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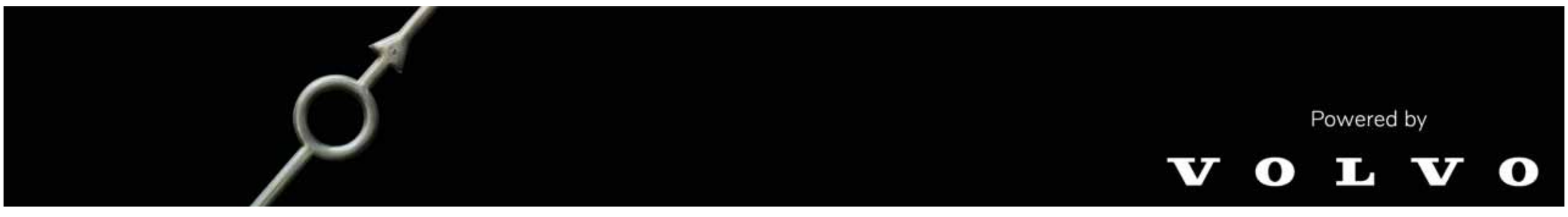


Passengers from 10 nations need health clearance to enter Kuwait

Kuwait closes zoo, bans shisha, postpones Gulf Games • No new coronavirus cases

Saudi bars Gulf citizens, residents; Iran deaths hit 77

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia yesterday barred citizens and residents of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries from entering the kingdom for 14 days after returning from outside the region due to coronavirus concerns, state news agency SPA reported. Travellers coming from any fellow GCC state - the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar - must spend 14 continuous days there and show no signs of the coronavirus before being granted entry, SPA said, citing an interior ministry source.

Saudi Arabia reported its first case of coronavirus on Monday in a Saudi national returning from Iran, which has reported the most deaths outside China, where the flu-like disease originated. The other GCC states have also diagnosed the infection in people who had visited Iran, totaling more than 145 cases. The Saudi health ministry said it was testing 70 people who had come into contact with the infected Saudi citizen, who remains in quarantine in hospital. The authorities have said he had not disclosed his visit to Iran upon returning home.

Continued on Page 24

By B Izzak, A Saleh and Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The civil aviation authority in Kuwait has asked passengers returning to Kuwait from 10 populous nations to produce health certificates showing they are free of the deadly coronavirus, otherwise they will be denied entry. The action will be implemented from March 8. In a statement posted on its Twitter account, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said passengers arriving from India, Egypt, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Syria and Lebanon, in addition to Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia must undergo tests for the coronavirus and produce certificates showing negative results before boarding planes to Kuwait.

The first seven countries, especially India and Egypt, have an estimated 2.5 million people, or almost three quarters of all expatriates, living and working in Kuwait. Authorities have already banned the entry of expats who recently visited several countries infected with the coronavirus, including Iran, Iraq, China, South Korea and others.

The civil aviation circular said passengers from the 10 abovementioned countries must carry out COVID-19 tests at medical centers approved by Kuwaiti embassies in those countries, which must be attested. In countries where there are no Kuwaiti missions, the tests must be attested by the health authorities in that country. The statement said passengers who do not produce the certificate will be barred from entering Kuwait and will be sent back on the same carrier, which will be fined. It said that Kuwaiti citizens arriving from these countries will undergo the necessary tests at Kuwait airport.

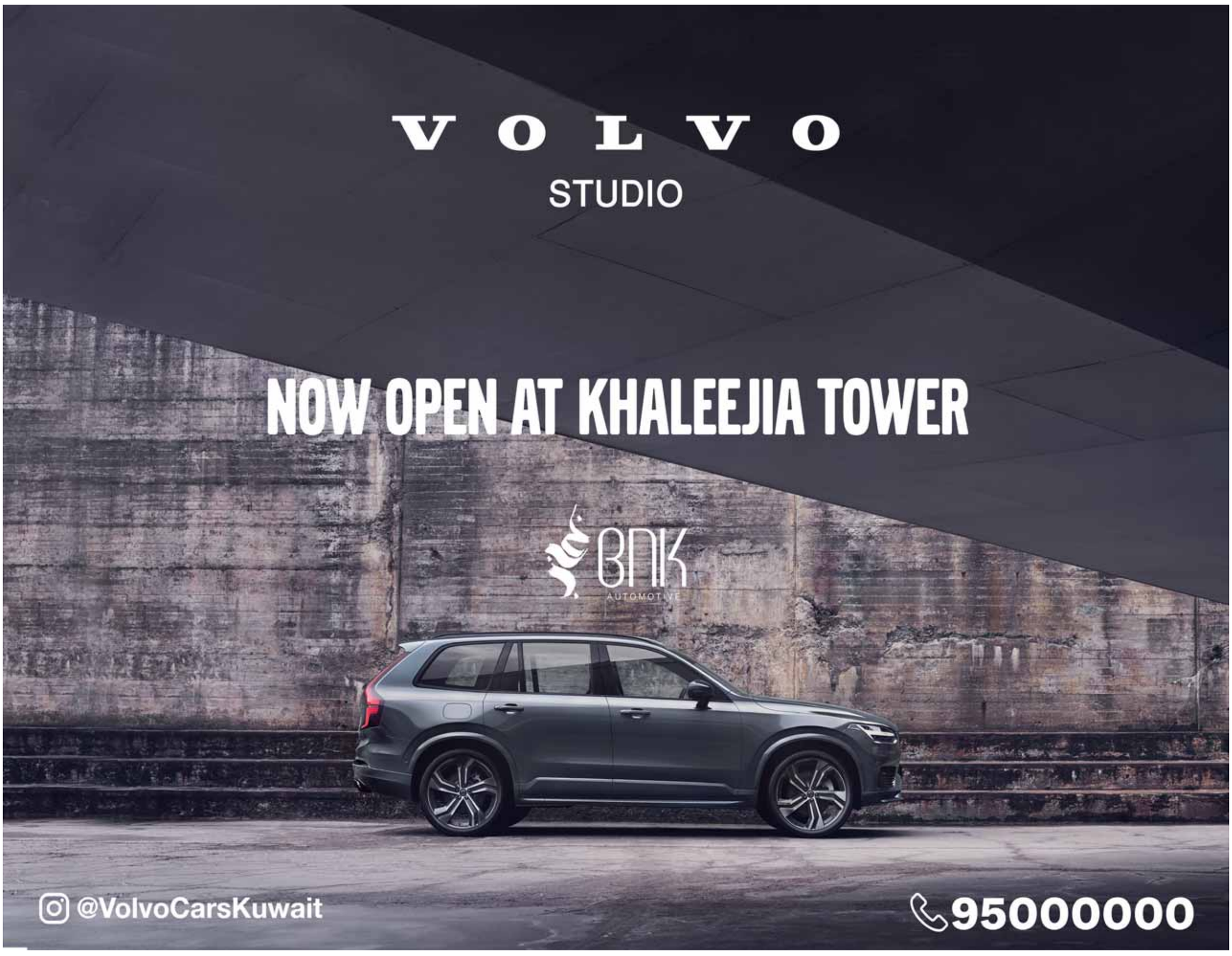
Kuwait has in the previous few days banned the entry of nationals from infected countries, stopped issuing visit visas to citizens of a dozen countries and introduced restrictions on visit visas for some nationalities. The ministry of health yesterday said no new coronavirus cases have been found, with the number of cases staying at 56. The ministry said it carried out tests on some 3,100 people, the overwhelming majority of whom have returned from Iran.

Kuwait yesterday postponed the GCC Games, a regional multi-sport tournament, from April to December. It also closed its zoo and the health ministry instructed cafes to stop serving the shisha water pipe, state news agency KUNA reported yesterday. The health ministry also called for using facemasks, gloves and sanitizers at barbershops, salons, spas and social and sports clubs.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said yesterday the ministry is preparing a fourth quarantine for people returning from infected areas, who are required

Continued on Page 24

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh are seen during a tour of the Khairan Resort quarantine center yesterday. — KUNA (See also Page 2)



Kuwait Fights Coronavirus

Early vacations, emergency leaves in Kuwait due to coronavirus downturn

Staff face pay uncertainty as they are asked to take leaves

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The sudden drop of sales at many stores throughout Kuwait has forced some retailers and restaurants to give emergency leaves and vacations to some of their staff. This was the response of some companies to cope with the current situation and prepare their staff for the busy schedule once the suspension of schools is lifted and things get back to normal.

"We asked several people to take advantage of the few days off and take the extra days off we owe them during these holidays, since we have very few customers," an HR official told Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity. "On busy days, we tell our employees to work extra hours in exchange for days off. Many of them want to take advantage of these extra days since we have almost zero customers, so we will give them these days off," the official added.

The government recently decided to close schools for two weeks and is mulling an additional suspension of two weeks. Several churches and community gatherings have also been suspended due to the coronavirus scare, including the celebration of high Mass, seminars and concerts. Many hotel ballrooms and rooms which were booked earlier have been cancelled due to the virus scare. In Kuwait there are 56 cases of coronavirus, most of them Kuwaitis who contracted the disease while on vacation to infected countries such as Iran and Italy.

