerance at all. Will it not be nice if a person, even if he did not want to give anything to another person, says no with a smile? What would be the response of an angry person if you countered him with a few calm words?

Tragedies happen when neither side wants to forgive or compromise and ends with a clash one way or another. A good number of people are now sensitive to being advised or told about something, even if it is for their benefit, and nothing will change until we change our approach to things. Let us be cooperative, forgiving and forgetting. We all live on the same soil, we breathe the same air and we walk under the same sun. We will face the same fate.

Allah says in the Holy Quran: "For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah. Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." [13:11]

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has recorded 44,942 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of yesterday, in addition to 348 deaths. With the exception of 149 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, 35,494 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,100 people receiving treatment.

### 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-ehhealth.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

# Random COVID-19 testing reaches Capital Governorate



**KUWAIT:** Health Ministry workers conducted random tests for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Capital Governorate on Saturday. Medical teams have already carried out random tests in Hawally and Farwaniya governorates since random field testing started last week, as the ministry plans to cover the remaining governorates (Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Ahmadi and Jahra) during its daily testing operations.

The Health Ministry had announced on June 20 that it would start field random testing for the coronavirus disease by sending teams to homes selected randomly at different residential areas. The ministry explained that the house visits would commence from 5 – 11 pm daily and will cover all residential areas for expats and citizens. It asked people to demand the identification of the teams and to cooperate with them. The campaign comes after a steep rise in the number of cases reported in the country. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



## News in brief

## Driving test appointments

**KUWAIT:** The Traffic General Department urged people who wish to take driving tests to book an appointment through its website ([www.moi.gov.kw](http://www.moi.gov.kw)) starting from yesterday. The department resumes work tomorrow and opens on weekdays from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior announced that all citizens and residents will not be allowed to enter any of its buildings without an appointment starting from tomorrow. People can book an appointment through its website ([www.moi.gov.kw](http://www.moi.gov.kw)). Working hours will be from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm.

## Masks disposal

**KUWAIT:** The Environment Public Authority distributes 700 containers where people can throw away face masks and gloves. The containers were placed at commercial complexes and government institutions around the country, and made available before the second phase starts tomorrow. Meanwhile, Kuwait Municipality installed 157 road signs as part of an awareness campaign on the dangers of throwing masks and gloves on the streets.

## Nineteen flights

**KUWAIT:** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation announced that 19 flights were set to depart Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 3,130 passengers. They included seven flights to Egypt, 10 flights to India, one flight to Qatar, and one flight to the Philippines.

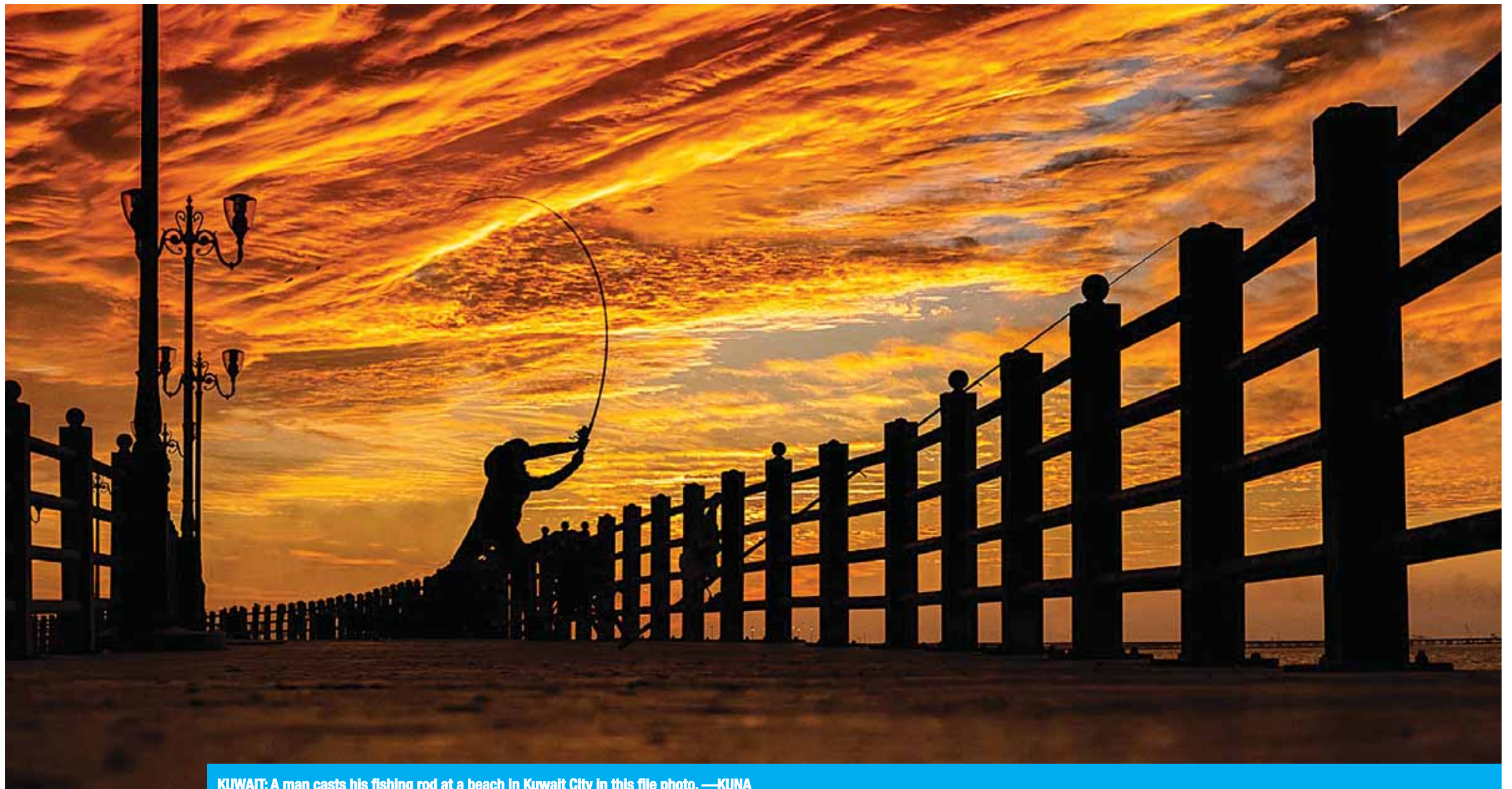
Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A man casts his fishing rod at a beach in Kuwait City in this file photo. —KUNA

## Kuwaiti divers lift tons of objects littering seabed

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Diving Team of the Environmental Voluntary Foundation lifted remains of sunken boats, tires and other dumped materials littering the seabed in Kuwait Bay. Team leader Walid Al-Fadhel said on Saturday that the divers brought to surface a sunken ship, remains of a two-ton yacht, others of a sunken boat weighing three tons from Oshairej shores. They also removed abandoned wooden and plastic materials, fishing nets weighing five tons and monitored fishermen picking crabs and snails in an illegal fashion. He reiterated the appeal upon seagoers and fishermen to abide by rules for safeguarding the Kuwaiti marine environment.

The Kuwaiti divers have not suspended activi-

ties at sea to rid the marine environment of harmful objects left behind by negligent persons. Moreover, they have been regularly examining condition of coral reefs in territorial waters despite extraordinary conditions prevailing in the country due to the coronavirus crisis. The fishermen had in the past lifted various objects harmful to the reefs, such as abandoned heavy anchors and dumped nets. The reefs off the Kuwaiti coast had also suffered from bleaching in the peak of past summers. The foundation along with state authorities have repeatedly urged sea goers and seamen to refrain from littering the sea and dumping objects that hurt coral reefs and other marine creatures. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality teams lifted 21 cars that were abandoned in open yards in Salmiya during a recent campaign in the area.

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## Local

# Kuwait participates in EU-organized conference for combating virus

## Experience in facing virus underlined dire need for joint action: Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, the Representative of His Highness the Prime Minister, headed the State of Kuwait's delegation at the EU-organized Global Pledging Summit to find a vaccine for the novel coronavirus, held virtually on Saturday. The premier's representative addressed the long distance convention, expressing gratitude to the chairperson of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the Global Citizen organization for holding this summit which came as a follow-up to the commission's efforts to combat the virus and rid the world of this pandemic. Der Leyen is co-chairing the Global Pledging Summit — "Global Goal - Unite for our Future." He lauded the commission for making the initiative of holding the summit in line with its leading role for maintaining global security and stability.

This pandemic, Sheikh Ahmad Nasser continued, constitutes an intercontinental and cross border danger taking lives in huge numbers in many states, including developed and developing countries, as well as poor and rich states. "The experience in facing this virus has underlined our dire need for bolstering col-

lective and joint action and unifying efforts and perspectives to overcome it," the Prime Minister's representative said. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser called for immediate response to the rapid changes and challenges afflicting the globe, noting for example armed struggles, widespread immigration and terrorism. There must be a unified decision, vigilance on part of states, regional and international organizations when dealing with complex issues witnessed "in our world today," he said.

The State of Kuwait shares with the European Union its international response for facing the virus "for we will not be able to fight this pandemic without joint and fair action," he said, re-affirming in this respect Kuwait's pledge — the allocation of \$100 million for backing international efforts against the virus. Giving a breakdown, he said \$60 million were earmarked for facing the virus and \$40 million for the EU for finding a vaccine, re-affirming Kuwait's commitment to cooperate with the international community to speed up making a vaccine. The summit is the third international event where Kuwait is taking part since the breakout of the pandemic. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends the EU-organized Global Pledging Summit to find a vaccine for the novel coronavirus, via video conference. — KUNA

## Three killed, two injured in Kabd collision



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Three people died and two others were injured in an accident reported in Kabd Saturday. First responders rushed to the scene following an emergency call reporting an accident between a tanker truck and a sports utility vehicle. Five men were inside the SUV, and paramedics pronounced three of them dead — all Indian nationals — on the scene, while the other two — Indian and Pakistani nationals — were

rushed to Farwaniya Hospital. The 26-year-old Indian truck driver was unharmed in the accident, and he was taken in police's custody for questioning. An investigation was opened into the accident.

### Boat fire

Salmiya firemen put out a blaze that broke out in a boat at Ras Al-Salmiya Club Saturday. The boat was tugged away from other boats before the flames were put out. No injuries were reported.



### Policeman attacked

A policeman was stopped at night by three persons who asked him about the reason he was out during curfew hours. The cop then introduced himself as a policeman, and asked them for their IDs. At that point, the suspects attacked him, took his police badge, civil ID and his car keys then escaped. The officer filed a complaint at Qurain police station, and detectives were assigned to investigate the case.

## US Ambassador denies report in Iraqi media

**KUWAIT:** Remarks attributed to US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski in the Iraqi media were a malicious fabrication, the envoy said Saturday. Ambassador Romanowski gave no such interview and the purported 'news' originates from a website created to spread false information. The Ambassador has not discussed Iraq with the Kuwait News Agency or any other media outlet, whether in Kuwait or elsewhere since her arrival as Ambassador to Kuwait.



**US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski**

Meanwhile, Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) denied publishing a news story on social media, which quoted the US Ambassador. KUNA stresses that it retains the rights and will take all the necessary legal measures to hold accountable any party or person found to be standing behind this incorrect story, and will do so in the court of law. — KUNA

## Kuwait not yet included in countries' list allowed into EU



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait is not among a list of 54 countries whose citizens will be allowed into the European Union when borders open July 1. The draft list of countries, published by Schengen news, include Australia, Canada, Korea, Egypt, Georgia, India, Lebanon, New Zealand and Turkey among others. None of the Gulf Cooperation Council states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia or UAE — are listed.

"The European Union has an internal process to determine from which countries it would be safe to accept travelers," EU Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said, adding that its decisions are "based on health criteria."

At the same time, the Commission recommended that the member states should start allowing third-country nationals to enter the EU starting from July 1, gradually and partially, based on the epidemiological situation in each third-country.

The Commission recommended the following objective criteria for the member states, when drafting the list of countries, the citizens of which may visit the EU after July 1: epidemiological situation and coronavirus response in that country, the ability to apply containment measures during travel, and whether or not that country has lifted travel restrictions towards the EU.



**KUWAIT:** Al-Nuwaiseeb border checkpoint men process transactions of Kuwaiti travelers after it started serving them daily from 8:30 am to 1:30 pm.





Iceland president wins a landslide

## Africa’s unsung army of women wage war on coronavirus



LHOKSEUMAWE: Rohingya men rest at an immigration detention house in Lhokseumawe, Aceh province. Nearly 100 Rohingya asylum seekers stranded off the coast of Indonesia were pulled to shore on June 25 by locals angered at the refusal of authorities to give them shelter over coronavirus fears.—AFP

# Rohingyas describe high-seas terror

## Group of Rohingyas drank their urine to stay alive

**LHOKSEUMAWE:** A group of Rohingya say they were beaten by traffickers and drank their own urine to stay alive on a perilous four-month journey at sea until their dramatic rescue near the Indonesian coast. The bedraggled survivors - about 100 in all, mostly women and children - described a high-seas horror story that saw them reduced to throwing the dead overboard as their rickety craft drifted thousands of kilometers towards Malaysia. Two survivors claimed that people smugglers paid to transport them had beaten the Rohingya who were later moved to a new boat and abandoned at sea. They were rescued by fishermen in Indonesia on Wednesday and pulled to shore by locals the next day, thousands of kilometers south of Bangladesh.

“We suffered so much on that boat,” 50-year-old Rashid Ahmad told AFP at an immigration detention centre in Lhokseumawe city on Sumatra’s northern coast. “They tortured us and cut us. One of us even died.” “There was food at first but when it was done they (the traffickers) took us onto another boat and then let us float away alone,” he added. Another survivor, Habibullah, said: “They beat everyone badly. My ear was cut and I was beaten on the head.” AFP could not independently verify the accounts of four members of the vulnerable Muslim minority group, who said they set off earlier this year near a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, next to their native Myanmar.

### Starving, thirsty

Survivor Ziaur Rahman Bin Safirullah, 35, said the group got by on small rations of rice and nuts while relying heavily on rainwater to survive. “Sometimes we squashed wet clothes and drank the water from them,” he said, adding that those who died were thrown into the sea. Korima Bibi said at least two people died during the voyage and that some on board resorted to drinking urine to stay alive, as others got sick from the rough seas.

“We didn’t get enough food or water,” the 20-

year-old said, “(but) we survived.” Among the roughly 100 in the group were 48 women and 35 children. They set off from the Balukhali refugee camp in southern Bangladesh, but were originally from Myanmar’s conflict-torn Rakhine State, according to survivors and an account given to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). A spokesperson for the group told the IOM that one woman had died on the way, leaving behind her two children. Another three children, two of them siblings, and a 10-year-old girl were unaccompanied. The group also included a pregnant woman, according to the IOM.

The smugglers were charging each person about \$2,300 to get them to Malaysia, the IOM said. Around a million Rohingya live in cramped and squalid refugee camps in Bangladesh, where



## Death and despair: Perilous 4-month journey at sea

human traffickers also run lucrative operations promising to find them sanctuary abroad. Indonesia, the world’s biggest Muslim majority nation, and neighboring Malaysia are favored destinations for Rohingya fleeing persecution and violence in mostly Buddhist Myanmar. Thousands try a perilous escape via smugglers across the sea each year. About 1,400 Rohingya have been stranded at sea this year - and at least 130 of those have died, according to IOM figures.

### ‘A thousand thanks’

Last week, a Malaysian coastguard official said dozens of Rohingya were believed to have died during a months-long journey to that country.



LHOKSEUMAWE: Rohingya people from Myanmar wait for aid at the immigration detention centre in Lhokseumawe in Indonesia’s North Aceh Regency. —AFP

There had originally been more than 300 people on board the boat that was intercepted by authorities this month, with the 269 survivors given temporary shelter. Neighboring Indonesia has previously allowed Rohingya to land and many to stay. But wary officials have turned them away in recent months, worried they could be carrying the deadly coronavirus. That concern played out in dramatic fashion on a beach in Lhokseumawe on Thursday when the Rohingya survivors were pulled to shore by locals furious at the refusal of authorities to give them shelter over COVID-19 fears.

They had spent the night several hundred meters offshore, waiting for a decision on whether they could land. Authorities eventually relented - a move cheered as a victory by rights groups. All have since tested negative for the coronavirus, local officials said. But the group’s fate remains uncertain. “As a fellow Muslim I felt compassion for them, especially because there were so many children and women - it broke my heart,” said Lhokseumawe resident Saiful Hardi. “I hope we continue to help them as fellow human beings.” That decision will be up the government, meaning an uncertain fate for survivors like 20-year-old Bibi. “You people saved us so a thousand thanks for that,” she said. “Now it’s up to you.” —AFP

“The resistance considers the decision to annex the West Bank and the Jordan Valley to be a declaration of war on our people,” said spokesman Abu Ubaida. And an Islamist official told AFP that Hamas was in talks with other factions in the coastal enclave to “coordinate the resistance and resume the ‘return marches’”.

### ‘More pragmatic’ attitude?

In March 2018, the Palestinians launched weekly protests along Gaza’s border with Israel calling for “the right of return” of Palestinians chased from their lands or who fled when Israel was created in 1948. They also demanded the lifting of the strict Israeli blockade imposed by Israel over a decade ago on Gaza to purportedly contain Hamas. Attendance at the rallies waned late last year, then restrictions related to the new coronavirus pandemic added further complications. If Israel goes ahead with its annexation plan, Hamas may take a “more pragmatic” attitude and perhaps allow other factions to fire rockets at Israel or engage in clashes along the border, said analyst Abu Amer. But it would do everything to prevent a major response

## Egypt executes Libyan militant for deadly attack

**CAIRO:** Egypt executed on Saturday Libyan militant Abdel Rahim Al-Mismari, who was convicted for an attack south of Cairo in October 2017 that killed 16 policemen, the defense ministry said. The lethal attack took place in Al-Wahat, about 200 kilometers south of the capital in the Western Desert, when a raid on a militant hideout was ambushed and a firefight ensued. Mismari was captured soon after. A military court found he had masterminded the attack and sentenced him to death in 2019, while 32 co-defendants received life sentences.

“He deliberately killed in a pre-meditated manner 16 police personnel,” the defense ministry said in a video outlining the charges against him. The seven-minute clip, edited with a dramatic score, listed 11 charges against him. Mismari was also charged with kidnapping Mohamed Alaa al-Hayes, a policeman, who was later freed by Egypt’s counter-terrorism forces. In a 2017 interview with prominent talk show host Emad Adib, some of which was used in Saturday’s defense ministry statement, a bearded Mismari appeared defiant and admitted to killing those he deemed “infidels”.

He was accused of forming and joining a “terrorist” group in Libya, targeting security personnel, murder and carrying out hostile operations against vital facilities, according to the defense ministry. The attacks largely centered on the turbulent North Sinai region, with others in the Western Desert along the porous border with Libya. In March, Hisham Ashmawy, a former Egyptian special forces officer turned top Islamist militant, was executed over involvement in several high-profile attacks after he was extradited from Libya in 2019. For years Egypt has been fighting a hardened insurgency in North Sinai that escalated after the army’s 2013 ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi. In February 2018, the army and police launched an ongoing nationwide operation against militants focused on North Sinai.—AFP

from Israel, he added.

Abu Amer said that Hamas wants armed attacks against Israel in the West Bank instead, in order to spare the Gaza Strip. But for that, there would need to be a dialogue between Hamas and the rival Fatah party of West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA) president Mahmud Abbas. The two parties have been at loggerheads since the Islamist movement wrested control of the Gaza Strip from the PA in 2007 after a near-civil war, a year after winning parliamentary elections. Since then, all efforts at inter-Palestinian reconciliation have failed.

In mid-June, a senior Hamas official, Salah Al-Bardawil, called for Palestinian political unity. “We call on our people to turn this ordeal into an opportunity to get the Palestinian project back on track,” he said. Abu Amer, however, said an agreement between the PA and Hamas is very slim, even “impossible because of the lack of confidence” on both sides. “The Palestinian Authority continues to hunt down and arrest Hamas activists in the West Bank on a daily basis,” fearing Hamas will resume operations in the West Bank and oust it, as it did in Gaza, he said. —Agencies

## Tough choices for Hamas over Israel annexation plans

**GAZA CITY:** Hamas has warned that Israeli annexation in the occupied West Bank would be a “declaration of war”, but the Islamist group must weigh the cost of a new fight, analysts said. In recent weeks, there have been almost daily protests in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip against US President Donald Trump’s Middle East peace plan. The proposals envisage Israeli annexation of its West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley, Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and located around 50 kilometers from the enclave of Gaza.

The Israeli government is expected to decide from July 1 on the implementation of the Trump plan and as the clock ticks Hamas, which has fought three wars against Israel since 2007, is seeking to define its strategy in the face of the lat-

est challenge. “There is no doubt that Hamas’ options are complex because any response to the annexation will have consequences for the Gaza Strip,” said Palestinian analyst Adnan Abu Amer. Despite a 2018 truce, Hamas and Israel still trade fire from time to time, with rockets or incendiary balloons launched from Gaza and reprisal strikes by Israel.

“Tensions at the border fence may resume, with the launch of incendiary and explosive devices,” said Mukhaimar Abu Saada, professor of political science at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. But he ruled out “the option of military activities” against Israel by Hamas, which rules over a territory already impoverished and under a crippling Israeli blockade. The movement “does not want Gaza to pay the price, and wants to wait to see what is going on, organize popular protests and not have to engage in confrontation with Israel,” he added.

On Friday Israeli air force jets struck Hamas positions in Gaza after rockets were fired from the territory towards Israel for the first time since early May. The previous day, Hamas’s military wing had warned that annexation would prompt a war.



## International

# US tops 2.5 million virus cases as infections surge

## Global coronavirus cases approach 10 million

**MIAMI:** The United States has surpassed 2.5 million coronavirus cases, as efforts to reopen the world's economic powerhouse were dramatically set back by a surge of new infections in states such as Florida. Infections are also up in some other parts of the world that have reopened, and the public health realities pushed global Pride celebrations largely online Saturday, 50 years after the first march for LGBT rights in New York. The US leads the world in COVID-19 cases by far, accounting for well over a third of the global total of nearly 9.9 million since the virus emerged late last year in China.

On Saturday alone the US recorded more than 43,000 new cases, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. US deaths now exceed 125,000, approximately one-fourth the world total of over 495,000. The tension between reopening battered economies - efforts pushed in the US by President Donald Trump - and public health is a source of debate in nearly every country. In Iran, which has struggled to curb its outbreak even as it gradually lifted restrictions from April, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said "something must be done" to prevent coronavirus causing economic issues.

"But in the case of negligence and significant spread of the disease, economic problems will increase, too," he said. The EU on Saturday pushed back a decision on a list of "safe countries" from which travellers can visit Europe - a list which could exclude the US. Meanwhile stars in the US by President Donald Trump - and public health is a source of debate in nearly every country. In Iran, which has struggled to curb its outbreak even as it gradually lifted restrictions from April, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said "something must be done" to prevent coronavirus causing economic issues.

## France pulls plug on country's oldest nuclear plant

**FESSENHEIM:** France's oldest nuclear power plant will shut down on Tuesday after four decades in operation, to the delight of environmental activists who have long warned of contamination risks, but stoking worry for the local economy. The Fessenheim plant, opened in 1977 and already three years over its projected 40-year life span, became a target for anti-nuclear campaigners after the catastrophic meltdown at Fukushima in Japan in 2011.

Despite a pledge by then-president Francois Hollande just months after the Fukushima disaster to close Fessenheim - on the Rhine river near France's eastern border with Germany and Switzerland - it was not until 2018 that his successor Emmanuel Macron gave the final green light. Run by state-owned energy company EDF, one of Fessenheim's two reactors was disconnected in February. The second is to be taken off line early Tuesday, but it will be several months before the reactors have cooled enough for the used fuel to be removed. That process should be completed by 2023, and the plant is not expected to be fully dismantled before 2040 at the earliest.

"We hope, above all, to be the last victims of this witch hunt against nuclear" energy, Fessenheim union representative Anne Laszlo said ahead of the closure that will see about 150 families depart the tiny Alsatian community of 2,500 inhabitants this summer. More will follow, with only 294 people needed on site for the fuel removal process until 2023, and about 60 after that for the final disassembly. By the end of 2017, Fessenheim had over 1,000 employees and service

## China slams Canada's 'megaphone diplomacy' over spy charges

**MONTREAL:** China sharply criticized Canada on Saturday, blaming its leaders for "irresponsible" statements about two Canadians accused of spying in China and calling on Ottawa to end its "Megaphone Diplomacy." The evidence against the two Canadians, former Beijing diplomat Michael Kovrig and North Korean consultant Michael Spavor, is "solid and sufficient," a statement posted on the website of the Chinese embassy in Ottawa said. Beijing has formally indicted the pair on accusations of espionage and providing state secrets. They were arrested in December 2018 - a few days after the financial director of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, Meng Wanzhou, was detained in Canada at the request of the US judicial authorities. The charges against the two Canadians have been widely perceived in the West as retaliation for Meng's arrest. China denies the allegation.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has repeatedly called the detention of the two men "arbitrary." "The accusation of so-called 'arbitrarily' detaining Canadian citizens is totally groundless," the Chinese statement read. "Chinese judicial organs will continue to handle the above cases strictly in accordance with law, and protect the two Canadians' lawful rights," it added. Meng's detention, on the other hand, was itself "arbitrary," the statement continued, describing it as "a grave political incident concocted by the United States to suppress Chinese high-tech enterprises and Huawei, and Canada is its accomplice." "Stop making irresponsible remarks on cases of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, and exerting pressure on China through 'Megaphone Diplomacy'," it continued.

of those countries are still far from reaching their peak in infections, authorities say.

In the Middle East, the governor of Bethlehem announced that the Palestinian city would temporarily close due to rising infections. While in India, densely populated cities have been particularly hard hit. The country set a daily record Saturday with 18,500 new



### USA leads the world in cases

cases and 385 deaths. Total infections are at 509,000, with more than 15,600 deaths. The disease also continues to rampage through Latin America, with Peru surpassing 9,000 deaths in total on Saturday. Brazil - the second hardest-hit country in the world after the US - recorded 990 deaths on Saturday, the highest in the world that day, while Mexico recorded the second highest, 719.

#### 'Explosion' in Florida

In Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis has conceded there has been an "explosion" in new cases. On Saturday the "Sunshine State" notched 9,585 cases in 24 hours, a new daily record. The av-



**NEW YORK:** Bodies are moved to a refrigeration truck serving as a temporary morgue at Wyckoff Hospital in the Borough of Brooklyn in New York. — AFP

erage age of people infected has dropped sharply - to 33 from 65 two months ago. Young people frustrated by months of confinement have poured back to the state's beaches, boardwalks and bars, often without masks and seemingly unconcerned about social distancing.

Miami announced beaches will close over the July 4 holiday weekend. Bars are also closing. Georgia, Nevada and South Carolina also reported new daily record cases on Saturday, while Arizona broke its record for hospitalizations. With Trump struggling to lift his re-election bid off the ground ahead of November, the campaign confirmed that events featuring

Vice President Mike Pence in Arizona and Florida next week have been postponed "out of an abundance of caution."

Trump had faced a backlash after insisting on a rally in Oklahoma despite virus concerns one week ago. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom ordered some areas to reinstate stay-at-home orders, while San Francisco announced a "pause" in its reopening. Texas also shut down its bars. Governor Greg Abbott, another Republican who resisted lockdowns, said Friday that if he could "go back and redo anything, it probably would have been to slow down the opening of bars." Texas was among the first US states to reopen. — Agencies



**FESSENHEIM:** Photo shows Fessenheim nuclear powerplant in Fessenheim, eastern France. — AFP

providers on site. There is no legal limit on the life span of French nuclear power stations, but the EDF had envisaged a 40-year ceiling for all second-generation reactors, which use pressurized water technology.

#### 'Island of prosperity'

France's ASN nuclear safety authority has said reactors can be operated beyond 40 years only if ambitious safety improvements are undertaken. In the 1990s and 2000s, several safety failures were reported at Fessenheim, including an electrical fault, cracks in a reactor cover, a chemistry error, water pollution, a fuel leak, and non-lethal radioactive contamination of workers.

In 2007, the same year a Swiss study found that seismic risks in the Alsace region had been underestimated during construction, the ASN denounced a "lack of rigor" in EDF's operation of the plant. With-

out Fessenheim, France will still have 56 pressurized water reactors at 18 nuclear plants generating some 70 percent of its electricity. Only the United States, with 98, has more reactors, but France is by far the world's biggest consumer of nuclear energy.

In January, the French government said it would shut 12 more reactors nearing or exceeding the 40-year limit by 2035, when nuclear power should represent just 50 percent of the country's energy mix in favor of renewable sources. At the same time, the EDF is racing to get its first next-generation reactor running by 2022 - 10 years behind schedule - and more may be in the pipeline. Local mayor Claude Brender condemned the closure of the plant, which he says has helped create an "island of prosperity" in an otherwise poor part of Alsace. The government has said workers will be transferred to other EDF sites. — AFP

## Hit by COVID and wild weather, Italy now battles locusts

**ROME:** Swarms of locusts have stripped thousands of hectares of pasture and cropland in Sardinia, devastating farmers already struggling from the coronavirus pandemic, farming groups said. Their numbers fuelled by rising temperatures, the pests have damaged nearly 15,000 hectares of grazing land in the central province of Nuoro, said Michele Arbau, of the Sardinia branch of Italian agricultural association Coldiretti. "Farmers have lost the summer pasture and partly the fodder for autumn and winter... and the very few people who grew barley had to give that up too," he said.

During the summer months, locusts are a common phenomenon on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia - known for its idyllic beaches and exclusive resorts - but this year's outbreak has been much larger than normal. Last year, the pests destroyed about 2,500 hectares in what was then described as the worst outbreak since the end of World War Two. More extreme weather driven by climate change can affect the development and spread of insect infestations, including locusts, according to Ignazio Floris, a professor of entomology at the University of Sassari in northwest Sardinia.

Rising temperatures can cause longer dry periods, leading soils to become arid and unplanted, which creates ideal conditions for insects that like laying their eggs in dry, untillied soil, he said. More frequent extreme weather swings - including drought in 2017, too much rain in 2018 and both extremes last year in Sardinia - also seem to be spurring bigger locust invasions, said Coldiretti's Arbau. — Reuters

## African-American deaths that inspired wave of protests

**MINNEAPOLIS:** The killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer last month has spawned a wave of protests and national soul-searching over systemic racism in the United States, while focusing new attention on other cases involving violence against men and women of color. The following are some of the most prominent cases involving deaths of African-Americans that have surfaced in recent weeks:

#### George Floyd

A 46-year-old man who grew up in Houston, Floyd was killed on May 25 after a Minneapolis police officer held a knee to his neck for nearly nine minutes while arresting him. A cellphone video taken by a bystander captured Floyd calling out, "I can't breathe," before he died. The incident touched off demonstrations across the country calling for police reform. One of the four officers involved in Floyd's attempted arrest was charged with second-degree murder and the other three with aiding and abetting murder.

#### Ahmaud Arbery

Arbery, 25, was fatally shot on Feb. 23 while jogging through the coastal Georgia town of Brunswick after being chased by three white men, including a former police officer. The suspects said that they thought Arbery was a burglar. Nearly two months after his death, a cellphone video of the shooting appeared on social media, setting off a national outcry. The three men were later charged with murder, but critics charge that prosecutors initially ignored the case. The US Justice Department is investigating if grounds exist for possible federal hate crime charges.

#### Rayshard Brooks

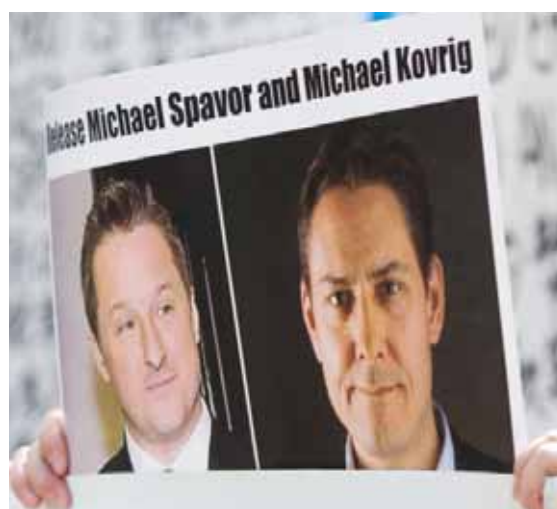
Brooks, a 27-year-old, was fatally shot by an Atlanta police officer on June 12 after failing a sobriety test in the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant. The shooting, caught on cellphone and security camera videos, shows Brooks tussling with two police officers and taking a Taser stun gun from one of them. He appeared to fire at one of the officers while running away. One officer then shot him twice in the back, with one round piercing his heart. A prosecutor later said that Brooks had posed no threat to the officers. One officer was dismissed from the force and charged with murder and other charges. A second officer was charged with aggravated assault.

#### Breonna Taylor

Taylor, 26, an emergency medical technician, was fatally shot on March 13 by Louisville police in her apartment after drug investigators executed a so-called 'no-knock' warrant and burst into her home. Taylor's boyfriend said he thought the plainclothes officers were intruders and exchanged fire with them. One of the officers who fired shots was dismissed from the force. The case, which received new attention after the Floyd killing, remains under investigation.

#### Elijah McClain

McClain, 23, died in police custody in August 2019 after officers in the Denver, Colorado suburb of Aurora responded to a report of a man behaving erratically. Officers stopped McClain and later said that he tried to grab an officer's gun. He was wrestled to the ground and police used a neckhold on him, causing him to sob, "I can't breathe," the same phrase uttered by George Floyd during his arrest. — Reuters



**Turnisa Matsedik-Qira, of the Vancouver Uyghur Association, demonstrates against China's treatment of Uighurs while holding a photo of detained Canadians Michael Spavor (left) and Michael Kovrig outside a court appearance for Huawei Chief Financial Officer, Meng Wanzhou at the British Columbia Supreme Court in Vancouver. — AFP**

"At the same time, Canada should reflect on its mistakes in the Meng Wanzhou incident, stop political manipulation, immediately release Ms. Meng Wanzhou and ensure her safe return to China." Some 20 Canadian officials, as well as Kovrig's wife, recently called on Trudeau to intervene to stop the extradition process of the Huawei executive in order to facilitate the release of the two Canadians. But the prime minister, who has regularly affirmed the independence of the Canadian judicial system, categorically ruled out this possibility on Thursday, believing such a decision would put other Canadians in China and around the world at risk. While on probation in Vancouver, Meng is accused by Washington of circumventing US sanctions against Iran. —AFP



## International

## Drones and CCTV: Surveillance for safety on the sand in Spain

## Spanish resorts gear up for a summer with a difference

**LLORET DE MAR:** Surveillance is the watchword at the seaside this summer, with Spanish beaches using drones, cameras and colored tape to ensure safety for tourists holidaying in the shadow of the virus. Although the pandemic is now well under control, Spanish resorts are gearing up for a summer with a difference, with a host of precautions to keep beachgoers safe. Over the curve of the bay in the northeastern resort of Lloret de Mar, a drone lazily flies overhead, the eye in the sky keeping a close watch to ensure there's no overcrowding. The aim, says mayor Jaume Dulset, is to "find the balance between people being comfortable and relaxing while ensuring a safe environment."

At this resort some 70 kilometers up the coast from Barcelona, the town hall has drawn up plans to reassure tourists in the wake of the pandemic which in Spain has claimed more than 28,300 lives. Always full in summer, its beaches are being partitioned off, with cameras and sensors transmitting real-time information to potential visitors via an app. With more municipal staff to flag up any non-compliance, they are also using drones that can play recorded messages about social distancing should they spot overcrowding. There's also a scheme for reserving areas on the sand - which would be easier to manage than a free-for-all - but for now, that won't be activated at this resort which is popular with British and French tourists for its family-friendly atmosphere and vibrant night-life.

## Saving the summer

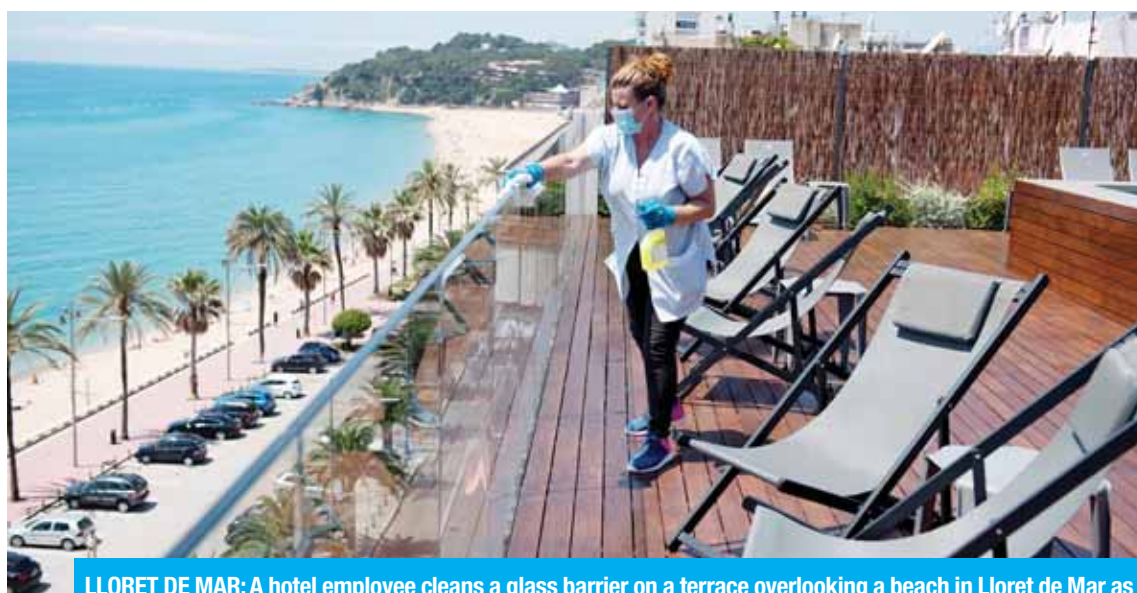
For now, only a handful of beachgoers are setting out towels and adjusting sunloungers on this kilometre-long (half-mile) beach which can accommodate

up to 15,000 people. "Normally we would be full by this point but for now, there are very few people so it's easy to respect the security distance," explains 78-year-old Jose Maria Quicio. He and his wife Olga, 81, have set up folding chairs a few meters from the shore inside a red cordon roping off space for those over 70. "This is our area," say his wife after coming back from a dip in the sea. "It makes you feel safer, it's good, better than before."