"We have no work really, because my job is in a canteen inside a school campus. If there is no school, we have no work too. I hope they pay the salary despite having no work for two weeks," a staff member of an English school in Hawally said. Some schoolteachers also expressed apprehension whether they are going to get paid at the end of the month. "I hope they will not cut our salary - sometimes they do that - because they do not care," a schoolteacher said.

Employees of some private companies and retail shops are afraid that the regular commission they get monthly will be cut since they only have few customers. "It is almost clear that we will get no commission this month since we failed to reach our target sales," an employee said.

"At my store yesterday, there were no customers at all until 5 pm. We normally open at 10 am and close at 10 pm, with lots of customers from opening till closing. Now it's really depressing; no customers and no sales for us means no commission. I am paying my monthly amortization for a house I bought last year in the Philippines. I am afraid I will not be able to pay next month because I do not have extra money. We hope that everything will get back to normal; we are afraid our salaries will be affected too because of this," a fashion store supervisor said.

A major company running a chain of restaurants all over Kuwait has asked its employees to take early vacations since sales have dropped up to 70 percent. "Most of our stores are located in big malls, but all of them have reported a sudden drop in sales. So we advised our employees to take advantage of the slow days and take a short vacation," the company's HR department said.

KUWAIT: Vendors, wearing protective masks, sit outside their shop in Kuwait City on February 26, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwaitis' welfare comes first, says interior minister

KUWAIT: The safety and health of Kuwaiti nationals is of the utmost priority, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh said yesterday, amid growing concerns over the coronavirus outbreak. As he visited his fellow compatriots at the Khairan Resort; one of the country's designated quarantine facilities housing patients suspected of having been infected with the pneumonia-causing virus, the minister conveyed to them the Kuwaiti leadership's warmest greetings, chief among them His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He praised Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) for its "prompt" response to the public health crisis, giving equal credit to interior ministry personnel for their sacrifices for the good of the nation and its people. All of the quarantined patients are generally healthy and have not shown any symptoms associated with coronavirus, said Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah, who revealed that a fourth quarantine facility has now opened to take in travelers coming from Iraq. A coronavirus prevention plan the health ministry has formed is progressing smoothly, he added, saying that the current situation does not yet warrant panic. Highlighting the ministers' visits to the quarantine facilities, KRCS secretary general Dr Maha Al-Barjes heaped praise on the health ministry for the stringent measures it has imposed to contain this outbreak. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh and Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah pose for a group picture with volunteers at the resort. — KUNA photos

Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah poses with Kuwait Red Crescent Society volunteers.

Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh poses with Interior Ministry personnel and Kuwait Red Crescent Society volunteers.

Kuwait bans online learning platforms during school break

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education (MoE) yesterday warned all public and private schools against using remote online learning platforms, noting that violators will be held accountable, said educational sources, noting that some schools had started using such platforms on their own, which angered some parents. The sources added that MoE is fully committed to the Cabinet decision suspending classes and stressed that schools violating the ministry's regulations will be referred to the legal affairs department, be they Arab or foreign schools. The sources explained that upon direct instructions from MoE assistant undersecretary for private education Abdul Mohsen Al-Huwailah, Private Education Department Manager Sanad Al-Mutairi notified school administrations against using any of these platforms.

School preparations

Meanwhile, MoE assistant undersecretaries' council convened yesterday to discuss resuming school on March 15th and the measures followed to fight the coronavirus. The meeting presided by MoE acting undersecretary Bader Bejad came up with several recommendations, including cancelling the morning assembly in all schools, cutting breaks short, organizing the process of sales at school canteens to limit crowding in queues and constantly checking the temperature of students and staff using 1,100 devices that the Ministry of Health (MoH) will provide.

Recommendations also included activating the role of the MoE official spokesperson and assistant undersecretary for educational development affairs Faisal Al-Maqseed in order to unify the ministry's media statements. Notably, MoE officials are scheduled to meet MoH assistant undersecretary for prevention Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi and school health department manager Dr Dalal Al-Wadani to discuss preparations at various school clinics.

Common cold

Following up the case of the Ministry of Public Works' (MPW) Egyptian employee who was rushed to Jaber Hospital, then referred to Farwaniya Hospital for medical tests after being suspected to be infected with COVID-19 on returning from vacation, informed sources said that the employee turned out to be suffering from common cold. Notably, the man was coughing severely and sweating heavily, so his fellow employees panicked and reported him to MoH, which advised he should go to Jaber Hospital. When he went there, he was told to go to Farwaniya Hospital instead.

Courts complex

In the meantime, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fahd Al-Afasi yesterday inspected Jahra courts complex to make sure all coronavirus-related precautionary measures are strictly applied by both employees and visitors. The tour resulted in referring a number of the complex employees for administrative investigations for not performing their jobs properly.

Commerce Chamber

In other news, MP Riyadh Al-Adsani said "the infiltration of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry in state institutions should come to an end", adding he had filed a grilling motion in this regard in which he expressed disapproval that a representative from the chamber is present in many state bodies.

Trade registers fees

Well-informed sources said Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan will soon issue a decision amending a previous one concerning unifying the fees for issuing trade registers to be KD 7 for companies' data, KD 1 for 'To Whom It May Concern' certificates and KD 3 for inquiries. The sources added that in a bid to improve the business environment, the amendments will also include reducing foundation and commercial licenses fees by KD 7 each.

Manpower authority provides easier online transactions

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fishermen's Union Chairman Thaher Al-Suwayyan stressed that the Public Authority for Manpower has been cooperating with the union through the facilities it provides by making its online services easier and swifter. Suwayyan also hailed the efforts exerted by manpower authority director Ahmad Al-Moussa, adding that the authority's online app is a new part of e-government services that save time and effort, and most important of all, reduce long queues where infections may be passed from one person to another.

Moussa announced that fishing, shepherding and agriculture-related professions have been exempted from submitting payroll lists for using the As'hal (Easier) online service currently launched for employers to use in order to avoid queuing under the current circumstances and the coronavirus outbreak. Moussa added that thanks to the exemption, the online service received 6,635 transactions on March 1 and 2, 2020, including visa transfers, cancelling of work permits, transactions related to national labor, issuance of work permits for the first time, and work permit renewal.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 56 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which all are for Kuwaiti patients who returned to the country from Iran. All cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested over 3,000 people, the overwhelming majority of them have returned from Iran.

Countries' ban list

As a precautionary measure against the spread of the virus, Kuwait has suspended flights from and to China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Iraq and Iran. In the meantime, Kuwait sent charter flights to bring back Kuwaitis from infected areas, mainly Iran, Italy and Thailand, and test them before entering the country. Meanwhile, authorities have stopped issuing all kinds of visas (visit, work, etc) for Egyptian nationals, while allowing those who already have a visa to enter only after they take tests in Cairo before coming to Kuwait. Furthermore, Kuwait is requiring expatriates to obtain a complete medical examination (PCR-certificate) confirming that they are free from the coronavirus if they are traveling back to the country from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Georgia and Lebanon. In the meantime, Iraq has suspended flights from Kuwait, whereas Saudi Arabia stopped issuing umrah visas for all nationalities as a precautionary measures.

Precautions

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. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for the first two weeks of March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs). In the meantime, the Civil Service Commission suspended the biometric fingerprint system for staff attendance until further notice.

Hotlines

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

Meanwhile, 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).

Kuwait's Amir receives phone call from Iraqi Wisdom Movement Leader

Sheikh Sabah receives senior state officials at Bayan Palace

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a phone call yesterday from Ammar Abdulaziz Al-Hakim, leader of the Iraqi National Wisdom Movement. During the phone call, Hakim expressed his congratulations on the occasion of the 59th anniversary of Kuwait's National Day and 29th anniversary of Liberation Day. Hakim hailed the deep-rooted bilateral ties between the two nations, and mutual eagerness to boost cooperation, wishing His Highness the Amir everlasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to Kuwait, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir expressed thanks to Hakim for his sincere wishes, wishing him everlasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to Iraq's people.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. His Highness the Amir then received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Moreover, His Highness received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received yesterday at Bayan Palace Speaker Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah. — KUNA

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Kuwaiti FM phones Egyptian counterpart

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah called yesterday his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry. They discussed through the phone call the deep-rooted bilateral relations, as well as latest regional and international developments.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad visited Sheikh Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute, where he was briefed on a personnel promotion course. The Foreign Minister was apprised of the academic program of the training course, and the presentations of the participants. He wished them further progress and success in serving their country under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah

The Foreign Minister was accompanied by Director of Sheikh Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute Ambassador Abdulaziz Al-Sharikh, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran, and Assistant Foreign Minister and Office Director of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Advisor Ahmad Al-Shuraim, along with a number of ministry officials. —KUNA