## Precautions to keep beachgoers safe

About 50 meters away, a lifeguard sits on his watchtower, wearing sunglasses and a fabric mask. As well as his normal duties, he must also watch for anyone flouting the distancing norms as well as disinfect the toilets and the first aid posts. "Our first priority is ensuring no one drowns. But from now, we're also helping out with the rest," explains lifeguard coordinator Joel da Silva. The town hall's plan involved training 8,500 workers in how to ensure health and safety in such places as well as in restaurants, hotels and nightclubs. "There's a lot of uncertainty but we've done our homework, we are ready for the tourists to arrive and we're waiting for them



**LLORET DE MAR:** A hotel employee cleans a glass barrier on a terrace overlooking a beach in Lloret de Mar as beaches reopen in Spain following a national lockdown to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. —AFP

with open arms," says Dulset. "We're hoping we can save the season."

## Sectioning-off the sand

Like Lloret, many resorts have developed strategies for avoiding a surfeit of sunbathers along Spain's 8,000 kilometers of shoreline - a refuge for millions of tourists from Spain and beyond. And the measures are manifold: from sensor-controlled access which can be shut off when capacity is reached, to sections parcelled-off for groups, to banning games taking up

too much space or involving a lot of people. And there's the job of disinfecting sunloungers and parasols. "The way we go to the beach this year has changed but that doesn't mean we can't enjoy it," says a promotional video for Benidorm, a southeastern resort hugely popular with British tourists. Its two main beaches have been divided into lots measuring four square meters which beachgoers can reserve through an app. But the system hasn't yet been used given the lack of visitors to this town that last year counted 16 million overnight stays. — AFP

## Lebanon's judge issues media ban against US envoy

**BEIRUT:** A Lebanese judge on Saturday banned media from reporting remarks by the US ambassador after she spoke about the powerful Hezbollah movement, a ruling criticised as non-binding and unenforceable. During an interview with Saudi-owned news channel Al-Hadath aired on Friday, Dorothy Shea said the United States has "grave concerns about the role of Hezbollah, a designated terrorist organization". "It has syphoned off billions of dollars that should have gone into government coffers so that the government can provide basic services to its people," she said. "It has obstructed some of the economic reforms the Lebanese economy so desperately needs," she added. The US considers Hezbollah a terrorist organization but the group and its allies command a majority in parliament and the cabinet.

On Saturday, a judge in south

Lebanon issued an order banning local and foreign media working in the country from airing or publishing locally comments by the US ambassador for a year. "The US ambassador discussed in her interview a Lebanese party represented in parliament and cabinet and that enjoys a wide popular base," the order said, referring to Hezbollah. "The US ambassador has no right to talk about this party," the order added, accusing her of promoting internal sedition and strife. The judge acknowledged that international law gives diplomats immunity but said media could be punished for violating his order.

The US embassy in Lebanon responded on Twitter, saying "we believe very much in freedom of expression and the important role a free media plays in the United States and Lebanon." The State Department issued a more fiery response from Washington later Saturday, stating: "Hezbollah's attempt to silence the Lebanese media is pathetic. To even think to use the judiciary to silence freedom of speech and freedom of the press is ludicrous. We stand with the Lebanese people and against Hezbollah's censorship." Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad dismissed the judge's order, saying "no one has the right to ban the media from covering the news." —AFP

## Africa's unsung army of women battle virus

**NAIROBI:** Armed with a face mask, notebook and pen, Everlyne Akinyi Omondi sets out each morning from her one-room home in Nairobi's informal settlement of Kawangware to do a job few others would contemplate in a pandemic. As cases of the new coronavirus climb and Kenyans are told to stay home and avoid human contact, 38-year-old Omondi moves house to house through Kawangware's maze of narrow lanes.

Standing at the doorways of the cramped, corrugated houses, she talks about COVID-19, shows residents how to wash hands or don a mask, patiently answering their questions. "I know there are risks of contracting the virus, but I don't feel so scared. I have made a pledge to keep my community safe," said Omondi, turning to reprimand a group of children crowded around her for not maintaining social distancing rules. "You see how small and close together the places where we live are. We have to make sure people understand how they can stop corona from spreading. Here, if one person gets it, everyone can." The mother of three is not a doctor, nurse or medic of any sort - just one of tens of thousands of ordinary African women who, without fanfare, battle the virus in their communities.

Poorly paid or not at all, these unsung armies of mostly female community health workers have for years doled out advice and health services to families living in remote villages and urban slums who lack formal support. Recruited and trained by government and charities - they are found from Kenya to Tanzania, Ethiopia to Malawi, Liberia to South Africa - the

women go door to door, dispensing advice on everything from family planning to immunizations. Now, as transmission of the new coronavirus spreads, women like Omondi are essential foot soldiers in the war on COVID-19.

Charities such as Catholic Relief Services, which is supporting coronavirus training for about 5,000 community health volunteers in Kenya, say this workforce is key. "Community health volunteers are not given the recognition they deserve, but they are important frontline workers. They have a wide range of knowledge and experience from dealing with cholera outbreaks to malaria prevention," said Moses Orinda, CRS's senior project officer in Kenya. "For COVID-19, they have the ability to contact trace, provide support to home-based patients and conduct essential prevention and control activities," Orinda said.

## Community transmission

The COVID-19 virus has infected close to 10 million people and killed almost half a million worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University. Initially the virus multiplied more slowly in Africa than in Asia or Europe, but all 54 nations on the continent are now infected, with more than 330,000 cases and over 8,800 deaths combined, says the African Union's Centre for Disease Control. South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria have recorded most cases, but experts say true numbers may be much higher as many nations lack reliable diagnostic or testing capabilities. With densely-packed slums, poor access to water, widespread disease and weak health systems, many countries will struggle to control the fast-spreading virus, they add. "For now, Africa still only accounts for a small fraction of cases worldwide," said Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization (WHO) Africa director, earlier this month. — Reuters

## Iceland president wins a landslide

**REYKJAVIK:** Iceland's President Gudni Johannesson won a landslide election yesterday, according to partial results, after the European country became the second to hold polls since coronavirus lockdowns were lifted. Since suffering spectacular bank failures in 2008, the volcanic North Atlantic island of 365,000 inhabitants has recovered some economic and political stability, which has worked in the 52-year-old president's favor.

Early results late Saturday suggested Johannesson had secured a second four-year mandate with 90 percent of the votes, seeing off a challenge from rightwinger Gudmundur Franklin Jonsson. "I am honored and proud," the president told AFP from his election night headquarters at Reykjavik's Grand Hotel. "This result of this election is, to me, proof of the fact that my fellow Icelanders... have approved of how I have approached this office." Opinion polls had predicted Jonsson had little chance of winning the support of the country, which has 252,217 eligible voters. "I send my congratulations to Gudni and his family," Jonsson, a former Wall Street broker close to Icelandic nationalists, told public broadcaster RUV.

## Largely symbolic role

In this parliamentary republic, the president is largely symbolic, but he or she does have the power to veto legislation or submit it to a referendum. Several voters told AFP

## Iranian judge's mysterious death angers activists

**PARIS:** The unexplained death of a fugitive Iranian judge, who plunged from a top floor of his hotel in Bucharest last week, has infuriated activists who say a rare chance has been missed to bring a senior Iranian official to justice over alleged rights violations. Gholamreza Mansouri's body was found by Romanian police on June 19, with the possibility of suicide so far their only lead, according to a police source.

But activists are furious that such a significant figure had not been held in custody to face eventual justice - and for his own protection. Mansouri, 52, was wanted by Tehran on accusations he took a 500,000-euro (\$560,000) bribe, part of a high-profile case that has seen 22 people go on trial, including former senior judiciary official Akbar Tabari. Mansouri had fled Iran last year, first going to Germany and then moving on to Romania, and was the subject of an Iranian arrest warrant.

He was initially arrested by Romanian authorities for extradition but then allowed to go free under judicial supervision. But activists in Europe also wanted him investigated for rights violations while in his post, which focused on culture and media cases. The Paris-based press freedom group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) filed a complaint against him with prosecutors in Germany on June 11 - and then two days later in Romania, when he moved there - al-



**REYKJAVIK:** President of Iceland, Gudni Th Johannesson and his wife Eliza Reid arrive to celebrate his re-election at a hotel in the Icelandic capital Reykjavik, Iceland. — AFP

that "character" is a key criterion in choosing a candidate. "I try to read the character of the person," said Sigurbjörg Hansen, 57. "If the person is honest, that's number one for me." Voter surveys have since early June have predicted a landslide victory for Johannesson, an independent and former history professor. The coronavirus pandemic was not expected to affect voting, as the country has been only mildly infected. It has reported 10 deaths, and currently has around 11 active cases.

## 'Not pompous, not very formal'

Johannesson, who in 2016 became the country's youngest president since independence in 1944, has enjoyed solid support throughout most of his first term, ranging

from 76 to 86 percent according to the MMR polling institute. "He has been seen as a man of the people, not pompous, not very formal. So Icelanders seem to like him and want to keep him as president," said Olafur Hardarson, a political science professor at the University of Iceland. Jonsson has struggled meanwhile to make inroads with voters. The 56-year-old challenger has run a hotel in Denmark since 2013 and is a fan of US President Donald Trump. Jonsson entered politics in 2010 when he founded the rightwing populist movement Haegri graenir. He wants the president to play a more active role by exercising his right to veto legislation. That power has only been used three times, by Olafur Grimsson who served from 1996 to 2016. — AFP



**BUCHAREST:** Forensic investigators carry the body of Iranian judge Gholamreza Mansour who died after falling from high in a hotel atrium in Bucharest. — AFP

leging he was responsible for the persecution, detention and torture of Iranian journalists in a notorious 2013 crackdown.

"The facts against him were massive," said Antoine Bernard, senior advisor on international strategic litigation with RSF, adding that there was a strong basis in both German and Romanian law to file the complaints. He said the group had the testimony of 20 Iranian journalists accusing Mansouri of arbitrary arrest and detention, and treatment that was "at the very least inhumane and degrading and involved torture." He told AFP that RSF was "outraged" by his death as well as the decision of the Romanian authorities not to detain Mansouri "for the sake of his own protection against any Iranian threat and against himself."

## 'Entire system on trial'

The Justice for Iran NGO said it had made an appeal for witnesses to come for-


ward after it emerged that Mansouri was in Europe. It had already collected testimony from eight people who said they were the judge's victims. "Beyond reasonable doubt, I can confirm that Mansouri was responsible for several arbitrary arrests and detention, usually in solitary confinement, the closing down of online businesses and start-ups, and the persecution of the families of journalists and media activists," the group's executive director Shadi Sadr said. But she told AFP it had not received evidence he was responsible for torture or other crimes that could see him face trial in Germany or Romania under universal jurisdiction, where one state prosecutes a defendant for a crime committed on another foreign territory. This, Sadr said, highlighted the difficulties faced by victims hoping to find justice abroad, "where there is little room for criminal prosecution." — AFP



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SHANGHAI: People rest at a newly-opened Huawei global flagship store in Shanghai. With growing pressure to keep China's Huawei out of 5G network development, it could be time for firms like Japan's NEC and South Korea's Samsung to shine. – AFP

Huawei row opens field for 5G challengers

It could be time for firms like NEC and Samsung to shine

**TOKYO:** With growing pressure to keep China's Huawei out of 5G network development, it could be time for firms like Japan's NEC and South Korea's Samsung to shine.

Washington has pushed allies to bar Huawei, a Chinese telecom giant, from building next-generation 5G mobile networks, claiming its equipment can be used to spy for Beijing. Huawei denies the charges, but US pressure has prompted an about-turn in Britain.

The government had already pledged to cut the firm out of the most sensitive "core" elements of 5G that access personal data, and is now reportedly pushing for plans to end Huawei's involvement in Britain's 5G infrastructure by 2023. But excluding Huawei is not without challenges, because there are currently only two alternatives in Europe for 5G equipment such as antennas and relay masts: Finland's Nokia and Sweden's Ericsson.

Britain has encouraged Washington to form a club of 10 democratic nations that could develop its own 5G technology, but there has been little movement so far.

"The vast majority of the commercial networks sold in the world come from the big three," said Sylvain Chevallier, in charge of telecoms at BearingPoint con-

sultancy, referring to Huawei, Nokia and Ericsson.

"But a world of three is not good for operators, and if it goes down to two it will be worse still," he told AFP.



US pushes allies to bar Chinese giant

Teaming up

That leaves a tempting potential opening for telecoms firms like Samsung and NEC. But building a successful 5G network is no simple task. That is a lesson Samsung has already learned. Despite being a major player in 3G, it found itself unable to compete with the big three on 4G and struggled to win commercial contracts.

"This has been a challenge for Samsung," said Daryl Schoolar, a mobile technology specialist at consulting

group Omdia. In building its 5G network, Samsung has so far focused on North America and parts of the Asia-Pacific region.

"So while operators may feel uncertain about Samsung Networks, they are much further along in the process of being a global presence than NEC," Schoolar added. NEC does have some advantages, including a partnership in Japan with mobile operator Rakuten.

The firms have already cooperated on a 4G network and are now jointly developing a 5G system. The Japanese firm is also a leader on undersea cables, fibre optic networks and—thanks to its affiliate Netcracker—logistics management software.

"Netcracker has a strong presence with operators in Europe, which could be a real entry point for NEC," said Stephane Teral, chief telecoms analyst at LightCounting, a market research firm.

**'A major challenge'**

NEC is tightlipped about its contracts for mobile networks, saying only that it is holding feasibility demonstrations for "a number of customers and we are engaged in commercial discussions with others".

Britain's government has reportedly asked both NEC and Samsung to take part in demonstrations as it looks to diversify its 5G options. And on Thursday, NEC announced a tie-up with Japanese operator NTT intended in part to speed up the development of a 5G network.

Samsung and NEC joined forces two years ago and have launched a joint marketing team to offer 5G products to European and Asian markets. Still, the path ahead will be tough, said Schoolar.

"I think it's a major challenge for NEC. It requires more than radios, it requires investing in people who can do system integration, sales, customer support, network design and engineering," he said.

"Plus NEC will need to build operator trust that they will be there to support them in five to 10 years as those 5G networks evolve." Washington has backed the use of non-proprietary technology like Open RAN in 5G development, hoping it will provide an entry point for US firms.

Such a move would open up opportunities for NEC, allowing them to "create an economic model that would shake up traditional equipment manufacturers," said Chevallier. – AFP

Turkish powerships ride wave of energy crises

**ALTINOVA, Turkey:** A Turkish company's expertise in turning freighters built for carrying coal or sand into mobile power stations is proving to be an antidote to woes brought onto energy supply projects by the coronavirus.

Floating electricity plants known as powerships come into their own when conflicts or other crises make the construction of land-based power stations difficult.

The novel coronavirus pandemic is such a crisis, having forced many companies to shut down and bringing construction to a halt. Enter Karpowership, which has been building floating plants for almost 15 years by converting old freight ships, making it a leading player in the industry with a fleet of 25 powerships.

The pandemic has created a windfall for the Turkish company by playing to the advantages of its floating power plants, especially the unbeatable delivery times: 60 days maximum to anywhere in the world. Lockdown

measures taken by several countries for months have obstructed progress of conventional power plant projects, whose construction already takes several years even in normal times.

"Credit committees were not approving credits, suppliers weren't able to meet their timelines, (and) workers weren't able to do constructions on site," Zeynep Harezi, Karpowership's chief commercial officer, told AFP.

"So the demand for our powerships naturally increased. We are now speaking to more than a dozen countries who requested powerships as soon as possible," she added.

Powerships have existed since the 1930s. The principle is simple: a merchant vessel is converted into a floating power plant, typically fuelled by diesel or liquid gas used to generate electricity.

It then travels to its destination where it connects to the local grid, supplying a steady stream of power.

**Juicy Libyan contract?**

Karpowership has deployed 19 such plants in 11 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia as well as Cuba. The floating plants provide more than half of the electricity consumed by several West African countries, including Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and Sierra Leone.

They are particularly suitable for countries whose capacity is insufficient to meet growing demand, or

where infrastructure has been destroyed by conflict. According to Turkish media, Karpowership is in talks about sending several powerships to war-torn Libya, where Turkey supports the UN-recognized government based in Tripoli. Ankara earlier this month sent a delegation including the foreign and finance ministers to Tripoli for talks.



Deniz Yalcindag, a Karpowership engineer poses during an interview in a shipyard at Altinova district, in Yalova. – AFP

Without saying whether those talks covered a potential contract for Karpowership, the company said it was ready to deploy powerships "from this summer onwards" to supply 1,000 megawatts (MW) or "eight hours of additional electricity" per day to a country facing massive blackouts.

**Taking a risk**

To meet delivery deadlines quickly, the company invests massively to build ships before they have been ordered, a calculated risk. "There, you see a billion dollars sitting on the dock," Harezi said, pointing to six powerships of different sizes moored in a shipyard in northwestern Turkey, pending the signing of deals.

"At the shipyard, it takes around 18 months to build a ship, but since we are doing our construction back to back, we can produce our ships in six months," explained Deniz Yalcindag, a Karpowership engineer.

Some observers say that the powerships can never be more than temporary solutions for countries with insufficient or obsolete infrastructure. But that is simply a "psychological barrier", Harezi objects, saying the floating plants can remain in place for up to 25 years, protected by a special coating applied to their hulls.

The company has big dreams and plans to double the size of its fleet in the next five years, hoping to also attract business from developed countries. – AFP



## Business

# stc participates as a lead sponsor in Virtual Int'l Telecoms Week 2020

## stc operating firms from Kuwait, Saudi and Bahrain participate

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its lead sponsorship role and active participation in the International Telecoms Week (ITW) 2020 virtual event held from June 15th to June 18th. The event primarily focused on developments related to the telecom sector, providing participants with the opportunity to share their experiences and valuable data related to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) with the audience.

The event included a series of panel and technical discussions led by telecom experts on topics that highly influence the industry. Seasoned professionals and members of stc's executive management team provided their insights and knowledge on a multitude of topics and points addressed during different ITW sessions.

On June 17th, ITW held a session focusing on virtual platforms, during which stc heavily participated in numerous sessions while carrying out its lead sponsorship role. stc representatives also participated in an important session titled "Connectivity in the Middle East", where several issues were reviewed on both long and short-term business growth, operation strategies, as well as the telecom sector post COVID-19.

Eng Ahmad Al-Sherif, General Manager - Network at stc spoke about some of the largest

opportunities for carriers in the Middle East during the "Connectivity in the Middle East" panel discussion. Throughout the discussion, he also expressed his opinion on how COVID-19 has impacted the Middle East telecom markets, focusing on the push towards digitization and the higher demand for data. Al-Sherif also emphasized that one of the main influences on carriers will be to adopt digitization to its fullest capacity, reducing human interaction, which will ultimately enable optimum growth not only in the telecom sector, but other industries as well.

When discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the Middle East telecom sector, Al-Sherif pointed out that the spread of infection was one of the main drivers towards enabling digital transformation. This in return has pinpointed the high demand for both consumer and enterprise connectivity during the time of crisis. To ensure that both consumer and enterprise data are fully protected, he positioned cyber security to be the main guard for communication means with the necessity to localize content.

With operational challenges arising due to the

COVID-19 outbreak, Al-Sherif indicated during the session that this challenge prompted the telecom sector to implement a new process in resuming operations and completing their daily tasks. To ensure the safety of employees, businesses switched to working remotely from home, utilizing virtual meeting platforms, as well as enhancing current data packages available to both individual and enterprise customers.

To maintain the high demand for network connectivity, Al-Sherif pointed out that the 5G technology played a crucial and pivotal role in enhancing the services offered by telecom providers. Considering that stc boasts one of the largest 5G networks in each of the countries it operates in, this enabled the Company to offer exceptional and distinguished services to its customers including a more intelligent network via Software Defined Networking (SDN).

In terms of its sponsorship role in ITW, stc released a statement expressing that as a digital leader in the regional market, the Company believes that it was highly beneficial for Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain operating companies to



participate in one of the most lucrative and renowned events covering the telecom sector. The Company also mentioned that the platform provided members of the executive management team to network with global corporations in the telecom field, software developers and other experts that can provide collaborative opportunities in the interest of stc's regional customers.

ITW is the world's largest annual meeting for the global ICT infrastructure industry, bringing carrier, data center, software, hardware, internet application, and investment communities together. The unique virtual platform will allow attendees to meet, network and do business from anywhere in the world. This year's conference was virtual with free access to all of the thought-leadership panels, roundtables and debates led by over 60 experts across every continent.



### ITW event held from June 15 to 18

## China industrial firms' profits surged in May

**SHANGHAI:** Profits at China's industrial firms rose for the first time in sixth months in May, suggesting the country's economic recovery is gaining traction and brightening the outlook for manufacturing investment and jobs.

China's national bureau of statistics said profits at China's industrial firms in May rose 6 percent year-on-year to 582.3 billion yuan (\$82.28 billion), according to a statement yesterday.

The rebound followed a 4.3 percent fall in April, and is its sharpest monthly gain since March 2019. Economic activity in China is clearly improving after the lifting of tough virus containment measures that led to weeks of near paralysis. But the recovery has been uneven and demand at home and abroad remains sluggish amid concerns of a second wave of infections and a global recession. Despite May's earnings growth, "market demand remains relatively weak amid the epidemic, and sustainability of the profit recovery deserves further observation," Zhu Hong, senior statistician at the statistics bureau said in the statement.

Earnings for Chinese factories were hit by the sharpest factory-gate price drop in more than four years recorded in May, while exports slipped again, erasing a transient gain in April. Futures prices for steel, which have surged this year on a government push for more infrastructure projects, fell last week as rising steel production and lean demand from downstream users stoked worries about oversupply.

For the first five months of 2020, industrial firms' profits fell 19.3 percent from the same period last year to 1.84 trillion yuan. May's profit growth was aided by significant profit recoveries in key industries including oil refinery, power, chemicals and steel.

For example, the oil refinery sector recorded a profit of 11.6 billion yuan in May, up 8.9 percent year-on-year, swinging from a loss of 21.8 billion yuan the previous month. Power sector profits grew 10.9 percent in May, compared with a decline of 15.7 percent in April. Zhu also attributed May's profit growth to easing cost pressures, improving profit margins, positive impact from policy stimulus and much higher investment returns. —Reuters

## Zimbabwe: On the edge again?

**HARARE:** A Zimbabwean shopper in a Harare supermarket shook his head, grumbling as he returned a loaf of bread to a rack after finding the price had jumped by a third and he could no longer afford it.

Nearby, a more than kilometer-long (half-mile) queue of cars waited for petrol at an empty fuel station in the hope it would receive a delivery. Zimbabwe is being buffeted by its worst economic crisis in over a decade, including scarcity of basics like fuel and cornmeal. Prices of basic goods gallop every week as the value of the Zimbabwean dollar continues to tumble, pushing official annual inflation to 785.6 percent in April.

Poverty is deepening among the majority of the population—UN aid agencies say some 7.7 million people, or half of the population, require food assistance. A loaf of bread went up 36 percent last month and last week a 10-kilo (22-pound) sack of cornmeal jumped 30 percent.

### 'Things cannot continue this way'

On Wednesday, the price of fuel soared by up to 152 percent. A similar rise in January 2019 sparked nationwide demonstrations in which at least 17 people were killed. "Things cannot continue this way. These people should just admit they have failed," said Harare resident Timothy Bhaureni, referring to President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government.

Mnangagwa, who took power in 2017 following a military coup pledging to revive the moribund economy, now blames the economic malaise on unnamed "political detractors".

"We are witnessing a relentless attack on our currency and the economy in general through exorbitant pricing models," Mnangagwa told his ZANU-PF party's politburo on June 10. "This battle is being fuelled by our political detractors, elite opportunists and malcontents who are bent on pushing a nefarious agenda," he added. "It has become apparent that among us there are wolves in sheep's clothing," he said last week.

### 'Economic sabotage'

In a dramatic move, and adding confusion to an already restless population, the government on Friday night suspended all mobile money transac-



**HARARE:** In this file photo, Zimbabwean security forces keep a close watch as shoppers line up to enter a supermarket which reopened in the capital Harare following a crippling strike over the increase in the price of fuel announced by Zimbabwean President. —AFP

tions, the most widely used platform to make and receive payments in the crisis-ridden country. It took the decision "to deal with malpractice, criminality and economic sabotage".

But in a notice, the largest operator EcoCash, defied the order, urging its more than 10 million users to continue transacting. The hardship and chaos has spurred discontent among ordinary people. The Zimbabwean authorities have in recent weeks targeted opposition activists and lawyers in what is seen as a tactic to strike fear into the population.

An opposition lawmaker and two party activists were last month abducted and then tortured by unidentified men, according to the victims, who spoke from the hospital where they were being treated. Police later arrested the trio, accusing them of faking their abduction and torture.

"Instability, the new normal" Three weeks ago security forces suddenly heightened security, turning back cars and buses heading into the center of the capital, spawning speculation about a possible looming coup. Rumors of an impending coup were quickly dismissed at a rare press conference attended by the country's security service chiefs.

"There is no coup in the making," declared

Home Affairs Minister Kazembe Kazembe. University of Zimbabwe's political scientist Eldred Masunungure said the situation "points to volatility in the country, a comprehensively volatile situation both politically and in the economy where it's very visible as it affects the livelihoods of the vast majority of the people."

"Nothing points to stability, but I don't want to overstate this because we have reached this crossroads many times before and the country has not collapsed."

"The default position in the country is one of instability. It appears like the new normal," he said.

Economist Prosper Chitambar of the Labor and Economic Development Institute of Zimbabwe think tank said Zimbabwe was on the brink of another round of hyperinflation. The country's inflation breached the 500-billion-percent mark in 2008, forcing it to trash its own currency.

"We are headed for tough times with the loss of value of the local currency. The economy is not growing," said Chitambar. "We are on the verge of hyperinflation. This increases economic uncertainty which is detrimental to private sector investment," he said. The World Bank predicts Zimbabwe's economy will contract by 10 percent. —AFP

## Rainy day hastens sovereign funds' refocus to home

**LONDON:** Famed for snapping up glitzy real estate and stakes in troubled international banks during the global financial crisis, sovereign wealth funds are investing more at home, a trend set to accelerate in the wake of the economic carnage wrought by COVID-19. Some of these state-owned entities, such as Singapore's Temasek Holdings, already acted more as development funds aimed at supporting their countries' economies, but many of them are considered "rainy day" funds - meaning they will have a big role in helping governments to manage the fallout from the pandemic.

There has been a flurry of recent domestic deals, such as Turkey's fund injecting 21 billion lira (\$3.1 billion) into three state banks and Temasek supporting a \$1.5 billion rights issue by Sembcorp Marine.

That's in addition to withdrawals from the Nigerian and Norwegian funds to help their governments deal with the economic impact of the virus. While the lion's share of sovereign fund investments is still overseas, domestic deals are on the rise. They

accounted for 21 percent of private equity deals in 2019 - already a doubling from 2015 levels, according to the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSFWF).

"I'd expect greater levels of investment in domestic economies going forward," said Will Jackson-Moore, global private equity, real assets and sovereign funds leader, PwC.

"That said, the best opportunities in international markets are going to be in the next 18 months. If there's demand for short-term emergency funding (from governments) then that could be more of a conflict and it will come down to how governments and sovereign wealth funds balance that." Analysts say returns at home may not necessarily be poorer, particularly if funds can cherry pick deals. Also, many are located in emerging markets, where expected gains can be larger. The rub comes if their remit also includes aiding the development of local economies, in which case some of the payback can flow to the economy as well as the fund.

Qatar made its name more than a decade ago in the aftermath of the global financial crisis when its sovereign fund vehicles snapped up stakes in Credit Suisse, Barclays and Volkswagen at a time when illiquidity meant many asset prices were low.

This year, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), which manages over \$300 billion in assets, is making similar waves, last month disclosing stakes in

Boeing Co, Citigroup Inc, Facebook Inc, Walt Disney Co and Marriott.

Still, the PIF is redoubling its domestic focus, said a source familiar with the fund. Its aim is to ensure its portfolio of local assets under management sits at 75 percent by the end of 2020. PIF did not respond to a request about its current weighting.

It's a not dissimilar story for other funds. "Many sovereign wealth funds will support national budgets to finance the recovery or support health-care systems," said Javier Capape, director of sovereign wealth research at the IE Center for the Governance of Change, pointing to the examples of the sovereign funds of Iran, Kuwait and PIF.

Ireland's fund formed a rescue package for small and medium-sized enterprises, while Temasek has helped accelerate the production of a vaccine. Abu Dhabi's Mubadala was set to play a key role in propelling up neighboring Dubai's economy by linking up assets in the two emirates, sources said last month. Mubadala declined comment at the time.

### Rainy day

While the financial pain caused by the virus is undoubtedly the rainy day sovereign funds have been built for, governments are having to weigh their use of resources now against the prospect of providing windfalls for future generations. That dilemma is especially stark in the case of oil wealth funds as

hydrocarbon revenues are expected to wane in future years.

Even before the coronavirus and the plunge in oil prices, drawdowns from Kuwait's General Reserve Fund, managed by the country's sovereign fund, meant its assets are estimated by Fitch Ratings to have fallen for the sixth year in a row.

The Kuwait Investment Authority didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Hong Kong Monetary Authority, not an oil-based fund, will raise the liquidity of its portfolio to ensure it can provide funds for maintaining Hong Kong's monetary and financial stability, while meeting the government's needs in withdrawing fiscal reserve deposits to deal with the epidemic, a spokesperson said.

A recent IFSWF survey of oil and non-oil sovereign funds found only two out of 10 said their governments had sought funds, with the same number saying they had received requests to support additional government projects. Instead of tapping their rainy day funds, several governments including Gulf states and Kazakhstan have tapped debt capital markets to cover budget shortfalls. Mubadala last month raised \$4 billion in bonds.

"It is interesting the use of leverage to finance the buying spree, it makes sense that sovereign wealth funds prefer to go to the debt markets than withdrawing private equity valuable positions at a loss nowadays," said Capape. —Reuters



## Business

KAMCO Invest Economic Report

## IMF further lowers forecast for global economic growth

## Estimates see steep downward revisions amid uncertainty and trade slowdown

KUWAIT: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) further lowered its forecast for global real GDP growth rates for 2020 by 190 bps for 2020 and by 40 bps for 2021 from its previous forecast and highlighted the uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 crisis. World GDP is now expected to decline by 4.9 percent this year and recover to a growth of 5.4 percent next year. The downward revisions reflect a higher-than-anticipated impact of the pandemic on economic growth rates in 1H-2020 and a more-than-gradual recovery from it during the remainder of the year and next year.

The IMF highlighted that as with the previous forecast, its current forecast continues to be marred by uncertainty and grouped the impact into countries with declining infection rates vs. countries that are struggling to control the spread of infection. For the former, the recovery path is expected to be slower due to the severe hit during the first two quarters of the year and for the latter, economic activity will be affected by the continued lockdowns.



## Falling trade hits demand and price

The GDP decline in Advanced Economies is expected to be even steeper as compared to previous estimates. The IMF revised its estimate for the group by -190 bps to a GDP decline of 8.0 percent in 2020. The US economy is now expected to contract by 8 percent (-190 bps) while euro area is forecasted to see a bigger contraction of 10.2 percent (-270 bps). For 2021, growth rate for Advanced Economies was only marginally revised up by 30 bps to a growth of 4.8 percent with the US expected to grow by 4.5 percent (-20 bps) whereas euro area growth is estimated to come in at 6.0 percent (+130 bps).

The estimates for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies were also lowered to a decline of 3 percent for 2020 (-200 bps) followed by a growth of 5.9 percent in 2021 (-70 bps). From amongst the key economies globally, only China is expected to see a growth in 2020 at 1.0 percent (-20 bps revision from previous estimates) followed by one of the highest growth rates of 8.2 percent for 2021 (-100 bps). Estimates for the Middle East and Central Asia region was lowered to a decline of 4.7 percent in 2020 (-190 bps) followed by a growth of 3.3 percent in 2021 (-70 bps).

The IMF made one of the biggest downward revisions to GDP forecast for Saudi Arabia, lowering the Kingdom's GDP estimates by 450 bps to a steeper decline of 6.8 percent in 2020, whereas 2021 estimates

saw a marginal upward revision of 20 bps to a growth of 3.1 percent. The biggest downward revision was made to GDP estimates for India which is now expected to decline by 4.5 percent in 2020 (a downward revision of 640 bps) followed by a growth of 6.0 percent in 2021 (-140 bps).

## Declining trade

The Covid-19 pandemic affected global trade severely during Q1-2020 resulting in a y-o-y decline of 3.5 percent during the quarter. The decline highlighted weak demand and a complete halt to sectors like tourism, hospitality and commercial airlines. For the full year, global trade is expected to see a steep contraction of 11.9 percent in 2020 followed by an increase of 8 percent in 2021 led by a gradual pickup in domestic demand.

Meanwhile, a decline in consumption and aggregate demand as well as fuel prices was reflected in a fall in inflation rates in both Advanced and Emerging economies. Average inflation in advanced economies declined by around 130 bps in 2020 to 0.4 percent as of April-2020, whereas in emerging market economies it has declined by 120 bps to 4.2 percent highlighting weaker activity and low commodity prices. Consumer price trends in the GCC is expected to follow the broader global trends with almost all the GCC economies see a declining price trend over the last few months.

In the UAE and Saudi Arabia, prices of food and beverages, textile, communication, and recreation went up that partially offset the steep decline in prices of transport, utilities and household sectors.

## Financial markets recover

Meanwhile, the impact on the financial markets were contained to an extent that the recent recovery in sentiments appears somewhat disconnected from shifts in underlying economic prospects. The commodity index has also recovered from its March-2020 lows with oil now hovering around \$40/b. In addition, exchange rates have also stabilized and the flight of capital from emerging markets appear to be back with increasing investments. Almost all asset classes have recovered during Q2-2020 with most showing double digit returns during the quarter as compared to steep declines during Q1-2020.

The recovery in GCC markets were partial as compared to the decline in Q1-2020 and modest at around 12 percent for the MSCI GCC Index in Q2-2020 with the biggest decliners of Q1-2020 showing the biggest recovery in Q2-2020. Nevertheless, financial markets continue to remain cautious as threat of a second wave of Covid-19 pandemic have already started showing signs in China, US and a number of other countries. This is also reflected in higher returns for gold as a safe haven asset. We believe that a successful launch of a vaccine for the virus would instill much firmer

confidence in global financial markets.

## Policy changes

On the fiscal front, the IMF asserted that the countermeasures deployed by governments and central banks across the globe has helped in curbing the impact of the pandemic and contained near term losses both in terms of monetary expense as well as in terms of quality of life and unemployment. Also, financial assistance from the banking sector led by policy changes from the central banks have helped in sup-

porting vulnerable sectors, especially in the MSME and SME space, by providing continued credit for businesses.

the rise in borrowing costs and enhanced liquidity provisions. These measures are expected to continue until the end of 2021 resulting in higher fiscal deficits and debt-to-GDP ratios and gradually improving investment climate.

According to the IMF, global public debt is expected to increase by 1900 bps to reach a record high of 101 percent of GDP in 2020-21 with average overall fiscal deficit expected to increase by 1000 bps from last year to reach 14 percent of GDP in 2020.

On the other hand, the pandemic had a severe

Country/Regions	June-2020 Updated Forecasts				Rev. from Apr-2020	
Real GDP Growth	2018	2019	2020e	2021e	2020e	2021e
World Output	3.6%	2.9%	-4.9%	5.4%	-1.9%	-0.4%
Advanced Economies	2.2%	1.7%	-8.0%	4.8%	-1.9%	0.3%
United States	2.9%	2.3%	-8.0%	4.5%	-2.1%	-0.2%
Euro Area	1.9%	1.3%	-10.2%	6.0%	-2.7%	1.3%
EM and Developing Economies	4.5%	3.7%	-3.0%	5.9%	-2.0%	-0.7%
China	6.7%	6.1%	1.0%	8.2%	-0.2%	-1.0%
India	6.1%	4.2%	-4.5%	6.0%	-6.4%	-1.4%
Middle East and Central Asia	1.8%	1.0%	-4.7%	3.3%	-1.9%	-0.7%
Saudi Arabia	2.4%	0.3%	-6.8%	3.1%	-4.5%	0.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.2%	3.1%	-3.2%	3.4%	-1.6%	-0.7%
Trade Volume	2018	2019	2020e	2021e	2020e	2021e
World Trade Volume	3.8%	0.9%	-11.9%	8.0%	-0.9%	-0.4%
Advanced Economies	3.4%	1.5%	-13.4%	7.2%	-1.3%	-0.2%
EM and Developing Economies	4.5%	0.1%	-9.4%	9.4%	-0.5%	-0.7%
Consumer Prices	2018	2019	2020e	2021e	2020e	2021e
Advanced Economies	2.0%	1.4%	0.3%	1.1%	-0.2%	-0.4%
EM and Developing Economies	4.8%	5.1%	4.4%	4.5%	-0.2%	0.0%

Sources : IMF WEO Jun-2020

porting vulnerable sectors, especially in the MSME and SME space, by providing continued credit for businesses.

According to the IMF, the overall fiscal measures announced globally stood at an estimated \$11 trillion as compared to an estimate of \$8 trillion in April-2020. Out of the total, around 50 percent or \$5.4 trillion are in the form of additional spending and forgone revenue that directly impacts government finances.