Kuwait supports efforts towards oil market stability

KUWAIT: Kuwait backs all efforts aimed at restoring stability to the global oil market, said a minister yesterday, ahead of marathon talks OPEC and its allies will hold to decide whether to extend output cuts beyond their March expiry. The March 5-6 talks will also hammer out the best strategy possible to restore stability and balance to the global oil market, Kuwait Oil Minister Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel said as he departed the country en route to Vienna for the meeting. The spread of the novel coronavirus around the world has sent shockwaves through the global oil market, which is underprepared to deal with the economic ramifications of the rapidly spreading disease, added the minister. As the coronavirus outbreak stokes global worries over oil demand, some major OPEC members are considering bigger output cuts of up to one million barrels per day (bpd) than previously suggested, he said. As a key member of OPEC's monitoring committee, known as the JMMC, Kuwait is fully committed to stability and balance in the global oil market, the minister highlighted. OPEC and its allies had agreed to cut output by 1.7 million bpd in a deal that runs until the end of this month. — KUNA

Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel

Photo of the Day

KUWAIT: Vehicles pass by a billboard showing precautionary instructions against the COVID-19 coronavirus disease as they drive along a main highway in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

United Nations praises standards of Kuwait drug control department

GENEVA: A general view of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's session in progress. — KUNA

GENEVA: The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Regional Director Dr Hatem Ali affirmed that Kuwait's drug control department operates according to UN standards; most valuable for drugs prevention. His remarks came on the sidelines of UN commission's 63rd session on the matter. He said yesterday that the Office worked for the past two years with 18 agencies in Kuwait to set the drug control strategy, which will confront drug scourge comprehensively in accordance with UN standards. Ali commended Kuwait's partnerships, mainly the one with the Interior Ministry and Supreme Council for Planning and Development to fight and monitor drug-bearing problems. The session, which kicked off on Monday, considers resolutions addressing, among other topics, strengthening forensic detection capability for synthetic drugs and measures of prevention. A delegation from the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry, including director of international control at the drug control department Colonel Fahad Al-Bader is partaking in the session.

Dr Hatem Ali

Environment conservation

Meanwhile, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights and the environment said that Kuwait's dedication to environment conservation is evident in the initiatives the country has launched over the matter. Kuwait has made notable contributions towards environment protection efforts, including passing stiff legislation to fight water and air pollution, David Boyd said amid the UN Human Rights Council's main annual session yesterday. These efforts have largely paid off in delivering "tangible" results to ensure a healthy and sustainable environment, added the UN official, pointing out that a looming environmental crisis would prove detrimental to the entire world. Kuwait is committed to all UN conventions aiming to protect the environment, said the country's permanent delegate to the UN Jamal Al-Ghunaim, adding that the UN's recognition serves as solid affirmation. — KUNA

Man hospitalized after camel bites hand that fed it

KUWAIT: An Asian man escaped death after he was bitten by a camel on his arm. The victim was medevacked to hospital for treatment. The man was feeding the animals when he was suddenly attacked by the camel. He is in stable condition.

Nationality forgery

Criminal court convicted two Saudis for forging Kuwaiti nationalities and sentenced one to seven years and the other 10 years in jail. One of the convicts was terminated from his job and has to pay back KD 43,000. He was also fined KD 86,000. The prosecution accused the first suspect - a fugitive - of forging the birth certificate, civil ID and passport and getting Kuwaiti nationality for the second accused using a different name. The second convict was accused by the prosecution of forging Kuwait nationality and adding other people to his file claiming they were his children in exchange of money, in addition to renewing civil ID and passports of his children.

Police offenders sentenced

The criminal court ordered two Syrian teenage girls be sent to social care homes for three months for filming and insulting a traffic policeman who issued them a citation.

Under the influence

Hawally police arrested a Kuwaiti and an Iranian after first attempting to help them with their vehicle, only to discover they were under the influence of drugs. They also had drugs on them.

Illicit act

Electronic crimes officers arrested two men who appeared in a video engaged in an illicit act. The two were kissing in the video, so they were identified and arrested.

Deportation

Two expats were sent to the deportation department for driving without a license. One was arrested in Hawally and the other in the Capital governorate.

Physical assault

A mosque preacher accused a Kuwaiti in Rawda of beating him near the mosque he works in. The citizen was arrested.

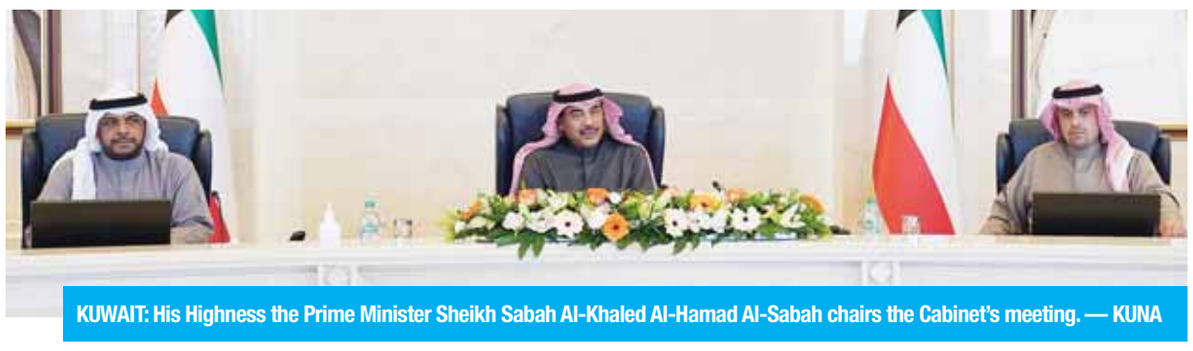
— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai and Al-Anbaa

Kuwait's Cabinet commends cooperation to fight coronavirus

Ministers praise Saudi measures to protect pilgrims from coronavirus

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet on Monday expressed thanks and appreciation to citizens and civil institutions for providing assistance and putting all their capabilities at the disposal of the government in its procedures to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In its weekly meeting, the Cabinet praised the precautionary measures taken to combat the virus and limit its spread in the country, expressing appreciation to all government bodies for the tireless efforts at all levels in order to secure the safety of citizens and residents and maintain their health. During the meeting, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah affirmed that the government will spare no effort in confronting the spread of the virus. His Highness the Prime Minister said that the Cabinet is constantly following the developments of coronavirus and that it will spare no effort in taking all measures to confront the spread of the virus. The Cabinet members were briefed in this regard to an explanation provided by the relevant ministers on the efforts made by government agencies to contain the damage resulting from the spread of the virus worldwide.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the frontline workers in healthcare who work around the clock to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled conveyed the appreciation of His Highness the Amir to the government and people of Kuwait at the beginning of the weekly Cabinet meeting. His Highness the Amir commends the selfless sacrifices being offered by various teams to combat the virus and ordered honoring the frontline individuals morally and materially, His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed. The Cabinet keeps a close watch on the progress of the combat against coronavirus and will spare no effort to implement the necessary precautions, he vowed. The Cabinet members reviewed the progress of the combat against COVID-19 inside and outside Kuwait, including the interagency cooperation, the preventive measures, and the screening of, and caring for, the new arrivals from abroad. They also discussed the results of the recent visit to Kuwait by a delegation from the World Health Organization where they verified the consistency



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

between the measures adopted by the Ministry of Health against COVID-19 and the WHO standards.

In the meantime, the Cabinet praised the precautionary measures taken by Saudi Arabia to combat the spread of the coronavirus by announcing the suspension of entry to the Kingdom for the purposes of Umrah temporarily to prevent the spread of the virus. The Cabinet expressed Kuwait's understanding and support for all precautionary measures taken by the Kingdom that are in line with the provisions of Islamic Sharia to preserve the Holy Land, religious sentiments, and the safety of pilgrims. Also during the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh briefed the Cabinet on the outcomes of the 37th session of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council, held in Tunisia recently, and the outcome of his meeting with Tunisian President Qais Saeed. — KUNA

stc concludes sponsorship of Maker Faire 2020

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company- stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has concluded its platinum sponsorship of the 2020 Maker Faire. stc sponsored the exhibition for the second year in a row which was held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at the Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref.

Within its framework to support and encourage the youth to explore their creativity, innovation and curiosity, stc stressed in a closing statement, that it will continue to support such initiatives that bring to light new ideas and concepts that benefit the development of society, especially in the field of technology with stc being a pioneer in digital transformation in the market today. stc's role in supporting platforms similar to the Maker Faire fall in line with the Company's goal to enable the digital transformation in Kuwait and drive sustainable technology.

The Company also said that sponsoring this initiative provided stc with a gateway to interact with the makers, evaluate their work and provide them with constructive feedback on how to enhance their products and pursue their goals. stc representatives that attended the faire got a chance to offer participants their expert opinion on overcoming challenges and further expanding the makers' concepts to market.

Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "The concepts displayed at the faire are a great representation, and fall hand in hand with the core objectives that stc aims to achieve by educating and empowering the youth to promote the development of our economy. stc's social responsibility strategy focuses on platforms that encourage the youth in developing the key skills that will allow them to transform their thoughts into reality. In return, we believe that this will grow and encourage the diversification of our economy in the short and long term through local initiatives within both the public and private sectors."