The remaining 50 percent is in the form of liquidity support initiatives, including loans, equity injections, and guarantees to support businesses. The lowering of rates and quantitative easing programs have limited

impact on the global labor market affecting work hours lost equivalent to 130 million full time jobs during Q1-2020, according to the ILO. The impact in Q2-2020 is expected to be even more severe at 300 million full time jobs.

Recovering from just a steep decline in employment would require extraordinary efforts and support from governments at the cost of fiscal performance. Also, economies that had already high unemployment rates would see several key policy changes with long term impact. Nevertheless, with the opening of the economies starting from the mid-May is expected to help ease the burden in the near-term.



MUNICH: The company logo is seen at the headquarters of German payments provider Wirecard in Aschheim near Munich, southern Germany.—AFP

## Wirecard plans to operate despite crisis

FRANKFURT: German payments provider Wirecard said Saturday that it would continue to operate despite filing for insolvency following a vast accounting fraud scandal.

The group admitted this week that 1.9 billion euros (\$2.1 billion) missing from its accounts likely does not exist, in a spiraling saga that has stunned Germany and evoked memories of the Enron scandal in the United States. Just hours after Wirecard opened insolvency proceedings with a court in Munich on Thursday, Auditing company EY accused the company of carrying out "elaborate and sophisticated fraud" across the world "with a deliberate aim of deception".

But on Saturday the group said its business activities "will be continued".

"The management board is of the opinion that continuation is in the best interests of the creditors," it said in a statement. "With the exception of a small development branch office, no insolvency applications have been filed by Group companies at present." Payments for merchants of the firm's banking arm, Wirecard Bank, "will continue to be executed without restrictions," it added. The firm is also "in constant contact with the credit card organizations", the statement said.

Credit card giants Visa and Mastercard are considering cutting ties with Wirecard, according to a Bloomberg report. Britain's financial watchdog FCA meanwhile has frozen Wirecard's operations there to protect its users' funds.

The hundreds of thousands of users of British subsidiary Wirecard Card Solutions have lost access to their funds, with some taking to Twitter to express their dismay. Wirecard's former CEO Markus Braun was detained this week on suspicion of falsifying accounts before being released on bail.—AFP

## Cash isn't king: Vulnerable short-changed by coronavirus

LONDON: Getting groceries in the coronavirus crisis has been tricky for many people, but for Eric Jones - an 89-year-old Briton who lives alone and relies on cash - it has proved particularly perplexing.

Before lockdown, a volunteer drove Jones to a supermarket near his home in southern England to pick up a weekly shop and withdraw cash to pay all the people who support him at home, be it the podiatrist or his handyman.

This is no longer possible with social distancing, and Jones, who asked for his name to be changed, found online shopping too difficult. "I tried and got very confused and forgetful. I couldn't possibly manage with that now ... I'm way behind with technology at my age," he said via Age UK, a charity helping older people.

The global shift towards paying for goods and services electronically means groups who rely on cash - from the elderly to the homeless, young people to casual workers - can struggle to participate in the economy. Concerns that the new coronavirus can live on surfaces has meant some retailers have stopped accepting cash, while many people stuck at home have switched to buying things online.

Most countries in Europe and Asia have some sort of contactless payment system, which typically involves holding a credit card or mobile phone over a device to make a payment. In Britain, cash payments declined 15 percent in 2019, with card payments accounting for half of all payments, according to UK Finance, a bank lobbying group. The nation is now at a tipping point that could leave millions of people behind, according to a review of the online economy by Access to Cash, a group of independent finance experts, that was released in February. While UK Finance has not shared data on 2020 payments, it said the coronavirus crisis could have accelerated the shift.

## Cash is king?

Over the lockdown months, Jones had his groceries delivered through a scheme run by his local council, placing an order over the phone and paying a delivery driver in cash. But he still struggles to get to an ATM to take out money. It either means walking to a corner shop to take out a small amount each day or taking a bus to one, which he said makes him feel vulnerable given the risk of catching the virus. Going cashless reduces the risk of crime, as well as being easier and faster, say advocates, but there are myriad

reasons why certain groups prefer, or are forced to, stick with cash. Some people find cash helps with budgeting, especially those on lower incomes, while others do not have the skills to use digital payments or cannot access the internet.

Add to that people who cannot open a bank account as they lack a fixed address or credit history.

A dependence on cash can be linked to the digital divide that exists in both rich and poor countries, said Mayada El-Zoghbi, managing director for the Center for Financial Inclusion (CFI), an independent US think tank. "A move to a cashless society will not benefit all groups equally. The groups that are most likely to be excluded will be women, rural communities, and the elderly," she said.

COVID-19 has expedited the need for contactless transactions all around the world as governments look for ways to transfer cash to individuals and businesses quickly and efficiently. "In some countries, like the US where a large part of the low-income segment does not have a bank account, pushing out these payments has been a challenge," she said.

## Future is electronic

As a result of the pandemic, cash withdrawals from ATMs are understood to be down "dramatically", by more than 50 percent in many European countries, said research firm McKinsey.

In Britain they were down 60 percent in April, against the previous year, according to Link, which runs Britain's ATM network. Before the crisis hit, many cities had already introduced legislation to prevent the collapse of cash infrastructure. In March, Britain indicated it would also legislate to protect cash, but the pandemic has made doing so even more urgent, said Neil Johnson, policy manager at Age UK.

"We need to be very careful we don't inadvertently slip into a vicious circle, where less cash is used, those costs [for retailers accepting it] increase, which actually stimulates further decrease in the amount of cash that is used," he said.

The trend towards cashless payments also affects homeless people who might not be able to access electronic payments and rely on loose change handouts - made even trickier in lockdown.

Greater Change, a British-based social enterprise, was also working to resolve the issue before the crisis hit by creating ways for people to donate directly to homeless individuals, either online or through contactless payment points.

The organization set up pay points across cities such as London and Oxford, but many were in bars and stations, meaning they have been out of action.

Jonathan Tan, chief operating officer, said there has been an uptick in web donations, but does not have figures to share on the impact to donations caused by the coronavirus. "It has sped up the demand (for cashless donations)," he said. "We need to ramp up our capacity to handle that." — Reuters

## Burgan Bank launches its WhatsApp service on 1804080

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently launched its new WhatsApp business service on 1804080 to accommodate general customer queries. The new service which replaces the existing WhatsApp service of 55804080 addresses customer's expectations of speedy interaction with the Bank and reflects the bank's pursuit for customer convenience, this was achieved in collaboration with Infobip. The service is available in both Arabic & English.



Venkat Menon

The new WhatsApp service is among the quickest interactive, easy-to-use platforms that aim to reach out to a wide customer base. No personal or confidential information will be displayed and the platform will serve as a reliable tool both domestically and when travelling abroad.

All messages on Burgan Bank's verified WhatsApp Business account are encrypted, ensuring safety and security of customer information. Customers are encouraged to check for the green badge next to the Burgan Bank name in the chat window to ensure they only engage with the bank's verified WhatsApp Business account.

Venkat Menon, Burgan Bank's Group Chief Operations & Technology Officer said: "We believe the new offering will complement our existing digital banking channels and offer security along with the simplicity and convenience of instant responses 24/7. As Burgan Bank forges ahead with its digitization agenda, we look forward to progressively expanding our range of WhatsApp based services in the near future to enable continuous, immediate and safe conversations with our customers".



# After drought, Kenya's herders hammered by coronavirus curbs

**KAJIADO, Kenya:** Peter Olankai, who keeps cattle, sheep and goats, has struggled to buy and sell his animals in Kenya's Kajiado County as the coronavirus pandemic closed markets and ushered in movement restrictions and curfews that have eaten away at his income.

"Our livelihood is reliant on livestock - we sell these animals to get money to buy food and other family needs, but now we can't," he said earlier this month. Olankai, 46, lives in Kisamis village in remote Maasai territory where there is no road network and connecting with buyers is a challenge.

Now at home with his four teenage children, the family's daily spending on food has gone up significantly. In 2018 and 2019, their community was hit hard by drought but this year, they have had a lot of rain and the livestock are healthy and in good condition.

Olankai replenished his herd and hoped to fetch a decent price for his animals - but his plan has been ruined by market shutdowns aimed at stemming the spread of the novel coronavirus. "Sometimes when I need money, I call one of the livestock buyers but it's hard for them to come because of movement restrictions," he said.

"We are the most disadvantaged as a community." As COVID-19 cases in Kenya continued to rise, and community transmission became more common, the government tightened control measures, including further restrictions on movement in and out of Nairobi, for another 30 days until early July.

This has made business tough for James Mburu in the town of Kiserian, 27 km (17 miles) southwest of Nairobi, who buys goats from the Maasai community to sell in the capital. "Since the market closed, I have lost about 300,000 shillings (\$2,800) and getting goats for slaughter is very expensive," he said.

## Meat matters

The COVID-19 response has disrupted the livestock marketing system in the area, with many of the brokers who drive animals from the bush to the markets halting their activities for now. Traders like Mburu have had no choice but to go into Maasai country to collect livestock from individual keepers. "Before... the pandemic, I used to buy about 100 goats per week but now getting even 20 goats is hard," he said.

He hires a pick-up van and drives for almost 80 km to buy goats, which leaves him with a loss because he pays two youths to come with him, as well as about \$10 for fuel.

Mburu also owns two butchers' shops supplying meat to the town's biggest hotels but has had to close them and send home five employees due to the dwindling supply of goats for slaughter.

A 2019 report on the future of Kenya's livestock sector by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization showed that about 3.6 million households keep cattle, contributing 40-73 percent of their income.

Leonard Leakey Ritei, Kajiado County Chief Agriculture Officer, said the livestock sector supports more than 300,000 households in his county, with animals kept to pay for essentials rather than making a profit.

"Our county is predominantly a livestock area and big fractions of the population are dependent on livestock trading. For people to get food and meet other family needs, they have to sell these animals," he said.

But following Ministry of Health guidelines to control COVID-19 meant closing open-air markets, leading the county government to incur losses averaging nearly 549 million Kenyan shillings (\$5 million) in revenue collection per month.



Livestock-keepers in Kenya had been hoping for a good year to help them recover from drought but have struggled to sell their animals as pandemic disrupted markets. — Reuters

It is now planning a phased reopening of major livestock markets from today, after ensuring they can comply with coronavirus prevention protocols, Ritei added. The government is also providing food aid to vulnerable residents to cushion the financial blow, he noted.

## Price plunge

The pandemic is further complicating recovery from the losses communities suffered due to serious drought a year ago. Olankai's neighbor, cattle-keeper Moses Saninko, said he lost more than 100 cows to the drought. He worries he might not be able to afford to pay for his children's education.

"When the markets open, everyone will be selling their animals and the market will be flooded - hence it will be a double loss, and getting money to pay

school fees will not be easy," he said.

The incomes of livestock-keeping communities are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic, said Ameha Sebsibe, head of livestock and fisheries at the IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development, which covers East Africa.

Sebsibe flagged the negative consequences of the pandemic for the region's market in livestock products, noting that the price of cattle, sheep and goats in Kenya's Samburu County dropped 40-60 percent in April from a year earlier due to low demand.

The IGAD center has prepared a regional COVID-19 response plan, which it has submitted to donors, recommending the use of online marketing, easing of restrictions on animal movement, and awareness-raising on COVID-19 control for pastoralists. — Reuters

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## Lifestyle | Features

## A world redrawn: Lebanon film director fears nothing will change

Prize-winning Lebanese documentary filmmaker Carol Mansour fears the world has learnt nothing from the novel coronavirus shock and will go back to square one or worse when normal life returns. The director, who lost her father living in Canada to the COVID-19 disease, admits “what scares me the most” is that mankind has learned nothing from this crisis. “Maybe the skies and the rivers have cleared up a bit, but if the coronavirus crisis can’t change us, I don’t know what can,” she told AFP in an interview on Zoom. “I am very afraid of what will happen after the return to normal” because the crisis “apparently did not teach us anything”.

“I think that we will quickly return to where we were and perhaps worse,” with “three percent of the world population” remaining in charge of the planet. In her own world, Mansour said the curbs linked to the pandemic have brought out “a personal dimension” in her work and pushed her to look differently at her city, Beirut. As for her media, the future of cinema remains in suspense, although she has stayed creative in lockdown. It’s as if “we pressed a stop button” since the



Lebanese director Carol Mansour uses her phone to film while wearing a face mask and standing by graffiti reading in Arabic “power to the people”, in Beirut. —AFP

virus swept across the globe, said Mansour, who lives in the Lebanese capital.

In collaboration with Daraj.com, an independent media platform, Mansour has produced two short films

on the epidemic, including one on her father. “Every day we hear about... the number of people who have died from coronavirus but I never imagined that my father would be one of those figures,” she says in the film “My Father, Killed by Covid-19”.

#### ‘Has Beirut become beautiful?’

In a second video, Mansour focuses on contradictions in “her plans, hopes and concerns” for Beirut in the era of coronavirus. “Beirut is ugly,” she said, “because of the indiscriminate construction, the proliferation of huge shopping centres and the continued demolition of old buildings.” But that has been cut short by the epidemic and stay-at-home restrictions. She explained that she could now walk in usually crowded streets, “alone among cats” because with confinement, Beirut “has become a city of cats”. “Has Beirut become beautiful or has calm embellished it?” she mused.

The Lebanese director of Palestinian origin has won several international awards, including the 2018 prize for best documentary at the Delhi film festival for

“Stitching Palestine”. Under confinement, Mansour also decided to make another “very personal” film about her mother who fled to Lebanon in 1948 from Jaffa in present-day Israel and died in 2015. The film addresses her mother’s discussions “on Palestine” while she was suffering from Alzheimer’s. “I was filming it without intending to collect these videos to make a film,” she said.

Coronavirus has come at a time when we had already grown familiar with “new ways” of seeing and photographing. “With ‘Stitching Palestine’ we shot segments via Zoom with 350 participants from 20 different countries,” she said. “We watched the film, then a discussion took place. In this area, there has definitely been some change.” As for Mansour’s private life, with the coronavirus, “I’ve discovered things about myself... I speak (more) now,” she said with a laugh. She has also grown to appreciate the merits of a simpler life. “I only yearn for friends and hugs.”—AFP



In this file photo US President Barack Obama shakes hands with graphic designer Milton Glaser after presenting him with the 2009 National Medal of Arts during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

## Milton Glaser, designer of iconic ‘I (Heart) NY’ logo, is dead at 91

If you like American pop culture you certainly know his work, even if you don’t know his name: graphic designer Milton Glaser, known for his wildly popular “I (Heart) NY” logo, died Friday on his 91st birthday. His death in Manhattan was confirmed by his wife, Shirley Glaser, who said he had suf-

fered a stroke and renal failure, The New York Times reported. Glaser, born in the Bronx to Hungarian immigrant parents, was known for a joyous and retro style that helped him shape the visual identity of American popular culture, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.



fered a stroke and renal failure, The New York Times reported. Glaser, born in the Bronx to Hungarian immigrant parents, was known for a joyous and retro style that helped him shape the visual identity of American popular culture, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

He was also co-founder, with Clay Felker, of New York magazine, where

he served as president and design director until 1977. Glaser designed the “I (Heart) NY” logo, with its red heart on a white background, for a 1977 campaign promoting the state as a tourism destination. It remains omnipresent in tourist gift shops, known to every visitor to the US financial capital.

But Glaser also captured the spirit of the time with his promotional poster for a 1967 album of Bob Dylan’s greatest hits that depicted the singer in profile, his face in dark shadows but with a wildly colourful, psychedelic mane of hair. Glaser, long considered the dean of American graphic designers, also reimagined the logo for DC Comics as well as the logo of Brooklyn Brewery, now popular with hipsters worldwide. More recently, Glaser designed the poster for the final season of hit TV series “Mad Men.” “What Milton Glaser gave to New York will long survive him,” the state’s governor Andrew Cuomo said on Twitter. “I (Heart) New York was the perfect logo at the time he created it and remains so today. We lost a brilliant designer and a great New Yorker.”—AFP

## Stars help raise billions in EU vaccine drive

Coldplay, Miley Cyrus, Jennifer Hudson and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson lent support to European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen in a coronavirus fundraising drive on Saturday that raised 6.15 billion euros (\$6.9 billion). Megastars of music, film, sport, fashion joined online events to support the search for a coronavirus vaccine and help make it available to poorer countries.

The EU chief opened the fundraiser by announcing 4.9 billion euros from the European Investment Bank, in partnership with the commission, in a fresh contribution to the effort. That followed pledges of almost 10 billion euros from the EU, governments and billionaire philanthropists at a first fund-raising summit on May 4, bringing the total to 15.9 billion euros. “We will only end this pandemic when it has been ended everywhere,” von der Leyen said, kicking off the virtual event. “And that means every person in the world having access to tests, treatments and vaccines no matter where they live and where they are from or what they look like,” she said.

Along with US-based movement Global Citizen, the EU executive spon-

sored the fund-raising and coordination drive to boost efforts to control the epidemic. Von der Leyen said the money will help develop a vaccine for the novel coronavirus and help make sure it is shared with the most vulnerable populations. Johnson, a former pro-wrestler turned movie star, will host a concert later on Saturday to be broadcast online.

That will feature celebrity artists such as Miley Cyrus, Salma Hayek, Charlize Theron, Forest Whitaker and Angelique Kidjo. “I have been really passionate about justice and equality and this campaign is all about making sure that everyone everywhere has access to the tools and solutions to end COVID-19,” Cyrus said. Also involved were philanthropist Melinda Gates, along with World Health Organization director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. The EU said 40 governments participated in the event, where many announced national donations to the WHO, World Food Program and other efforts to fight the pandemic internationally.—AFP



In this file photo Shakira and Chris Martin from Coldplay perform together on stage during the Global Citizen Festival G20 benefit concert at the Barclaycard Arena in Hamburg. —AFP



In this file photo, US-Chinese actress Yifei Liu attends the world premiere of Disney’s “Mulan” at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. —AFP

## Disney delays ‘Mulan’ release again as virus cases surge

Disney has delayed the release of “Mulan” again, this time until mid-August, as the coronavirus pandemic continues to threaten blockbusters that Hollywood hoped would bring audiences back to theatres after months of lockdown. “Mulan,” a mega-budget live action remake of the tale of a legendary Chinese warrior, had already been delayed once, to July 24. It will now launch on August 21, a statement from Disney said Friday—though the company warned of the need to be “flexible” in the process. “While the pandemic has changed our release plans for ‘Mulan’ and we will continue to be flexible as conditions require, it has not changed our belief in the power of this film and its message of hope and perseverance,” said a statement from Walt Disney Studios co-chairmen Alan Bergman and Alan Horn.

“Director Niki Caro and our cast and crew have created a beautiful, epic, and moving film that is everything the cinematic experience should be, and that’s where we believe it belongs – on the world stage and the big screen for audiences around the globe to enjoy together.” The decision comes after Warner Bros. pushed back the launch of another big summer film, Christopher Nolan’s “Tenet,”—a thriller about an agency trying to ward off World War III—to mid-August. Warner Bros. also noted the need to be “flexible” as it announced the delay. In April, Disney delayed the releases of more than a dozen major films, including eagerly awaited Marvel movies “Black Widow” and “The Eternals,” as well as the latest “Thor” and “Doctor Strange” sequels, as COVID-19 shuttered theaters around the world. —AFP



## Oz tech titans to build world’s tallest ‘hybrid timber’ tower in Sydney

Global software giant Atlassian will build the world’s tallest “hybrid timber” building for its new headquarters in Sydney, the company said Thursday. The 40-storey structure, coming in at 180 metres (590 ft), will be constructed with timber mass—layers of softwoods pressed together—and will feature a glass and steel facade, topped by outdoor gardens. The Atlassian building, designed by New York architects SHoP and Australian firm BVN, will operate on 100 percent renewable energy and incorporate solar panels and self-shading windows in its facade.