Jasem expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the active participation and level of engagement witnessed by both visitors and makers, which led to the successful turnout. She also thanked Kuwait Investment Company (KIC) for annually organizing and hosting a globally renowned platform that attracts participants from all around the region, as well as the meticulous organization of the event.

Kuwait is the first GCC country to exclusively host

the faire, gathering tech enthusiasts, educators, creators and inventors to display their creations and share their talents to the public. Since it was held during the month of February, the Maker Faire's celebrations were aided by the county's celebration of National and Liberation Days.

ABK holds retail banking engagement day

KUWAIT: To ensure constant engagement with its employees, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently hosted its Retail Banking World Class Day for staff. Held at the Salwa Al-Sabah Ballroom, the event brought ABK's staff together under one roof and provided an insight into the differing areas and responsibilities of Retail Banking.

This event allowed employees to exchange their opinions freely and learn about different areas within retail, through fun activities. Designed as an exhibition with each stand representing a different segment of retail, employees had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the objectives and practices of each unit. In addition, senior employees from other business areas were present and shared their professional experiences with attendees.

Commenting on the activity, Stewart Lockie, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK said: "Employee engagement is essential to ensure staff are given the platform to provide feedback. We chose to create a less formal and relaxed environment to allow them to be more forthcoming. We did not want to make it seem like a normal business meeting, hence we chose the exhibition format. We are proud of our employee's level of engagement, dedication and enthusiasm. It is always a pleasure to see employees strive to give the job all that they have."

Turkey, Russia face off in Syria as fighting escalates

Page 9

US votes in crucial primaries after ex-rivals back Biden

Page 8

YUEYANG: People wearing face masks walk along a street in Yueyang, Hunan province yesterday. The world has entered uncharted territory in its battle against the deadly coronavirus, the UN health agency warned, as new infections dropped dramatically in China yesterday but surged abroad with the US death toll rising to six. —AFP

Coronavirus changes global habits

Handshake? No thanks: Try a direct gaze, or a hand gesture

PARIS: Say no to a handshake, refuse every peck on the cheek and definitely avoid hugging. Instead, try a direct gaze, or maybe a hand gesture. Around the world people are changing their habits at work, home and in worship to reduce the risk of contracting the new coronavirus and prevent it from spreading any further. AFP looks at changes in behavior due to the coronavirus, which has killed more than 3,000 worldwide.

China

In Beijing, the capital of the country where the outbreak began, red hoardings tell people not to shake hands but to join their own hands together in a sign of greeting. Loudspeakers tell people to make the traditional gong shou gesture - a fist in the opposite palm - to say hello.

France

Newspapers have been filled with advice on how to replace kissing on the cheek - an everyday greeting in France, even between people who have only just met - and handshaking, a common formality at work. Etiquette expert Philippe Lichtfus, who has been widely cited in the media, says handshakes are a relatively recent development that began in the Middle Ages. He says simply looking into a person's eyes can suffice as a greeting.

Brazil

Brazil's health ministry has recommended that citizens not share metal straws used to consume the caffeine-rich South American drink mate, also known as chimarrao. Meanwhile a kiss - even if not on the mouth - is totally advised against as a greeting.

Germany

In a sign of the times, Germany's Interior Minister Horst Seehofer rebuffed Chancellor Angela Merkel's attempt to shake hands with him on Monday, smiling and keeping both his hands to himself. They both laughed and Merkel threw her hand up in the air before taking a seat.

Spain

The outbreak could hit one of Spain's most cherished traditions - the kissing of sculptures of the Virgin Mary in the week leading up to Easter. With just a month to go before the week starts, the ritual could be banned. "It is one of the measures that is on the table," said national health official Fernando Simon. During the holy week, the faithful queue up to kiss the hands or feet of sculptures of Mary and the saints, seeking their protection.

Romania

Romania's Martisor festival marks the beginning of spring when talismanic strings and flowers are handed out, often from men to women. But the government has passed on a message to people urging them to hand over the flowers and talismans without the accompanying kiss. "Let's give the flowers but not the kiss," said Nelu Tataru, state secretary at the health ministry.

Poland

In Poland, one of Europe's most Catholic countries, the faithful are allowed to take "spiritual communion" instead of consuming the communal bread - or it can be taken in the hands rather than the mouth. The faithful have also been asked not to dip their hands in holy water when going in and out of the church and instead make the sign of the cross.

Iran

Is the footshake the new handshake? In Iran, where 66 people have been killed by the virus, a video has gone viral showing three friends meeting - hands in their pockets, with two of them wearing masks - tapping their feet against each other as a greeting. A similar video in Lebanon shows singer Ragheb Alama and comedian Michel Abou Sleiman tapping their feet against each other while making kissing noises with their mouths.

New Zealand

Some educational institutions in New Zealand have temporarily abandoned the Maori greeting known as the hongi — which involves two people pressing their noses together. Wellington polytechnic WelTec said that instead of staff greeting new students with a hongi, its welcome ceremony would instead include a waiata, or Maori song.

Australia

New South Wales Health Minister Brad Hazzard urged Australians to kiss with caution and suggested a pat on the back instead of a handshake. "It's a very Australian thing to put your hand out to shake hands, for example. I would be suggesting to the community... it's time that Aussies actually gave each other a pat on the back for the time being - no handshaking," he said. "There are other things that can be done - I'm not going to say don't kiss, but certainly you could be exercising a degree of care and caution with who you choose to kiss."

UAE

The United Arab Emirates, as well as Qatar, are advising citizens to stop the traditional "nose to nose" greeting. The UAE also said that people shouldn't shake hands or kiss. Greet each other "by waving only", it said.

United States

NBA stars have been given a series of recommendations including that players interacting with fans should bump fists rather than high-five and avoid taking items such as pens, balls and jerseys to autograph, ESPN reported. Some players have already taken steps to limit their exposure to the virus. Portland Trail Blazers star CJ McCollum said he was no longer signing autographs because of the outbreak. "Make sure y'all washing y'all hands with soap for 20 or more seconds & covering ya mouths when you cough," McCollum wrote on Twitter.— AFP

Pope 'tests negative for coronavirus' as Vatican ups controls

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis, who is suffering from a cold, has tested negative for the coronavirus, an Italian newspaper reported yesterday, as Italy battles Europe's worst outbreak. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni did not respond to an AFP request for comment on the Messaggero newspaper report, and sources said it was unlikely the Holy See would comment on the pope's health yesterday.

Francis cancelled a Lent retreat for the first time in his papacy this weekend, after axing all public meetings at the end of last week over the cold. "Unfortunately, a cold forced me not to take part this year," the 83-year-old pontiff told a crowd on Saint Peter's Square after suffering two coughing fits while reciting his traditional Angelus Prayer.

The new coronavirus has spread from China across much of the world, Italy among the worst affected with over 2,000 people infected and 52 deaths. The Argentine-born pope has been seen coughing and blowing his nose for days. With rumors swirling that the pope himself had come down with COVID-19, the Vatican issued a formal denial on Sunday. "There is no evidence to suggest a diagnosis of anything other than a slight ailment," a spokesman said. Francis was tested for the disease last Wednesday after showing cold symptoms following a period outside in the wind. The Vatican has been projecting an image of calm, releasing a pre-recorded message from the pope yesterday and stressing that he was still scheduled to deliver his Angelus Prayer on Sunday. But the vast crowds that usually throng Saint Peter's Square, and the queues that snake in front of the museums are gone.

The Vatican is set to supply staff working in close contact with tourists with masks and gloves, the Messaggero reported. The pope has enjoyed a life of good health despite losing part of a lung as a young man and suffered from sciatica-a nerve condition that causes pain in his hip. Yet he rarely cancels appointments and normally takes extra time to mingle with supporters and the faithful.

The Vatican itself has had at least one coronavirus-related scare. The offices of a French priest working at the Vatican's ministry of communication were disinfected on Monday, following the quarantine of his community of 20 priests from Rome's Church of St Louis of the French. They had been in contact with a priest who returned to Paris in mid-February and tested positive for the virus last week. On Monday, an internal letter leaked to the press was sent to the staff at the ministry, saying the ministry employee was in isolation but "is well and showing no symptoms".—AFP

ROME: Pope Francis wipes his nose during mass which opens Lent, the forty-day period of abstinence and deprivation for Christians before Holy Week and Easter at the Santa Sabina church in Rome.—AFP

South Africa bus accident kills 25

JOHANNESBURG: Twenty-five people died yesterday when a bus rolled down a steep embankment in South Africa's coastal Eastern Cape province, the country's transport minister said. "Reports indicate that the driver lost control of the bus, which subsequently rolled down a steep embankment, leaving 25 dead and approximately 62 injured," Fikile Mbalula said in a statement. "To lose so many lives in a single accident is devastating and shocking."

The bus was carrying more than 80 mainly elderly people travelling between Butterworth town and a settlement named Chebe. The minister said most of the victims were going to cash-in their government-issued social grants. President Cyril Ramaphosa said the dead were mainly pensioners and young students. "This tragedy leaves our country deeply saddened and forces us to focus yet again on the need for transport providers and other road users to exercise care and consideration on our roads," said the president.