It will use Mass Timber Construction, a technique that fuses softwoods, which Atlassian described as a key technology to lower the building’s carbon footprint. Construction is due to start next year and be completed in 2025. Highly ecological, hybrid timber constructions have seen a burst of popularity. The Netherlands is due to begin work next year on a 140m (459 ft) hybrid timber tower in Rotterdam.

Atlassian, founded in 2001 by Mike Cannon-Brookes and Scott Farquhar, says the tower will house 4,000 staff and form the hub of a new tech precinct in the

central Sydney business district. “The space that we are building will be highly sustainable and highly flexible—it will be purpose-built for the future of work, for tomorrow’s world, not today’s,” Farquhar said in a statement. He noted the post-COVID reality of more people likely working from home, but said companies still needed offices to thrive.

“Now we can design this space especially for these new ways of working,” he said. Cannon-Brookes and Farquhar, both 40, met at the University of New South Wales in Sydney in 1998 and launched Atlassian three years later. The company, now one of the world’s biggest collaborative software firms, has made the pair among Australia’s richest people, each worth around \$12 billion according to Forbes. The Atlassian HQ project is not their first foray into the Sydney property market. The duo live in side-by-side estates on Sydney harbour which both broke records as the most expensive homes in the city when purchased in 2017 and 2018 for around \$50 million and \$70 million.—AFP



These handout illustrations of an artist’s rendition shows what would be the world’s tallest “hybrid timber” building for the company’s new headquarters in Sydney. —AFP photos



In this file photo French chef and restaurant owner Alain Fontaine answers interview in his restaurant “Le Mesturet” in Paris. —AFP

## French bistros down but not out: Paris chef

Coronavirus took a terrible toll on an icon of French culture—the corner bistro—but it will survive, says chef and restaurateur Alain Fontaine. “If bistros disappear, it’s life that disappears,” Fontaine told journalists at Le Mesturet, the bistro he has run for 18 years in the heart of Paris, on Thursday. The bistro is a place where one can “talk nonsense or discuss very important things,” he said, likening the French institution to the Irish pub. Think of it as a “people’s parliament”, the 62-year-old said, quoting Honore de Balzac, the prolific chronicler of early 19th-century French society.

The numbers were already alarming before the crisis, dropping from 200,000 bistros and cafes at the beginning of the 20th century to a little over 50,000 after World War II to 25,000 today, Fontaine said. The coronavirus lockdown imposed in mid-March was a “disaster” for the sector, he said, noting that bars and restaurants remained open throughout the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. But he dismissed dire predictions that up to 40 percent of the businesses would not survive the crisis, saying many would simply change hands.—AFP



## Lifestyle | Features



A man, clad in mask due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, stands behind the till at his shop selling China in the historic city of Shaqlawah, about 48 kilometres northeast of Arbil, in the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region.—AFP photos



A mask-clad man stokes burning wood by teapots at a traditional cafe in the historic city of Shaqlawah.



Men sit at a traditional cafe in the historic city of Shaqlawah.



Men sit at a traditional cafe in the historic city of Shaqlawah.

# As visitors stay home, Iraqi Kurdistan tourism collapses

In a normal year, Ahmed Hazem's mountainside restaurant would be teeming with tourists. But a nationwide curfew aimed at combatting the novel coronavirus has starved Iraq's Kurdish region of visitors. "Everything is empty. With the roads cut, not a single tourist can even get here," said Hazem, whose restaurant is a collection of red tables and chairs on terraces cut out of the mountainside. The tables now stand empty in the early summer sun among the babbling rivulets of spring water that normally draw the tourists.

The nearby town of Al-Amadiyah lies in a mountainous district of the autonomous Kurdish region's Dohuk province, which borders both Turkey and Syria. This would normally be high season, with families escaping the scorching heat of the plains to enjoy the relatively mild weather of the northern mountains.

They rent chalets or small apartments, dip into natural lakes and streams and flock to restaurants or hold their own barbecues at campsites and picnic spots. Last year, around 200,000 tourists visited Al-Amadiyah alone, the town's tourist chief Nazif Mohammed Ali said. But this year "no one came", Ali lamented.

## Pessimistic projections

In mid-March, just as the tourist season was getting under way up in Iraqi Kurdistan, the region's three provinces announced a strict lockdown to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. One of them, Sulaimaniyah, had registered Iraq's first coronavirus-linked death just weeks before. Border crossings with Syria, Turkey and Iran were sealed off. Hotels and restaurants shuttered their doors and people were instructed to avoid gatherings.

The rest of Iraq soon followed suit, meaning the expected 1.7 million visitors—most of them Iraqis from the south but also including some foreign tourists—did not show up. The shutdown brought the private sector to its knees across Iraq, but the Kurdish region's tourist sector has been particularly hard hit. The Kurdistan Region's Restaurant and Hotel Owners League counts 868 hotels and other lodgings that employ 8,500 people. "Their occupancy rate is zero," the League has said. Even when restaurants do reopen, "they will only be half full" if routes from the south are still closed to would-be visitors, predicted the League's

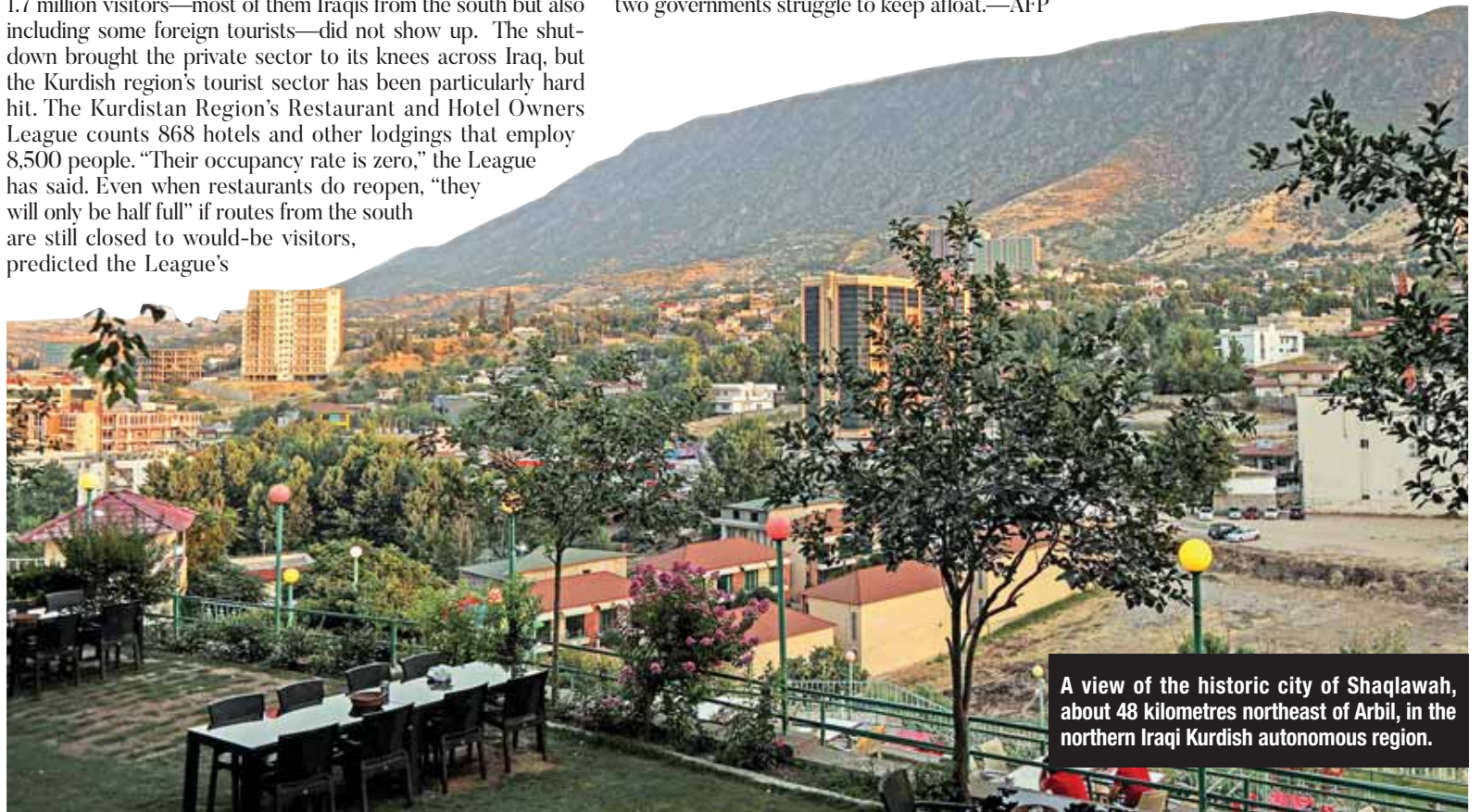
deputy head Shaker Aziz. The coronavirus figures have since steadily crept up with confirmed infections topping 37,000 and 1,400 deaths.

## Empty coffers

Over the past two decades, Kurdistan's economy had been heavily reliant on the oil and gas sector, which has driven the region's development. Authorities have been trying to diversify but the collapse of world oil prices has still dealt a heavy blow. The tourism sector formed a key part of the diversification plans, injecting about \$1.5 billion into the Kurdish economy last year, said Nader Rusti, spokesman of the region's tourism office. The loss of most if not all of that spending comes on top of a deepening fiscal crisis that has left the public sector reeling.

The regional government has failed pay public sector workers for several months, sparking protests in cities across Kurdistan. It also owes months of payments to international companies extracting oil and gas from the region. And it will have to cut production by 23 percent to comply with an agreement hashed out by members of the OPEC oil cartel in April to reduce excess supply to the market in a bid to shore up prices.

The region's prime minister, Masrour Barzani, recently announced that his government was \$27 billion in debt, after it was forced to take out more loans to honour its immediate obligations. It had hoped for some economic relief from talks with the federal government over longstanding budget and oil issues. But Baghdad is facing a similar fiscal crisis as a result of the sharp fall in oil revenues and the collapse of religious tourism, the second-largest contributor to Iraq's economy. So for Hazem and other stricken restaurateurs and hoteliers across the Kurdish mountains, there is no prospect of state help, as the two governments struggle to keep afloat.—AFP



A view of the historic city of Shaqlawah, about 48 kilometres northeast of Arbil, in the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region.

## Croatia touts dazzling coastline to rescue virus-hit tourism sector

Croatia is touting boating and camping on its azure 1,800-km Adriatic coastline to woo back visitors and revive its coronavirus-battered tourism sector. After travel restrictions across the European Union were relaxed earlier this month, foreigners are now slowly returning as tourism operators try to salvage the season. Boats and tents might

The two sectors have traditionally accounted for an important but smaller slice of the tourism pie, which accounts for around a fifth of Croatia's GDP. Its tourism industry is expected to contract by 70 percent due to the pandemic. This economic pain will be the first challenge of the new government to be elected in on July 5. As the polls approach, conservative PM Andrej Plenkovic is hoping to capitalise on his government's relative success in combating the virus so far. With some 107 deaths and nearly 2,500 known infections in a population of 4.2 million, a fragile sense of normality is returning as borders reopen to the main markets, including Austria, Germany and Slovenia.

## Peace and silence

On the island of Krk, tourism operators like Cvetkovic are finally seeing bookings replace cancellations, sparking hope he can achieve up to half of last year's figures. After months, the Marina Punat is coming back to life with sailors cleaning their boats and sunbathing on the decks. Home to some 1,000 islands and islets, Croatia is a dream destination for those looking to island-hop, seek out secluded bays or sail from one restaurant to another to taste fresh seafood. "Peace and silence," is how Manfred Schwarz, 59, summed up his week on the sea with four other Austrian friends. "At

most places we were alone or there were only a few other boats", his friend Johann Wagner, 61, added.

Some of their initial fears from catching COVID-19 have vanished after seeing the lack of crowds. The men were also only a six-hour drive from home. Croatia hopes this proximity of its main markets, accessible by car in a few hours, will be another draw for tourists weary of airline travel. "Despite initial pessimism ... our expectations are slowly growing," said Renata Marevic, who oversees Marina Punat.

## Back to nature

Guests are also gradually filling the nearby five-star Krk Premium Camping Resort, which opened in late May. It is one of the 800 campsites in the country, most of which claim prime real estate on Croatia's beaches. Many offer visitors various options for their stay, from spaces for tents and camper vans to camping huts or 'glamping' tents for a more high-end experience.

In the Krk resort, reminders of the pandemic are visible but subtle, with signs warning to 'Please keep a distance' at the reception, while tables and sun chairs are arranged to ensure the required 1.5-metre (5 foot) distance. "We got a recommendation from friends of ours, we looked on the Internet, we tried it and we like it," said Florian Marchl, 30-year-old who came

to Krk with his family from Salzburg. "It's not a problem to keep a distance," he said, as his wife put their two-month baby boy to sleep on the terrace of their luxury bungalow. Before making a decision the couple researched how Croatia was dealing with the pandemic.

Guests at the campground are offered online check-in, food delivery and a 24/7 health and safety manager ensuring adequate medical services. The camp, run by leading tourist group Valamar, will also cap capacity at 80 percent for safety reasons. "The advantage is that we are in nature, guests have their private space," explained camp manager Bruno Bogdanic.

Yet experts warn that keeping the virus under control is key. After registering only a few or no cases of the disease daily since mid-May, numbers have now started to creep up again. This week authorities re-imposed 14-day quarantines for visitors from neighbouring Balkan states which have logged rising infection rates. Any new outbreak of COVID-19 "would be a terrible setback that would throw us back to the beginning" warned Cvetkovic.—AFP



A view of a quay at the Marina Punat on the northern island of Krk.

be the cure, offering travellers built-in social distancing as they relax on the idyllic picture postcard coast. "Alone in a bay on your boat, there is no better distancing," said Zeljko Cvetkovic, who owns a boat charter company on the northern island of Krk. "Camping is similar," he adds.



Holiday house look out to sea views at the Krk Premium Camping Resort.



Florian Marchl from Salzburg, Austria, and his wife Elisabeth Edfeldner and their two-month-old baby boy Leo sit on the terrace of their holiday house at the Krk Premium Camping Resort.



A Germany sailor prepares to fill the water tank of a motorboat in Marina Punat, on the northern island of Krk.





This combination of long-exposure pictures taken early on Saturday shows a view of buildings destroyed by bombardment in the town of Ariha in Syria's rebel-held northwestern Idlib province as the Milky Way galaxy is seen in the night sky above. — AFP

## In Syria, Milky Way glimmers over sea of rubble

**ARIHA, Syria:** Years of violence in Syria's last major opposition bastion has created a landscape of ruin, eerily lit in the early hours of Saturday by the Milky Way in the night sky. Over the bombed-out town of Ariha in Idlib province, the stars looked like specks of dust shining over the town's pulverized buildings. Ten long-exposure pictures taken by an AFP photographer on an unusually clear night with no moon show the stark contrast between the grim

devastation on the ground and the Milky Way.

A Russian-backed government offensive between December and March ravaged Ariha and other parts of northwest Syria, displacing nearly a million people. A truce reached on March 6 had largely reduced the fighting but Russia resumed air strikes this month for the first time in an alarming uptick. Some 780,000 of the nearly 1 million displaced are estimated to remain in displacement, according to the

United Nations. Perched on a mountainous region in Idlib, Ariha is held by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance (HTS), led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, and its rebel allies. It was home to almost 70,000 people before the regime's latest offensive but it is now nearly deserted. Its streets are dotted with the skeletons of buildings damaged by previous rounds of bombardment. Barely any lights emanate from the ground, except the dim glow of mobile

phones carried by passersby.

Nearly half of Idlib's population of three million has been displaced from other parts of Syria that have come under regime control. The war in Syria has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced nearly half of the country's pre-war population since it started in 2011. With the help of his Russian and Iran allies, President Bashar Al-Assad has clawed back more than 70 percent of the country. — AFP

## Workers stuck in Iraq with...

Continued from Page 1

poverty" due to the lockdown measures enforced to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Nafis Abbas, a 32-year-old Pakistani tailor in Baghdad, returned to work last week after nearly four months of total shutdown. "I want to go back (home) but I don't have any money. If I want to go to Pakistan now, it costs \$700 and I don't have anything — not even 1,000 Iraqi dinars", equivalent to less than a dollar, he told AFP.

Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, largely from South Asian countries, have flocked to Iraq over the last decade to work in a range of businesses, from oil fields to restaurants. Among them are 250,000 registered Bangladeshi workers, according to Mohammed Rezaul Kabir of the country's embassy in Baghdad. "More than 20,000 have lost their jobs," he told AFP, adding that the numbers could be even higher, given how many work informally.

They include 9,000 Bangladeshi laborers at international oil companies and contractors in Basra, once seen as lucky for working in such a lucrative industry. "Oil prices going down led to a lot of oil fields laying off employees, some of them without even a final paycheck," said Kabir. Many Bangladeshi oil workers headed north to Baghdad, hoping their embassy could send them home. "We are making lists and contacting people as soon as

we find a place for them. We are trying our best to transfer them back home but it is expensive and we need a lot of flights to get them there," said Kabir.

According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) survey, 95 percent of businesses in Iraq have suspended work due to COVID-19. Four out of 10 said they had to lay off some workers, and many expected the crisis to continue another four months. Salem Ahmed, an Iraqi restaurateur who employs Bangladeshi, Egyptian and Iraqi workers, said his establishment had been hit hard by the lockdown. "We estimate our losses at about \$20,000 per month," he said. "The government didn't provide any support to businesses, and we're still expected to pay taxes by July," he said.

Even once the lockdown is fully lifted, many business owners surveyed by the ILO predicted they would be unable to bring their operations or sales back to pre-coronavirus levels. Forty percent feared their businesses will shut either temporarily or permanently. "The government should explore all options to finance measures that support enterprises, and it should provide emergency support to all workers, mainly those who are working informally," said Maha Kattaa, ILO's Iraq country coordinator.

But Mohammed Fadel Lhak, a 49-year-old Bangladeshi worker, wasn't optimistic. Lhak was in a precarious situation well before the pandemic and the plunge in oil prices, living hand-to-mouth every month from menial jobs at small businesses in Baghdad. Last year, he always managed to sort something out — but this year feels different. "Everything is closed now. With the coronavirus, there are no more customers. We just hope for things to get better so we can move on with our lives," Lhak said. — AFP

ernment had expired on Jan 22 and his contract with the foreign partner had expired on Jan 29.

The employer added that on June 25, he had submitted a portfolio of documents indicating the contract's expiry and an affidavit from the foreign partner bearing responsibility for the workers' financial, administrative and legal liabilities and rights. The authority added that on receiving this portfolio from the company, the matter was referred to Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel on June 26.