"From this incident we see the need for us to be especially considerate towards elderly persons and children who depend on others to be conveyed around communities and the country," he added. The crash was the deadliest accident in the province since 2015 when 35 people lost their lives. The bus was travelling on a gravel road near the village of Qolweni when it overturned. "The driver lost control of the vehicle and it rolled down a very steep embankment," provincial transport department spokesman Unathi Binqose said.

Binqose said checks would be carried out if the bus had been roadworthy as "it may be a contributing factor". Despite having one of the most developed road networks on the continent, South Africa has among the highest rates of road accidents in the region owing to speeding and poor maintenance of some vehicles and roads. The Road Traffic Management Corporation data shows that more than 14,000 people died in road crashes on South African roads in 2017.— AFP

Netanyahu claims Israel election 'win' despite corruption charges

Palestinians dismayed, angered by campaign pledges

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emerged victorious yesterday after Israel's third election in a year despite a looming corruption trial, dismaying the Palestinians who were angered by his hardline campaign pledges. Monday's election left the veteran right-winger in prime position to form a government and end a year of political deadlock, after similar votes in April and September proved inconclusive.

The central election committee said it had counted 90 percent of the vote, with breakdowns of the result in the media showing Netanyahu's Likud party with 36 seats in Israel's 120-member parliament. That would mark the party's best-ever result under Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister and its first to be indicted in office. Netanyahu's bloc, which includes ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, is likely still one or two votes short of a majority, but his party spokesman said it was confident of luring defectors.

Likud's main challenger, the centrist Blue and White party, was projected to win 32 seats. Counting its centre-left allies as well as the mainly Arab Joint List alliance, the anti-Netanyahu camp was expected to control 54 to 55 seats. While there remains no guarantee that Netanyahu can form a coalition, he hailed Monday's election as a "giant" success. "This is the most important victory of my life," he told supporters in Tel Aviv where people danced, sang and shouted "Bibi, king of Israel," using the premier's nickname.

Netanyahu campaigned on his tough position towards the Palestinians and on expanding Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank. He also pledged to annex the Jordan Valley, a key part of the West Bank that Palestinian see as crucial for their future state, if he won. Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the exit polls showed that "settlement, annexation and apartheid had won".

Trial casts shadow

Blue and White's leader, ex-military chief Benny Gantz, admitted "disappointment" with the result. But he stressed that regardless of the final tally Netanyahu is still due to go on trial on March 17 after being charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust. "In two weeks, he will be in court," Gantz said. While Netanyahu will likely be tapped by President Reuven Rivlin to form a government, he has no immediate path to a 61-seat majority. The projections indicate that the secular, nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party won six or seven seats and may again be able to play kingmaker, the same position it was in following the April and September votes.

Party leader Avigdor Lieberman served as defense minister in a previous Netanyahu government and his support would easily put Likud over the crucial 61-seat line. But after the September vote Lieberman said he would only join a government of national unity - ruling out cooperation with the ultra-Orthodox parties allied to Netanyahu and the Arab camp that backed Gantz. "There is no choice but to wait for the final results and only then conduct a situation assessment," Lieberman said after the exit polls were released.

'Strong national government'

In a statement, Likud said Netanyahu had spoken to all the heads of right-wing parties and "agreed to form a strong national government for Israel as soon as possible". Netanyahu will now begin talks with a number of opposition MPs and parties in a bid to encourage defections, though the process could take weeks.

Likud party spokesman Jonathan Urich told Israeli army radio yesterday they had already reached out to a number of lawmakers. "I believe that soon enough we'll find the missing seats from the other bloc," he said. "People on the other side understand it's the right thing to do." Bolstered by US support, Netanyahu campaigned on building thousands more homes in Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territory, even though they are considered illegal by the international community. In January, US President Donald Trump unveiled a controversial peace plan approving Israel's annexation of settlements and swathes of land in the West Bank, sparking Palestinian outrage. Gantz, a security hawk, was also supportive of the Trump plan, sparking criticism from the left that he did not offer a real alternative to Netanyahu. The vote was held amid the coronavirus outbreak, with special polling stations set up for thousands of Israelis under quarantine who were met by election staff in full protective suits and masks.—AFP

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara address supporters as confetti falls upon them at the Likud party campaign headquarters in the coastal city of Tel Aviv yesterday. — AFP

Iranians fearful and struggling to cope as virus spreads

TEHRAN: Cooped up at home for days because of Iran's coronavirus outbreak, Parmis Hashemi was desperate, so her mother took her shopping - even though they only had one mask between them. Despite their fears of catching the disease, the mother and her 13-year-old daughter were out pounding the unusually quiet streets of downtown Tehran on Monday afternoon as officials announced yet another spike in deaths and infections.

Schools have been shut across the country as part of measures aimed at stemming the rapid spread of COVID-19, the virus that has now claimed 66 lives out of more than 1,500 cases in Iran. "It's extremely hard for us but I can't take a taxi or bus to go somewhere even if my feet hurt" from walking, said Parmis' mother Shahpar. "My daughter was depressed at home, so I brought her out shopping to cheer her up," said the 45-year-old housewife. "They (the children) haven't been going to school, and they are scared of the virus," she said.

As she spoke, cars and buses flew past at irregular intervals after sling-shotting out of Vanak Square - one of the capital's biggest intersections where traffic normally snarls at that time of day. Gone too was the pollution that usually shrouds the sprawling city of more than eight million, thanks at least in part to the reduced congestion. That was of little comfort to 39-year-old architect Pejman, who expressed fears about the spread of the novel coronavirus. "The disease has disrupted our lives. We are scared. There are no masks, and no alcohol for disinfection. People need them but cannot find them," he said.

'People are frightened'

Businesses are suffering too. Pejman said some of his work colleagues were suspected of having the virus and ordered to stay away at home. "It has had a bad effect on our company. They now test our temperatures every morning before we enter the office," he said. The economic slowdown was tangible on the streets.

Shop assistants passed the time by playing games, cleaners meticulously wiped down the doors and windows of empty restaurants, and taxis sat idle on the side of the road waiting for customers. "The streets are empty," Jamshidi said as his taxi driver colleagues shared a meal and engaged in rowdy banter. "It's my job to... take people where they need to go, but nobody is leaving their homes to go anywhere," he said.

"If the situation remains like this, we won't have enough money to eat. Yesterday I earned very little and so far today I haven't had any passengers."

Hamid Bayot, who owns a juice shop on Vanat Square, said sales were down by 80 percent since the coronavirus outbreak emerged last month. And that is despite steps the business has taken to reassure its customers. "We disinfect everything three times every day. But people are frightened and haven't been buying anything from us," said Bayot. "If the situation remains like this, we'll go bankrupt and we will have to close our shop."

In an apparent bid to cure the boredom of youths, state television has been airing light-hearted shows on its typically austere news channel. It has shown blooper home videos in the past few days and on Monday it broadcast a Pink Panther cartoon as well as the trailer of The Revenant, a film starring Leonardo DiCaprio. "We have to stay at home and do nothing. We can't see our friends and we are no longer happy," Parmis said grudgingly through the face mask given to her by her mother. — AFP

TEHRAN: A handout picture provided by the office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday shows him watering a freshly-planted tree in a garden during a ceremony marking the week of 'Natural Resources' in Tehran. — AFP

Global supplier India curbs drug exports

BENGALURU: India, the world's main supplier of generic drugs, has restricted the export of 26 pharmaceutical ingredients and the medicines made from them, including paracetamol, as the coronavirus outbreak plays havoc with supply chains. Indian drugmakers rely on China, the source of the virus outbreak, for almost 70% of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for their medicines. Industry experts say they are likely to face shortages if the epidemic drags on.

"Export of specified APIs and formulations made from these APIs... is hereby 'restricted' with immediate effect and till further orders," the Director General of Foreign Trade said in a statement yesterday, without explaining the extent of the restrictions. The list given by the government, of 26 APIs and their formulations, account for 10% of all Indian pharmaceutical exports.

"Irrespective of the ban, some of these molecules may face shortages for the next couple of months," Dinesh Dua, chairman, Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India said. "If coronavirus is not contained, then in that case there could be acute shortages," Dua said. The council falls under the federal commerce ministry.

Separately, the government said yesterday it had detected "high viral load" in six people who had been in contact with a patient who contracted the virus in the capital New Delhi. The people have been kept in isolation and their samples are being sent to India's National Institute of Virology for confirmation, the government said in a statement. Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to quell public fears. "There is no need to panic," he said in a tweet.

"Had an extensive review regarding preparedness on the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus. Different ministries & states are working together, from screening people arriving in India to providing prompt medical attention," he added. On Monday, India reported three new cases of coronavirus, including an Italian national in the western Indian state of Rajasthan. The patient in New Delhi was being closely monitored but stable, the government said. The Indian ministry of health did not immediately give further details on the cases when contacted by Reuters. — Reuters

After Malaysia's political turmoil, questions over trials in 1MDB scandal

KUALA LUMPUR: Hours after Malaysia's change of leadership at the weekend, former prime minister Najib Razak posted a picture of himself smiling and giving a thumbs up on social media. It was tagged as a gesture of satisfaction with a restaurant meal, but many Malaysians saw it as a bigger sign of happiness from a man who was driven from office in 2018 and is now on trial for corruption over the multi-billion 1MDB fund scandal.

With the return of Najib's party to power after a week of political turmoil, and therefore being in a position to influence policy, some Malaysians were questioning whether it will affect the handling of the high profile trials. Mahathir Mohamad, who was ousted as prime minister in last week's realignments, accused Najib and his party of engineering last week's political crisis to help them avoid conviction. "If Najib can be part of the government now, he can do all sorts of things to free himself," the 94-year-old told a meeting with his party's youth members on Sunday.

Cynthia Gabriel, director of the Kuala Lumpur-based anti-corruption watchdog C4 Center, said: "The worst case scenario is that these grand corruption trials will be dropped through judicial interference and more." Najib has said he hopes to continue to fight his case in court. In his first message, new Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said fighting corruption would be a priority for his government, whose biggest backer in parliament is Najib's United Malays National Organization (UMNO). The prime minister made no specific mention of the trials.

Muhyiddin took over on Sunday from Mahathir, who had ousted UMNO in 2018 amid anger over the 1MDB scandal that stretched from Malaysia to the Middle East to Hollywood. Najib, his wife, UMNO's leader and others were quickly put on trial for corruption. The US Department of Justice estimates $4.5 billion was misappropriated from Malaysia's 1MDB sovereign fund between 2009 and 2014. US and Malaysian authorities say over $1 billion stolen from 1MDB flowed into Najib's personal banks accounts.

The case has also led to scrutiny of Goldman Sachs, which Malaysia has accused of misleading investors over bond sales totaling $6.5 billion that the bank helped raise for 1MDB. Three units of the bank have pleaded not guilty. Najib is facing five trials, the first of which - involving seven charges linked to $10 million misappropriated from a 1MDB unit - is expected to reach a verdict within months. He has consistently denied wrongdoing, saying he was misled by Malaysian financier Jho Low and other 1MDB officials.

Multiple trials

Among 10 others on trial for corruption are Najib's wife Rosmah Mansor and UMNO party leader Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. Muhyiddin's office did not respond to a request for comment on what would happen to the trials now. Najib did not respond to requests for comment but told reporters on Monday that he hoped to continue fighting his case in court. "We'll go through the court process," he said. "It's the only credible way."

A senior UMNO official echoed Najib's sentiments, saying the new government should not interfere in the courts. "If we interfere by withdrawing cases of those charged, the people would say the government does not respect the law and the judicial body is not independent; so, don't mar that concept," party secretary-general Annuar Musa told state news agency Bernama. Although Najib was quick to post congratulations to Muhyiddin on social media, their relationship has been strained.

Muhyiddin was fired by Najib as his deputy in 2015 after questioning his handling of 1MDB. That led Muhyiddin to form the new party with Mahathir that brought them both back into office before it was torn apart in the recent political fighting. Najib had not been directly involved in coalition talks even if he had tried to encourage Mahathir's downfall from behind the scenes, said one source close to the new prime minister who did not want to be identified. "Muhyiddin doesn't want to deal with Najib," the source said. Muhyiddin pointedly emphasized "efforts to stamp out corruption" in his first public speech on Monday.

Despite his fall, Najib is an elected lawmaker and remains a senior figure within the UMNO party. He has a large popular base. His Facebook page has 3.9 million likes compared to 3.6 million for Mahathir's and fewer than 1 million for Muhyiddin's. Workers at the Indian Muslim restaurant where Najib posted his selfie after Muhyiddin's swearing-in said he had been in a particularly good mood on Sunday. "No matter how busy with politics, don't forget to eat first. Love yourself first," Najib's Facebook post said. —Reuters

PUTRAJAYA: Photo shows the Malaysia's new Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, signing a document on his first day at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya. — AFP

India defends citizenship law

NEW DELHI: India defended its contentious citizenship law as an internal issue yesterday as the UN rights chief sought to join efforts challenging the legislation in the country's highest court. The law, which makes it easier for religious minorities from three neighboring countries to get Indian citizenship - but not if they are Muslim - was the spark for last week's deadly riots in New Delhi.

More than 40 people were killed and hundreds wounded in the worst sectarian violence to rock the capital in decades. That followed street demonstrations that have occasionally turned deadly across the Hindu-majority country since the law was approved by parliament in December. "The Citizenship Amendment Act is an internal matter of India and concerns the sovereign right of the Indian parliament to make laws," foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said.

"We strongly believe that no foreign party has any locus standi on issues pertaining to India's sovereignty." Dozens of petitions filed in the Supreme Court, including by social rights activists and political parties, are challenging the law's constitutionality. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet informed India on Monday of its application to be a third party in one petition brought by a former civil servant, Kumar said.

The court is hearing all the petitions together. Kumar said the government was confident in the legality of the law, which was approved by parliament in December. The UN application came as the government yesterday summoned the Iranian ambassador over tweets by Foreign Minister Javad Zarif condemning the "wave of organized violence against Indian Muslims" in the Delhi riots. Kumar said a "strong protest was lodged against the unwarranted remarks", adding that they were "not acceptable".—AFP

US votes in crucial primaries after ex-rivals back Joe Biden

Key endorsements dramatically boost Biden's hopes

HOUSTON: Americans voted yesterday in primaries that play a major role in who will challenge Donald Trump for the presidency, a day after key endorsements dramatically boosted Joe Biden's hopes against surging leftist Bernie Sanders. The backing of Biden by three of his ex-rivals marked an unprecedented turn in a fractured, often bitter campaign.

The Democratic establishment is desperate to unite around a moderate candidate who can triumph over frontrunner Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist, and face President Trump in November. Voting begins as early as 6:00 am in some areas. As the five remaining Democratic candidates made their final pitch to voters in 14 states, Biden was capitalizing on momentum he seized at the weekend with a blowout victory in South Carolina.

The 77-year-old former vice president is consolidating support among moderates eager to blunt the advance of Sanders, who could take a potentially insurmountable lead in the all-important delegate count after Super Tuesday. Biden has been riding high with key endorsements that built into a political crescendo on Monday. He took the stage at a rally in Dallas, Texas joined by Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, who told the crowd she was ending her campaign and endorsing Biden for president.

Biden later introduced Beto O'Rourke, who made a big splash early in the Democratic race but then fizzled out. O'Rourke remains popular in Texas, the state with the largest delegate haul after California. "We need somebody who can beat Donald Trump (and) in Joe Biden we have that man," O'Rourke said, peppering his short speech with Spanish.

Hours earlier Pete Buttigieg, the 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, threw his support behind Biden a day after quitting the race himself. "I'm looking for a president who will draw out what is best in each of us," Buttigieg said in Dallas, with the former vice president at his side. Biden appeared reinvigorated by the support, and he repeatedly flashed his million-watt smile.

But he delivered a tough message intended to warn voters away from the seductions of Sanders, who has called for nothing less than a "political revolution" in America. "Most Americans don't want the promise of a revolution," Biden told supporters. "They want results. They want a revival of decency, honor and character."

Main challenger

The trio of endorsements could be political gold for a resurgent Biden. His campaign was on life support after disappointing showings in the first three state contests, but he is suddenly the main challenger to Sanders on the biggest day of the primary campaign. Buttigieg had strong showings in predominantly white early states but was unable to mobilize black and Hispanic support.

Klobuchar's campaign never gained traction. By endorsing Biden, she could deprive Sanders of a large delegate claim in her home state of Minnesota. New York billionaire Mike Bloomberg, who yesterday competed in his first primaries, has also spread his message to voters in a lavish multi-state ad blitz.

'Massive effort' to stop Sanders

Flush with money for ads, an extensive organization, and momentum in the polls, Sanders has focused on multiple states including delegate-rich California, biggest prize. In Utah, he said there was "a massive effort" trying to stop his campaign. "The corporate establishment is coming together, the political establishment is coming together," he added. "They are really getting nervous." Sanders leads Biden nationally in polling. Among his backers is Jessica Chadwell, 24, who works for Planned Parenthood in Burlington, Vermont, where Sanders served as mayor decades ago. "He is fighting for all these things the younger generation needs: fair pay, affordable housing, equal rights," she said. — AFP

ARLINGTON: Voters wait in line to cast their ballots during the presidential primary in Houston, Texas on Super Tuesday. — AFP

Tornadoes leave 8 dead in Tennessee

WASHINGTON: At least eight people have died after tornadoes ripped across Tennessee yesterday, destroying buildings and toppling powerlines in the capital of Nashville hours before the southern US state was to vote in Super Tuesday primaries, officials said. Melisa Hucks of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency reported that the statewide death toll was "eight at this time" and that fatalities had occurred across four counties. The Nashville Fire Department said that it was responding to reports of approximately 40 structure collapses around the city.