Aqeel was asked to contact the ministers of oil and electricity and water to take proper measures and withhold the company's cash deposit and any due payments, as well as administratively suspend dealing with the company until the workers' dues are paid. The authority said despite notifying the workers of the measures taken so far, they have continued their agitation.

## China had sent martial artists...

Continued from Page 1

India claims Chinese troops ambushed Indian soldiers and forced them down a ridge where they

## Global virus cases exceed...

Continued from Page 1

The total number of cases continued to increase at a rate of between 1-2 percent a day in the past week, down from rates above 10 percent in March. Countries including China, New Zealand and Australia have seen new outbreaks in the past

## Curtailed hajj adds to Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

"We're not used to seeing Makkah empty. It feels like a dead city. It's devastating for Makkah."

A tsunami of cancellations has also battered overseas hajj operators who organize travel logistics for pilgrims, many of whom invest their life savings in the five-day ritual. Saudi authorities had already in March suspended the umrah pilgrimage, which can be performed at any time. Then, in a hugely sensitive but long-awaited decision, they said they would only allow around 1,000 pilgrims already present in the kingdom to perform the hajj. That is a tiny fraction of the 2.5 million pilgrims who attended last year.

"It will be a symbolic event, a photo-op that allows the kingdom to say 'we didn't cancel the hajj as many expected'," said a South Asian official in contact with hajj authorities. Saudi Arabia has stressed that the watered-down hajj will be open to people of various nationalities. But the selection process for the few spots is expected to be hotly contested, as some Makkah residents expect to be given priority over outsiders. "I have gone to hajj before and hopefully this year, with God's will, I will be among the first pilgrims," said Marwan Abdulrahman, a Saudi living in Makkah.

Many feared the pilgrimage, which packs colossal crowds into small religious sites, could have been a massive source of contagion. The novel coronavirus has hit the kingdom with the highest number of cases in the

had gone to remove a Chinese "encroachment". A bilateral accord prevents the use of guns, but the fighting was still fierce, with rudimentary weapons. China has in turn accused Indian soldiers of twice crossing the Line of Actual Control, the unofficial boundary, provoking its troops. The two countries fought a war over the border in 1962. There is an understanding between the nuclear-armed neighbors that their troops in the disputed and inhospitable region will not use firearms. — AFP

month, despite largely quashing local transmission. In Beijing, where hundreds of new cases were linked to an agricultural market, testing capacity has been ramped up to 300,000 a day.

The United States, which has reported the most cases of any country at more than 2.5 million, managed to slow the spread of the virus in May, only to see it expand in recent weeks to rural areas and other places that were previously unaffected. In some countries with limited testing capabilities, case numbers reflect a small proportion of total infections. Roughly half of reported infections are known to have recovered. — Reuters

Gulf — more than 178,000 confirmed infections including 1,511 deaths. But scaling the pilgrimage back will deepen the kingdom's economic slump, analysts say.

The move follows a sharp downturn in oil prices and coronavirus-led losses, which triggered austerity measures including the tripling of a value added tax and cuts to civil servants' allowances. The hajj decision "does compound Saudi Arabia's economic difficulties", Richard Robinson, a Middle East analyst at Oxford Analytica, told AFP. On Wednesday, the International Monetary Fund warned the kingdom's GDP will shrink by 6.8 percent this year — its worst performance since the 1980s oil glut.

The Saudi Binladen construction group, a bellwether known for vast mega-projects, has missed salary payments for thousands of workers in recent months, according to a source close to the company and employees complaining on social media. The Arabic hashtag "Delays in Binladen salaries" has gained traction as the slowdown impacts the firm behind a series of critical projects, including a \$15 billion skyscraper hotel complex that towers over Makkah's Grand Mosque.

The company is seeking to charter a number of private jets to send many of its laid-off South Asian laborers home, according to the source. The company did not respond to a request for comment. The downturn has also disrupted Riyadh's ambitious plans to build a tourism industry from scratch, a cornerstone of the Vision 2030 reform program to reduce the kingdom's reliance on oil. "The government has singled out tourism as a key area for growth under its diversification strategy, and the loss of hajj revenues could set the sector back through lost investment or bankruptcies," said Robinson. — AFP

## MPs press for quick, massive...

Continued from Page 1

and that he was spending a lot on poor people and charities in his country. Local press said leading figures from the government have been added to his list of accomplices, in addition to at least two current Kuwaiti MPs and an ex-MP.

Meanwhile, the manpower authority yesterday explained in a press release that emergency teams were dispatched to the scene of a protest in Mahboula last week and found over 148 workers demonstrating because they had not received salaries for March, April and May. The employer was summoned, who said his contract with the gov-



## Friday's Solution

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

medium

very hard

## STAR TRACK



Today is a day to shine, Aries, so make sure you're giving it your all. Get the credit you deserve for all you do. Try not to fall into self-pity. Be yourself and people will naturally follow your lead. Now is an excellent time to make some plans for the future. Stay grounded and on target with your goals. Make sure you aren't thrown off course by other people's whims.



Get your head out of the clouds today, Libra, and come back to Earth for just a little bit. There are some things you need to take care of here. Mundane tasks and routine jobs won't be painful after you set your mind to getting them done. You'll be able to accomplish quite a bit. Just make sure to keep a level head about the reality of the situation.



Today is a day of contrasts for you, Taurus. Eat chocolate in the morning and go jogging in the afternoon. Sleep in late and go to bed early. It's also a day of grounding. If you can, spend time at home and make more phone calls than usual. Clean your desk and organize a bookshelf. Why not clean the refrigerator while you're at it? Take care of your pets, too.



Bring things down to Earth today, Scorpio. Get grounded and enjoy the day. You'll find that the more you slow down and adopt a caring, sensitive, receptive attitude, the more things will naturally flow your way. This isn't a day to fight. It's a day to connect with others on a symbiotic level. Nurture yourself and others. Get/give a massage and snuggle up close to those you love.



The day doesn't begin until you clear your head and take stock of some pending personal issues, Gemini. You might be making mountains out of molehills. Realize that there is a path for everybody. Put your aggression away today. It's powerful, but it won't do any good. Keep your power under wraps. Concentrate on the mundane tasks that need to be done. Why not make a list?



Today is a fantastic day for you, Sagittarius, so enjoy yourself fully. Your emotions will be stable, and you'll find that you have a very expansive sense of well-being. Your self-confidence is strong, and you should use this to your advantage. This energy may be subtle, but if you tune into it early in the day and set a plan for what you want to accomplish, you'll find you can be quite productive.



Today might be a somewhat difficult day for you, Cancer. Instinctively, you'll want to escape the situation and explore your freedom, but something will be holding you back. Take care of the bills on your desk and deal with the mess in the bedroom. Clearing the physical space around you will help clear your mental space, too. You'll be footloose and fancy free soon enough.



Today is a good day for you to simply get things done. Take care of those annoying tasks that have been building up for a while. You have a great opportunity to accomplish quite a bit. People are less concerned with frivolous drivel and gossip than they are with setting a plan for meeting an important goal. Contribute to this trend by getting serious about the tasks at hand.



The world is wide open to you today, Leo. Take advantage of all the great things on offer. You may not realize it, but you have a loyal fan club building in the wings. The things you say and do affect others. This is a fantastic day to take charge and lead others who seem to be floundering. Your grounded mind and solid perspective are incredible assets in any situation.



Your emotions may seem a bit muddy today, and you might not understand the reason why, Aquarius. Share your thoughts with others, and you should find that talking it out will help you sort through the maelstrom of feelings. If you need to, shift things down to second gear for a little more power. Take your time. Don't let others rush you into believing something that you know isn't true.

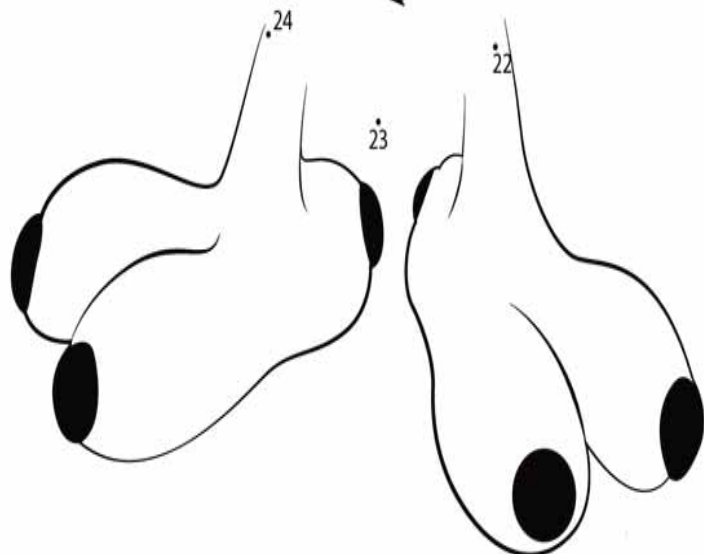


Speak your mind today, Virgo, but don't take offense if it seems like no one is listening. Don't push your viewpoint. Concentrate on your goals and aspirations, and feel free to push them to the limit. You might have been doing a lot of talking lately. Getting those ideas out there is a great thing. Now is the time when you need to lay some solid groundwork for those ideas to manifest.



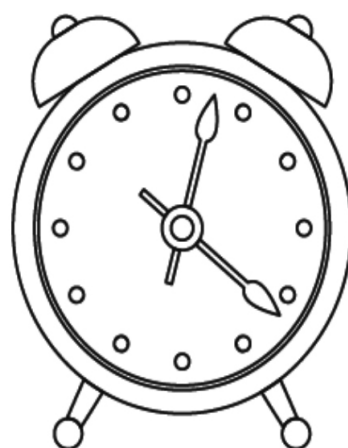
You're going to get it all today, Pisces. You may not be feeling especially powerful, and in fact, some around you may be trying to make you feel incompetent. Realize that this is a passing trend and you'll soon bounce back to your true self. Open your aperture up a little more than usual and let more light into your life. You can shoot some of the best shots today!

## Word Scramble



**WORD SCRAMBLE AND CROSS:** Unscramble each of the words on the left and write them in the grid. When the puzzle is complete the shaded letters going down will spell out what goes on in the Groundhog's den all winter long.

Figure 1: A schematic diagram of a 10x10 grid representing a 1000x1000 km² area. The grid is divided into four quadrants by a central vertical line. The left half is labeled 'LHOE' and the right half is labeled 'DIPERCT'. The top row is labeled 'RYAEBURF' and the bottom row is labeled 'EDN'. The grid is further divided into four quadrants by a central vertical line. The left half is labeled 'LHOE' and the right half is labeled 'DIPERCT'. The top row is labeled 'RYAEBURF' and the bottom row is labeled 'EDN'. The grid is further divided into four quadrants by a central vertical line. The left half is labeled 'LHOE' and the right half is labeled 'DIPERCT'. The top row is labeled 'RYAEBURF' and the bottom row is labeled 'EDN'.





## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Sam Sunderland of Red Bull KTM Factory Team performs in Morocco in 2019. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Keys holds off Aussie Open champ Kenin

**WASHINGTON:** Madison Keys made it through another tense finish on Saturday, letting one match point slip before finishing off Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin 6-3, 5-7 10-2 in the women's tennis event in Charleston, South Carolina.

Keys, who would have been defending her 2019 Charleston WTA title earlier this year if the coronavirus pandemic hadn't halted play on the women's tennis tour, had overcome a late lapse on Thursday in a 6-1, 6-7 (6/8), 10-4 victory over fellow American Caroline Dolehide.

She said the tight finishes in the 16-player team event, being played with strict social distancing protocols and with no spectators, would stand her in good stead when the WTA resumes in Palermo on August 3. She was up two breaks at 4-0 in the second set, and held a match point against Kenin's serve in the ninth game that she couldn't convert.

Keys dropped her next two service games but regrouped in the 10-point tiebreaker, saying she was "kind of giving myself a little bit of grace, knowing that I don't have those big points under my belt right now." "I know that these matches come in handy later, once the tour comes back and (I'm) just using that as an opportunity and not being too hard on myself."

The match pitted the top-ranked players to feature in the team event, which is being played on the same green clay courts that host the annual WTA Charleston event.

Kenin, who won her first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January, is ranked fourth in the world while Keys is ranked 13th.

"When you play someone like (Kenin) you know that she is going to up her levels, especially when it matters," Keys said. "She definitely did that at the end of the second set. 'A few of those points were me, but I thought I had a pretty clean tiebreaker.'" —AFP

# Nadal wavers over US Open and Roland Garros, Murray fears player safety

## Schedule is unrealistic, especially for veteran players

**LONDON:** As Rafael Nadal was described as waver over defending his US Open title or preparing for an assault on a 13th Roland Garros, Britain's Andy Murray said Saturday he fears for the safety of top players as tennis emerges from its five-month coronavirus lockdown.

Tennis has been on ice since mid-March and will not return until early August.

The US Open will run from August 31 to September 13 on the hard courts of New York with the rescheduled French Open on clay taking place just a fortnight after. In between are Masters events in Madrid and Rome, both on clay and also rescheduled from the spring.

"I have spoken to Rafa and he is doubting which tournaments to play," Nadal's uncle — and long-time former coach — Toni told ESPN Deportes.

"The schedule is unrealistic, especially for veteran players, who cannot compete for so many weeks in a row. 'I think it is a bit ugly what the ATP has done. This decision is totally against players like Rafa and Novak Djokovic.'"

Murray, meanwhile, expressed his fears over player safety in quickly switching from surface to surface. He suggested that a rankings rethink might be a solution. "It's not safe for players to go from the semis

or final in New York, quarters even, and then you're playing on the Tuesday in Madrid at altitude on the clay court, when players haven't competed for a very long time," said Murray. "None of the top players have competed a week before a Slam. The rankings, if you can keep the points as they are, could get a bit skewed."

Murray added: "It might be worth potentially looking at a two-year ranking for the time being so that the guys who did well last year and are not able to defend their points properly aren't punished."

"There are big tournaments every single week and it's going to be very difficult for players that are winning consistently to commit to that many events. I just think we need to be a bit careful with the rankings," Murray, returning from injury, went down to a 1-6, 6-3, 10-8 loss to Dan Evans in the semi-finals of the 'Battle of the Brits' tournament exhibition event in Roehampton on Saturday.

It was Murray's fourth match in five days in his first event since last November after being sidelined because of bone bruising on his pelvis. Murray also needed hip surgery last year, but the 33-year-old is confident he is heading back to his best. "My game is there, I just need more time to practise and prepare and I'll get there," he said. — AFP



## Tennis has been on ice

## Crusaders take rare chances to extend home run to 35

**CHRISTCHURCH:** Auckland Blues and Canterbury Crusaders remain the only unbeaten teams in New Zealand's Super Rugby competition, after the Crusaders won their grudge match against the Waikato Chiefs 18-13 in Christchurch yesterday.

In wet, greasy conditions, Will Jordan scored twice for the Crusaders to give them two wins from two matches and extended their unbeaten home record to 35. The Blues, who have played an extra game, notched their third win on Saturday when they held off a hard-fighting Otago Highlanders 27-24.

The Chiefs have now lost three from three, the Wellington Hurricanes have lost two from two and the Otago Highlanders have a win and a loss.

It was a battle of attrition in Christchurch with the tone set midweek when Crusaders prop Joe Moody talked of a "deep-seated hatred" of the Chiefs, which gave visiting coach Warran Gatland all the ammunition he needed for his pre-match pep talk.

With the constant rain forcing handling errors and dictating a bruising forward clash with lots of kicking by the backs, the result came down to the Crusaders capitalising on the two opportunities that went their way. "We knew it was going to be a confrontational game and we had to make sure the breakdown was really clean," Crusaders captain Codie Taylor said.

"A young fella like Will Jordan who's on his toes and just wants to get involved

and it's awesome to see the boys backing their skills especially in conditions like this," Chiefs captain Sam Cane called it a "classic arm wrestle" which came down to the Crusaders making the most of key moments.

"There wasn't much between the two sides and credit to the Crusaders, a couple of opportunistic tries, and a couple of moments can really swing a game," Cane said. The Chiefs, who beat the Crusaders earlier this year before the coronavirus pandemic brought a halt to global sport, could claim to have had the better of the first half territorially.

But, they could not break the Crusaders defence and their sole reward was a Damian McKenzie penalty.

The Crusaders, however, were rewarded from a lineup steal when the Chiefs were on attack.

Sevu Reece beat McKenzie in the air to reclaim Richie Mo'unga's clearing kick and sent Jordan away for the try.

Jordan's second try early in the second half came from another Chiefs error when an Aaron Cruden pass went into touch.

While the Chiefs switched off believing there would be a reset for a lineup, Reece took a quick throw-in to Jordan rushing up from fullback and he ran 30 metres untouched to the line. The Chiefs bagged 10 points early in the final quarter with a converted try to Sean Wainui and another McKenzie penalty but could not find a way through the Crusaders in the closing 10 minutes. —AFP



Rafael Nadal

## Meet Bangladesh's ground-breaking female coach

**DHAKA:** Not many Bangladeshis would quit a safe, public-sector job with perks and a pension to become a full-time football coach, especially not a woman in the deeply conservative nation.

But Mirona, Bangladesh's first female coach at club level, has done just that. And the 27-year-old, who comes from a humble background, has no regrets.

"I have always dreamt of being coach of a top team and one day even the national side," said Mirona, who stands barely five feet (1.5 metres) tall. The former Bangladesh international was speaking as she coached a group of male players — all much taller than her — on the outskirts of Dhaka.

Mirona was an assistant coach at Dhaka City Football Club, a second-tier team, last year when Bangladesh Navy invited her to coach its women's team. For most people in Bangladesh — especially the lower middle-class — this was like winning the lottery: a safe job with retirement benefits that many people can only dream of.

But a few months later, Mirona got a call from her former club, which is owned by a garment entrepreneur. She was offered the head coach's position with full freedom — from recruiting players to preparing the team — to fight for its promotion to the premier league.

Mirona, who grew up in a village among six siblings, did not think twice and she quit the Navy immediately, despite consternation from her senior military colleagues.

Dhaka City's administrative manager Robin Ahsan, also a former national player, said the club made the right decision in hiring Mirona. "Our team's performance has

improved since she joined us. Her honesty and hard-working attitude are tremendous," said Ahsan.

"She can mingle with players better than many male coaches in this industry," Mirona said she is having the time of her life, despite some barbs directed at her by male coaches. "At first many people negatively commented about me being in this profession. Many male coaches couldn't take that, a woman becoming a club head coach," she said. "I believe in quality. If I have it then I know I can prove that I can train up the players," she said.

Her parents and most of her siblings, who still live in rural Bagerhat district, some 250 kilometres (155 miles) south of the capital Dhaka, want her to settle down and get married. But Mirona says she is "married to football" and that for now the sport "is my life and my family".

She says she has largely avoided criticism from the community, adding that her parents' support played a big role when she started out as a footballer more than a decade ago. Mirona was a midfielder for the national side for eight years, and also played club football in the Maldives.

"There was no family pressure when I took up soccer. Besides, I love the sport so much that I overcome all the barriers," Mirona said. Mirona's return to Dhaka City electrified the training ground.