Smashed buildings, downed power lines and debris could be seen across the city, where a tornado tore through shortly after midnight. "A line of severe storms passed through Tennessee and has caused major damage to buildings, roads, bridges, utilities and businesses in several counties," TEMA said. "Nashville is hurting, and our community has been devastated," Mayor John Cooper wrote on Twitter, urging people to lend a helping hand.

Tennessee is one of 14 states voting in the crucial Super Tuesday primaries, which will help determine the Democratic nominee for November's presidential election. Voting was to start an hour late in Nashville and Wilson County due to the tornado damage, with several alternate polling sites set up, local newspaper The Tennessean reported. Governor Bill Lee said he and his wife were sending "prayers across Tennessee this morning as our state suffers from last night's storms." Nashville is best known as the epicenter of the United States' country music scene. — AFP

NASHVILLE: A man walks by a storm damaged pickup truck on Underwood St yesterday in Nashville, Tennessee. —AFP

Putin to enshrine God heterosexual marriage in the constitution

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has submitted to parliament a number of proposed constitutional changes, including amendments that mention God and stipulate that marriage is a union of a man and woman. Putin unleashed a political storm in January by proposing an overhaul of the constitution, the first changes to the basic law since 1993.

Shortly afterwards, the lower house unanimously approved the constitutional reform bill in a first reading after less than two hours of debate.

Ahead of a second and key reading set for next week, Putin submitted new proposals running to 24 pages, State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said. "The president's amendments are the result of his dialogue with representatives of all factions (and) civil society," he said in comments released by the State Duma, or lower house of parliament. The proposed amendments enshrine the mention of Russians' "faith in God" and also stipulate that marriage is a heterosexual union, deputy speaker Pyotr Tolstoy said.

Most Russians identify as Orthodox Christians, but Russia is officially a secular state. The new amendments also ban giving away Russian territory, and any call promoting such a move would also be outlawed. A member of a Kremlin-appointed constitutional working group, actor Vladimir Mashkov, has suggested that such an amendment would ensure that Russia keeps Crimea - which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014 - or the Kuril Islands - disputed with Japan for decades - even after Putin quits power.

Historic truth

The amendments also seek to protect historic truth. The Russian leader has repeatedly railed against attempts to "rewrite" history and complained that the West does not fully appreciate the huge losses sustained by the Soviet Union during World War II. Russia is set to hold large-scale celebrations this year, 75 years after the Allied victory over the Nazis. Tolstoy praised the draft legislation. "I believe that most of the proposals that have been discussed have been taken into account," he told AFP, adding he was glad the president supported his heterosexual marriage proposal.

The 67-year-old Putin, who has dominated Russia for 20 years, has sought to cast himself as a defender of traditional values and rally support by promoting anti-Western and conservative ideas. Putin's fourth stint in the Kremlin has seen a strong pivot to more conservative policies, with groups promoting fundamentalist Orthodox Christian views gaining more legitimacy and liberal viewpoints attacked as Moscow's relations with the West have soured.

The second reading of the constitutional reform bill is expected to take place on March 10, said a spokeswoman for Pavel Krasheninnikov, co-chief of the constitutional working group. She said the text of the amendments was expected to be published later this week. A public vote on the constitutional reforms has been set for April 22. Analysts see Putin's plan to change the constitution as beginning preparations for succession when his current term ends in 2024, while the opposition says the Kremlin strongman wants to remain leader for life.

The reforms will transfer some authority to parliament, including the power to choose the prime minister, and strengthen the role of an advisory body called the State Council, potentially headed by Putin. More than 22,000 people rallied in central Moscow at the weekend to call on Putin not to stay in power indefinitely. According to the Levada Center, an independent pollster, a quarter of Russians will back the constitutional proposals, while 56 percent said they were not sure why the changes were needed. — AFP

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a Security Council meeting in Moscow. —AFP

High-fives, hugs and kisses discouraged

NEW YORK: As news broke of more cases of coronavirus spreading across the United States, T-Mobile had a novel response to the threat: fewer hugs, kisses or high-fives. The Bellevue, Washington-based wireless provider is "encouraging personal distancing at work" - and has "all sorts of sanitation products readily available," according to the company.

Elsewhere, US companies are embracing new ways to protect their employees. Hollywood executives are reconsidering red carpet premiers; CNN head Jeff Zucker is personally reviewing intercontinental travel. Facebook Inc is going so far as to take the "social" out of social media and has banned non-business visitors to its offices.

Across the US business landscape, companies from AT&T Inc to Home Depot Inc are scrambling to manage the risk of a virus that only a week ago was isolated to China, Iran, Italy and South Korea and has now spread to 53 countries. Major tech companies are pulling out of big industry events. Twitter Inc, which late Monday strongly encouraged employees to work from home, also said its Chief Executive Officer Jack Dorsey will no longer appear at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas later this month.

By Monday evening, Facebook announced it will not attend the event. Others are cancelling their own conferences. Alphabet Inc's Google on Monday scrapped its biggest conference for cloud computing customers, scheduled for next month in San Francisco, following the cancellation last Friday of two other events.

Facebook last week shelved its annual developer conference and has also restricted travel to China, South Korea and Italy. The Menlo Park, Calif social media giant went one step further and discouraged all gatherings of more than 50 attendees. Job candidates shouldn't bother showing up at the office. Interviews are being rescheduled as video conferences where possible, according to one source familiar with the plans.

In addition to banning travel to and from Asia and Italy, Home Depot also implemented a 14-day stay-at-home policy for employees who have returned from those regions within the past two weeks. On Wall Street, at least two major banks are testing technologies and compliance systems in preparation for employees who may be asked to work from home or off-site locations in coming weeks. — Reuters

London mayor launches re-election campaign

LONDON: London Mayor Sadiq Khan yesterday launched his re-election campaign, attacking Prime Minister Boris Johnson for failing to tackle a crisis in affordable housing in the British capital. Conservative party leader Johnson was mayor before Khan, running local services for London's nearly nine million people between 2008 to 2016. But Khan, from the main opposition Labor party, said his predecessor failed to tackle rough sleeping and a shortage of lower-cost housing. He accused the prime minister of repeatedly blocking his attempts to introduce rent controls, which he argued would help ease the problem.

"When I arrived at City Hall we inherited a terrible mess, the pipeline was empty because Boris Johnson only cared about building luxury flats for overseas investors," Khan said. Rough sleeping had doubled during Johnson's time in charge, he claimed. The May 7 vote, at which Khan wants to secure a second four-year term, would be a "referendum on rent controls", he said, vowing to secure the powers to do so from central government.

Khan wants to set up a private rent commission in the capital and introduce measures to keep costs down, citing New York and Berlin as examples. The London Renters Union, which represents thousands of private renters, said the plan could transform the housing system and stop sky-high rents. But it pointed out: "Rents need to be linked to incomes and simply settling for caps on rent rises won't ease the real suffering London's renters face."

Independent mayoral candidate Rory Stewart, a former Conservative minister, accused Khan of four years of inaction. "Instead of doing his job, with the powers he has, to build affordable houses, the mayor has concocted a hollow fight with government to simply freeze rents at unaffordable levels," he tweeted. Property and rental prices are higher in London and southeast England than elsewhere in Britain because of higher demand and population density.

According to a BBC briefing on housing last month, one in 53 people were homeless in London — the highest in the country. In Newham, in east London, the figure rises to one in 24. The number of rough sleepers in England and Wales has more than doubled since 2010, government statistics suggested, with 8,655 people on the streets in London in 2018. A lack of social housing has led to long waiting lists for local authority homes. In Newham, for example, more than 25,000 households were waiting for fewer than 600 properties. — AFP

LONDON: London Mayor Sadiq Khan speaks during an event to launch his re-election campaign in London yesterday. London is set to vote in a mayoral election on May 7, 2020. — AFP

Turkey and Russia face off in Syria as fighting escalates; plane shot down

UN fears worst humanitarian crisis of Syria war

REYHANLI: Turkey shot down a Syrian government warplane yesterday over northwest Syria, where fighting has intensified in recent days, bringing Turkish and Russian forces close to direct conflict in the battle over the last swathe of Syria still held by rebels. It was the third Syrian warplane Turkey has shot down since Sunday in an escalating campaign against President Bashar Al-Assad's forces. NATO-member Turkey supports the rebels, while Assad relies on his superpower ally Russia.

With more than a million refugees amassing since December on the Turkish border, the battle for Syria's Idlib province has brought what the United Nations fears might be the worst humanitarian crisis of the nine-year-old Syrian civil war. "This relief operation has been overwhelmed. There needs to be more of everything. The first thing is money," UN Under-secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock told reporters at a trans-shipment point for supplies in southern Turkey.

Fighting was raging north of the strategic crossroads town of Saraqeb, recaptured on Monday by Syrian troops, one of several times the town, which controls access to Idlib city and Aleppo, has changed hands in recent weeks. Syrian state media said the army was now combing the town and had dealt heavy blows to fighters still holed up in hideouts on its outskirts. A state television correspondent said Turkey was firing artillery to halt the government advance.