"We love being in her training sessions. We can feel our improvement day by day. She made us believe in fitness," said midfielder Ataur Rahman.

"She made me play in the midfield when I was a winger. But now I understand mid-



DHAKA: In this photo taken on February 5, 2020, head coach of Dhaka Football City Club, Mirona (R), reacts as she trains players on a field on the outskirts of Dhaka. —AFP

field strategy, thanks to her, very well," the 19-year-old said.

The club was so impressed that it signed two more female coaches, one for goalkeeping and one as an assistant, said team manager Ahsan. For now, Mirona's main focus is the battle for the title in the second-tier championship league, which usually starts in June but has been delayed due to the worsening coronavirus situation.

She has now gone back to her village where she spends much of her time watching matches of Barcelona and her favourite player, Lionel Messi. "He is technically so gifted. He is a superstar, yet so gentle. My ultimate goal is to watch him play a match at Camp Nou," she said. — AFP



## Sports

# Maguire sends Man Utd into FA Cup semi-finals with 2-1 win over Norwich

## Solskjaer's team finally awoke from their slumber

**NORWICH:** Ole Gunnar Solskjaer believes Manchester United's strength in depth will be crucial to their bid to win the FA Cup after they moved into the semi-finals with a 2-1 win over 10-man Norwich on Saturday.

Solskjaer's side had to work hard for their last-four place as Harry Maguire won it late in extra time at Carrow Road. Odion Ighalo's opener was cancelled out by Norwich's Todd Cantwell, but Canaries defender Timm Klose was sent off for hauling down Ighalo in the 89th minute. United gradually wore Norwich down and England defender Maguire pounced to extend their unbeaten run to 14 games in all competitions.

United, who won their 12th and most recent FA Cup in 2016, remain on course to reach the final for the second time in three years. "I'm delighted to be in the last four. Many of these players did not play the last game and now have 90 or 120 minutes in their legs," Solskjaer said.

"We made many changes so I didn't make it easy for the players. The game was not the greatest spectacle but I felt we kept the ball ok."

"It is great to have the option to rotate. Anthony Martial came on and did brilliant, but Odion Ighalo gives me a chance to rotate. "He is a proven goalscorer and played his part in both goals." Exactly 114 days after United won at Derby in the fifth round on March 5, the FA Cup returned following the coronavirus hiatus with the competition's first ever match in June.

Solskjaer made eight changes as only Maguire, Luke Shaw and Bruno Fernandes survived from the midweek Premier League win against Sheffield United.

United's stand-ins were out of sync for much of a first half that followed the pattern of many post-lockdown matches, both teams lacking energy and invention.

In a rare threat, Maguire had to stop Lukas Rupp's shot with an alert block after Cantwell's run opened up the visitors' defence.

Solskjaer's team finally awoke from their slumber after the interval and grabbed the lead in the 51st minute.

Luke Shaw's cross was helped on by Juan Mata and Ighalo sniffed out the chance, flicking an agile finish past Tim Krul from inside the six-yard box.

The Nigerian has scored in each of his four United starts, making it five goals in 11 appearances since he arrived from Shanghai Shenhua in January.

Norwich were playing in their first FA Cup quarter-final since 1992, but Canaries boss Daniel Farke had dampened the mood when he insisted they had no chance of winning the competition.

Despite Farke's pessimism, Norwich nearly equalised when Ben Godfrey stretched to reach Alexander Tettey's header from Emiliano Buendia's free-kick.

Norwich kept pressing and drew level in the 75th minute when Cantwell's 20-yard strike swerved away from slow-to-react United keeper Sergio Romero.

Suddenly in the ascendancy, Norwich almost won it in the final minutes when Buendia shot just past the far post. But with extra time looming, Fernandes' superb flick found Ighalo on the edge of the area and Klose's panicked response, hauling down the Nigerian, triggered a red card from referee Jonathan Moss.

Krul made good saves to keep out efforts from United



**LONDON:** Norwich City's English-born Northern Irish defender Jamal Lewis (L) clocks a shot from Manchester United's Nigerian striker Odion Ighalo during the English FA Cup quarter-final football match between Norwich City and Manchester United at Carrow Road in Norwich. — AFP

substitutes Paul Pogba and Mason Greenwood in a frantic finale.

With five subs allowed since the lockdown and an additional one given to teams who go to extra time in the FA Cup, United become the first English side to make six changes in the same game when Anthony Martial re-

placed Eric Bailly. United dominated extra time and Marcus Rashford's strike was pushed over by Krul, who made an even better save to stop Maguire's header. Maguire wasn't to be denied and in the 118th minute United's pressure finally told as the England defender poked home from close range after Ighalo flicked on. — AFP

## Man City will give Liverpool guard of honour

**LONDON:** Pep Guardiola on Saturday confirmed that his Manchester City side will give new Premier League champions Liverpool a guard of honour when they meet next week.

Liverpool's first English league title in 30 years was secured two days ago as second-placed City lost 2-1 at Chelsea.

The top two meet at the Etihad Stadium next Thursday and Guardiola, whose team had won the two previous Premier League titles, says Liverpool deserve to be given the traditional guard of honour.

"Of course we are going to do it," said Guardiola. "We are going to do the guard of honour of course."

"Always we receive Liverpool when they come to our house in an incredible way. They cannot complain and of course we are going to do it because they deserve it."

The Spaniard refuted any suggestion that his team have not been as hungry or motivated this season, despite Liverpool winning their 19th league title with a record seven games to spare.

"A team that wins eight titles (trophies) in the last three years have passion, in every single game, in

every competition, everywhere. No one in this country can say that," added Guardiola, who led City to a third straight League Cup triumph before the coronavirus lockdown in March.

"It is so difficult to do what we have done in the most difficult league in the world but you cannot win all the time. "There was one team that was exceptional and, when one team is exceptional, I say learn from them and congratulate them. It is simple."

"This team's passion and desire, it is going and going and going again."

City visit Newcastle on Sunday for their FA Cup quarter-final and are still chasing a treble of major trophies, leading Real Madrid 2-1 after the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at the Santiago Bernabeu.—AFP

## NWSL players kneel for anthem as tourney kicks off

**LOS ANGELES:** Players from the Portland Thorns and North Carolina Courage took a knee during the national anthem Saturday as the National Women's Soccer League kicked off team sports in the US following the coronavirus shutdown with its Challenge Cup in Utah.

Players, wearing shirts that read "Black Lives Matter" fanned out from the midline and knelt along with players on the sidelines during the pre-game playing of the anthem.

"We took a knee today to protest racial injustice, police brutality and systemic racism against black people and people of color in America," the teams said in a joint statement. "We love our country and we have taken this opportunity to hold it to a higher standard."

"It is our duty to demand that the liberties and freedoms this nation was founded upon are extended to everyone."

Kneeling for the anthem made former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick a lightning rod for controversy when he began the gesture to protest racial injustice in 2016.

While Kaepernick has been out of an NFL job for four years, his protest has gained backing as demonstrations against racial injustice and police brutality have swept across the United States after the killing of unarmed black man George Floyd while in custody of Minneapolis police in May.

Athletes from an array of sports have now backed kneeling for the anthem in peaceful protest when their leagues return from the shutdowns forced by the coronavirus pandemic.

With the game underway, players sported Black Lives Matter armbands with their uniforms. Forward Lynn Williams scored the game-winner for the Courage, heading in a cross from Samantha Mewis to secure the 2-1 triumph in injury time of the rematch of the league's 2017 and 2018 championship games.

North Carolina's Brazilian star Debinha had opened the scoring in the 75th only for Portland's Simone Naomi Charley to equalize in the 80th.

"Me and Sam have been working for years to try to get on the same page," Williams said. "I think in that moment, the clock is counting down, I like to think we have a mental connection. I just saw an opening and right when she looked up I thought 'she's going to cross it in.'"

While plans for the return of the NBA, NHL, MLS and Major League Baseball have garnered headlines, the NWSL on Saturday became the first pro team league in action.

It hasn't been smooth sailing for the tournament, scheduled to run until July 26, with the Orlando Pride pulling out last week after six players and four staff had tested positive for COVID-19.

The tournament is also missing some of the best-known US players, with Megan Rapinoe and two of her US teammates from last year's Women's World Cup champions — Christen Press and Tobin Heath — opting out.

But Rapinoe had her eye on the proceedings, tweeting her support for the pre-game protest.

"You love to see it," Rapinoe tweeted. "You love to see these women using their voice, demanding better for America, and for black people and people of color." — AFP

## Cagliari beat Torino to keep Europa League hopes alive

**MILAN:** New Cagliari coach Walter Zenga hailed "an important" victory as the Sardinians kept their Europa League hopes alive with a 4-2 victory over Torino in Serie A on Saturday.

Cagliari had been on a run of four consecutive defeats until former Italy international goalkeeper Zenga took over before the coronavirus lockdown in early March.

After beating SPAL on their return, Zenga's side clinched back-to-back wins and their first victory over Torino in nearly seven years.

"It's an important victory," said Zenga after his first victory at the Sardegna Arena. "The players are starting to have fun again."

Uruguayan international Nahitan Nandez opened the scoring after 12 minutes for the hosts with Charalampos Lykogiannis setting up Giovanni Simeone to tap in a second, confirmed after a VAR review six minutes later.

Immediately after the break, Belgian star Radja Nainggolan broke through, rifling in an impressive third from outside the penalty area.

Torino hit back with goals from Brazilian Bremer on the hour mark and captain Andrea Belotti off a corner on 66 minutes.

But Joao Pedro restored Cagliari's two-goal cushion from the penalty spot after Nicolas Nkoulou fouled Luca Pellegrini.

The Sardinians are now tenth — four points off the Europa League berths — and level on points with ninth-placed Hellas Verona.

Torino stay 14th, six points above the relegation zone. Title-chasing Lazio host Fiorentina later on Saturday needing a win to cut the gap on leaders Juventus back to four points.

Basement club Brescia look destined for a return to Serie B next season after throwing away a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw against relegation-rivals Genoa.

Alfredo Donnarumma scored for the hosts after ten minutes, with Alessandro Semprini getting his first Serie A goal three minutes later. But Genoa hit back with a pair of penalties, the first earned after Cristian Romero was fouled by Brescia teenager Andrea Papetti.

Iago Falque stepped up to slot in on 38 minutes, with Andrea Pinamonti converting the second on 69 minutes following a handball.

Genoa move one-point clear of the relegation zone, ahead of Lecce, who lost 4-0 to Juventus on Friday.

Brescia stay bottom with 18 points from 28 games, eight points from safety. — AFP



**BIRMINGHAM:** Aston Villa's English midfielder Jack Grealish (R) runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Wolverhampton Wanderers at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England on June 27, 2020. — AFP

## Dendoncker sinks Villa to boost Wolves' Euro bid

**BIRMINGHAM:** Nuno Espirito Santo backed Wolves to step up their bid to qualify for the Champions League after Leander Dendoncker sealed a 1-0 win at Aston Villa that lifted them into fifth place in the Premier League on Saturday.

Nuno's side made it three successive victories since the Premier League restart thanks to Dendoncker's clinical finish in the second half.

Wolves have yet to concede a goal following the coronavirus hiatus and are now just two points behind fourth-placed Chelsea and three ahead of sixth-placed Manchester United.

Both Chelsea and United have a game in hand on Wolves due to their FA Cup involvement this weekend. But with fifth place potentially offering Champions League qualification if second-placed Manchester City's European ban is upheld, Nuno's men are firmly in contention to play in the continent's elite club competition for the first time in 60 years.

"What's in front of us will be very tough but it's a welcome week to recover. We will prepare ourselves to compete and see what happens," Nuno said.

"I'm very happy for Leander Dendoncker, he gives so much to us and he truly deserves this moment."

Wolves are unbeaten in eight league games and have won three successive top-flight away matches

for the first time since 1980.

In contrast, their struggling midlands rivals Villa are without a win in eight league games and remain rooted in the relegation zone on goal difference.

Second-bottom Villa have now played a game more than the teams around them and have just six matches left.

With fixtures against Liverpool and Manchester United up next, Dean Smith's team are in serious danger of an immediate return to the Championship.

"We more than matched a top-six team today but they managed to get a goal from the edge of the box out of nothing and we didn't convert the chances we had," Smith said.

Smith had complained about the fixture schedule that saw his team playing for the fourth time in 11 days. His fears were confirmed when defender Matt Targett limped off with a leg injury after 10 minutes.

Wolves were on top and Joao Moutinho's free-kick was flicked goalwards by Raul Jimenez, but Orjan Nyland was well placed to save.

Matt Doherty led another threatening Wolves raid, the wing-back bursting into the Villa area to shoot into the side-netting. Villa captain Jack Grealish was being deployed in a central midfield role rather than his usual wider position and he tested Rui Patrício with a low strike from the edge of the area.

Nyland had got away with a horrendous mistake in Villa's first game of the Premier League restart when he carried the ball into his own net against Sheffield United, only for Hawk-Eye to fail to award the goal. Luck was on Nyland's side again when he threw the ball straight to Diogo Jota late in the first half, but the Wolves forward shot hurriedly over the bar with just the blundering keeper to beat.—AFP



# Sport Times

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**VIGO:** Barcelona's Guinean-Spanish forward Ansu Fati (C) challenges Celta Vigo's Ghanaian defender Joseph Aidoo (L) during the Spanish League football match between Celta Vigo and Barcelona at the Balaidos stadium in Vigo on June 27, 2020. — AFP

## Title blow as Barca draw with Celta

### In-form Atletico Madrid hold off Alaves

**MADRID:** Barcelona's title hopes suffered a hammer blow on Saturday as they were held to a 2-2 draw by Celta Vigo, handing Real Madrid the chance to move two points clear at the top of La Liga.

Luis Suarez twice put his team in front at Balaidos with his first goals since January but Iago Aspas bent in a late free-kick to earn Celta a draw, in what could prove a pivotal moment in the title race.

Barca face an even tougher test tomorrow against in-form Atletico Madrid, who held off a late fight-back from Alaves to win 2-1 at the Wanda Metropolitano. Atletico are third, now four points clear of Sevilla.

Before then, Zinedine Zidane's Real Madrid side will hope to take a big step towards becoming champions by winning away at bottom club Espanyol. Madrid own the superior head-to-head against Barcelona and have won four out of four since La Liga restarted earlier this month. With a

kinder run-in than the Catalans, the trophy appears to be Madrid's to lose.

"The feeling is a negative one," said Suarez afterwards. "If we want to stay in the title race and have it in our hands we have to win all our games. But we now have to rely on Madrid to drop points."

Suarez played his best game since undergoing knee surgery in January, his first goal coming from a surprise free-kick from Lionel Messi, who crossed when everyone expected him to shoot.

Yet Barcelona's defensive frailties hurt them again and Celta should even have won it in injury-time, only for Nolito to miss a golden chance at the back post. Celta climb to 16th, eight points clear of the bottom three. Quique Setien answered calls to start 20-year-old Riqui Puig and 17-year-old Ansu Fati, and the duo impressed, injecting energy and speed into Barca's attack.

Antoine Griezmann was left on the bench and

when he came on, he was on the side of the wall that Aspas breached with his free-kick to find the bottom corner.

Messi was at the heart of everything going forward and it was his early corner that Gerard Pique headed against the crossbar. With a free-kick on the edge of the area in the 20th minute and a 700th career goal in sight, Messi sized up the sprawl of Celta defenders in front of him.

But with everyone expecting a shot, Messi clipped a cross towards the post, where Suarez headed in. Messi even tried to score from a corner but Celta had chances too on the break. A poor clearance from Marc-Andre ter Stegen went unpunished by Fedor Smolov, who then overhit his pass when Aspas was clear. Brais Mendez slid through and hit the post.

The warnings went unheeded and when Arturo Vidal played a careless pass early in the second half,

Celta capitalised. Aspas sent Okay Yokuslu sprinting in behind and he squared for Smolov to tap in.

Celta look invigorated but Barca landed a sucker-punch. Denis Suarez lost possession under pressure from Fati, Messi played into Luis Suarez, who backed in, turned and drove into the far corner.

It looked like they had weathered the storm but Celta hit back again, Aspas curling around the side of the wall and into the corner with two minutes left. They should even have won it in injury-time as Denis Suarez teed up Nolito at the back post but a scuffed finish let Ter Stegen save on the line.

Atletico held on to beat Alaves as Joselu gave the visitors hope by converting an injury-time penalty after Saul Niguez's header and Diego Costa's spot-kick had put Diego Simeone's side in control.

Victory means Atletico have taken 13 from a possible 15 points since the resumption and ahead of their trip to Camp Nou tomorrow. — AFP

## US athletes, Carlos call on IOC to end protest ban

**LOS ANGELES:** United States athletes and 1968 Mexico Games icon John Carlos on Saturday called for the International Olympic Committee to scrap rules barring athletes from protesting at the Olympics.

In a letter sent to the IOC, the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee's athlete council requested that Olympic chiefs abolish its anti-protest regulation.

The letter was sent in partnership with former US sprinter Carlos, who was famously kicked out of the Mexico City games in 1968 for raising his fist on the

medal podium in a black power salute along with compatriot Tommie Smith.

"Athletes will no longer be silenced," the US athlete council wrote in the letter.

"The IOC and International Paralympic Committee cannot continue on the path of punishing or removing athletes who speak up for what they believe in, especially when those beliefs exemplify the goals of Olympism," the letter reads.

"Instead, sports administrators must begin the responsible task of transparent collaboration with athletes and athlete groups to reshape the future of athlete expression at the Olympic and Paralympic Games."

The issue of athlete protests at the Olympics came under renewed scrutiny following the wave of protests which erupted across the United States and around the world following the death of unarmed black man George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis on May 25.

The USOPC had been criticised after issuing rep-

rimands to US hammer thrower Gwen Berry and fencer Race Imboden, who both protested on the podium during last year's Pan-American Games in Lima to draw attention to social injustice.

Berry, who raised a clenched fist on the podium, and Imboden, who knelt down, were given a year's probation by the USOPC and warned they could face severe sanctions if they carried out similar protests again. International Olympic Committee rules bar any "demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda" at the Games.

In the weeks since the protests over George Floyd's death erupted, the USOPC has said it will review rules regarding athlete protests, saying officials had "failed to listen and tolerated racism and inequality." The IOC, which in January issued an updated set of guidelines regarding athlete activism, outlawing any kind of demonstration on the medal podium or field of play, has hinted it may be willing to soften its stance.

The IOC is backing discussions led by the Olympic

Athletes Commission to consider ways of allowing "dignified" shows of support for anti-racism initiatives.

The USOPC athlete council and Carlos had requested abolishing the rule against protests during a conference call with the IOC's Athletes Commission on Thursday.

In its letter to the IOC released Saturday, the US Olympians said freedom of expression was a "fundamental human right."

"The Olympic and Paralympic movement simultaneously honors athletes like John Carlos and Tommie Smith, displaying them in museums and praising their Olympic values, while prohibiting current athletes from following in their footsteps," the letter read.

"Carlos and Smith risked everything to stand for human rights and what they believed in, and they continue to inspire generation after generation to do the same. It is time for the Olympic and Paralympic movement to honor their bravery rather than denounce their actions." — AFP