Rebels said the government was aided by thousands of Iranian-backed Lebanese and Iraqi militiamen brought from other areas to help storm the town after two days of failed attempts. A Syrian general who has defected to the opposition, Ahmad Rahhal, said a Russian announcement on Monday that it had deployed military police in Saraqeb was aimed at blocking Turkey from trying to help rebels reclaim the town.

Humanitarian crisis

Turkey has sent thousands of troops and armored vehicles into northern Syria over the past month to fight back against Assad. Last week, a Syrian air strike killed at least 34 Turkish soldiers in the deadliest attack on the Turkish army in decades. Moscow, which has anti-aircraft missiles in Syria, has since warned Turkey that it cannot guarantee the safety of Turkish planes in Syrian skies. The Turkish Defense Ministry said yesterday that its forces had shot down a Syrian L-39 ground attack jet. Syria's state-run SANA news agency confirmed the plane had been shot down over Idlib province by missiles fired from Turkish warplanes.

Russia, Turkey edge closer to direct conflict

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Russia's Vladimir Putin are due to meet on Thursday to seek ways to avert conflict. Asked about the prospect of direct clashes with Turkey, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: "We hope that we're able to absolutely minimize this risk thanks to the close contact between the two countries' militaries." Turkey, already home to 3.6 million Syrian refugees, says it cannot take any more. It wants to push Assad's forces back to lines agreed in a 2017 deal brokered with Russia and Iran, which left a buffer zone in northern Syria near its border.

Since last week, Turkey has thrown open its frontiers with Greece and Bulgaria to allow migrants to enter the EU, a move apparently aimed at putting pressure on European countries to back it in Syria. Some 10,000 migrants have tried to cross into Greece by land in recent days and more than 1,000 have arrived by sea at Greek islands, creating fears of a repeat of the 2015-2016 migration crisis, when more than 1 million people crossed into Greece and 4,000 drowned in the Aegean.

AL BARA: Photo shows an aerial view of destruction in the village of Balyun in the southern part of Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. — AFP

The opposition says Syrian government forces are deliberately attacking civilians to provoke them to flee. A rocket attack believed to have been fired by the Syrian army on a residential quarter of Idlib city left at least nine civilians dead, including five children, according to Osama Idlibi, a rescuer in the opposition-run Syrian Civil Defense. Overnight Russian and Syrian jets killed at least 10 people in the town of Al Foah in what residents said was a spike in strikes on several towns, including Binish and the outskirts of Tatanaz in Idlib province.

Russia and its Syrian army ally deny indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and say they target jihadists. US Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft, in Turkey inspecting the relief efforts, announced $180 million in additional funding for the humanitarian crisis in Idlib. "Humanitarian aid is only a response but the solution is an immediate ceasefire," Craft told reporters. "This is not something that just happened. This is planned by the Assad regime," Craft said. "It is cruel and brutal." — Reuters

Tamil women fight for land a decade after war ends

KEPPAPILAVU: Chandraleela Jasinthan was a school teacher in a northern Sri Lankan village when, in the last days of the civil war, she and her neighbors were forced to flee their homes by the army. More than a decade later, their land is still held by the military. Jasinthan and dozens of other women in Keppapilavu have been staging a protest for more than three years at the entrance to the army camp which they say sits on their ancestral land, one of the longest protests in the country.

"The men say they have to work, that they are afraid of the army. But for us women, this land is our security, our right - if we do not fight for it, who will?" said Jasinthan, 43. "We lost everything in the war; why must we also lose the land we have lived on for generations? These are our homes, our livelihoods," she said. Thousands of people were killed in the war, which ended in May 2009 after nearly three decades. Many of those who fled or were forced from their homes in the north and east of Sri Lanka had their properties seized, according to human rights groups.

Former President Maithripala Sirisena vowed to return all private land held in the northern and eastern provinces by Dec 31, 2018. But the deadline was not met, according to land rights groups. In Keppapilavu, nearly 350 acres of land is yet to be released, according to the People's Alliance for Right to Land. About 85% of the private lands in the north and east held by armed forces "have already been handed over to the legitimate owners," said Chandana Wickramasinghe, an army spokesman.

KEPPAPILAVU, Sri Lanka: Maria Jeyaseelan sits outside her daughter's home on Jan 5, 2020 in northern Sri Lanka with her family after being uprooted during the war by the navy from the island they had lived. — Reuters

The remaining land is of "tactical importance" and is vital for national security, he said. "Hence releasing the remaining lands will depend on the situation subsequent to the accessing of security parameters. Therefore a timeline is not a matter that can be discussed at present," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in emailed comments.

Uprooted

Across the world, land is increasingly seen as a root cause of conflict. In the aftermath of war, military occupation of land is a frequent occurrence, and access to and control of land and natural resources can be a contentious issue for years. Dysfunctional legal systems, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, and the loss of documents and land records make it particularly hard to resolve land disputes during and after a war, according to researchers.

In Sri Lanka's embattled north and the east, Tamils - an ethnic minority - were uprooted several times during and after the decades-long conflict by both the separatist forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan army. The army set up camps and high-security zones in confiscated land, thwarting the return of those who fled. Even where land was released, there was inadequate assistance for land clearance and livelihood aid, non-profit Human Rights Watch said in a 2018 report.

Some land is also being used for commercial purposes including agriculture and tourism, it said. Lands held by the army are "fully utilized for welfare purposes and recuperation purposes," Wickramasinghe said. Chellamma Singharatnam, a spry 87-year-old who fled her home in Puthukkudiyiruppu, about 100 kilometers southeast of Jaffna as the army advanced in May 2009, had to resort to a hunger strike to get her home back. When she and her family returned after nearly three years in camps for the displaced, they learned that the army had taken over both her house and her daughter's home.

After several petitions, Singharatnam went on a hunger strike outside the district secretariat office. Other women from the village joined her, and the strike lasted a month. In the end, the army capitulated and returned her homes, although they were completely destroyed, she said. "There was trash everywhere, the furniture was broken, even the doors and windows were gone," she said. "We had to borrow money, and only managed to repair one house so far. We had no assistance, and don't know when we can fix the other house," she said, seated outside her home.

Occupied

During the war, tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils sought refuge in neighboring India, particularly in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. The United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR) began facilitating their return to Sri Lanka from 2011, and has so far helped 8,529 refugees return, said Menique Amarasinghe, UNHCR's country representative. Several thousand refugees have also returned by themselves. Nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils still live in India, many in camps.

More than two-thirds of returning refugees are landless, according to human rights groups. About 30,000 people are still considered internally displaced, many of whom have lost their homes and land. Restitution of land is critical to peace-building as it recognizes violations and ensures the restoration of rights, including freedom of movement and an adequate standard of living, according to the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), a think tank in Colombo. "In the Sri Lankan context, land is a critical aspect of one's identity and belonging," said Bhavani Fonseka, head of research and advocacy at CPA.

"Reparations, including the restitution of land if implemented correctly, can contribute to long-term peace-building efforts and prevent further marginalization of warñaffected communities," she said. Sri Lankan authorities promised returning refugees a small plot of land, but it can be a long wait. Others have taken matters into their own hands. About 100 former residents of the northern island of Iranaitivu, who had been uprooted in 1992 by the army, had been living on the mainland for years, returning to the island to fish and harvest coconuts.

While they had hoped to return to their homes in 2009 after the war ended, the Sri Lankan Navy said the island was of strategic importance, and barred them from returning. After numerous petitions, women - particularly widows who had struggled to make a living without easy access to the island - staged a year-long protest from 2018, demanding the return of their land. Last year, supported by the local Catholic church, former residents of Iranaitivu boarded more than two dozen boats to the island and occupied their land peacefully.

The Navy conceded, retaining a small area for its use. More than 100 former residents now live on the island. They are campaigning to get the Navy off the island entirely, said Maria Jeyaseelan, one of the protest leaders. "We are once again able to farm and fish and earn a living, even if we are not living as well as before," she said. "But our wish is to get back all our land."

For Jasinthan and the other women protesting for the return of their ancestral land in Keppapilavu more than 100 kilometers away, women like Jeyaseelan and Singharatnam give them hope. Jasinthan has been summoned to court several times - including the day after her husband died - because of the protests. She said she has received threats, and has installed security cameras at her home and acquired a pair of guard dogs. "As a widow, it is harder to go against the army. But this land is all we have, so we are going to continue to protest till we get it back," she said. — Reuters

Taleban attacks Afghan army bases, throwing peace talks into doubt

KABUL: The Taleban carried out more than a dozen attacks on Afghan army bases, officials said yesterday, hours after ending a partial truce and throwing into doubt peace talks between Kabul and the insurgents. The intra-Afghan negotiations are due to begin March 10 according to a US-Taleban deal signed in Doha on Saturday, but a dispute over a prisoner swap has raised questions about whether they will go ahead.

QUETTA: Activists of Jamiat Ulema-e Islam Nazryate party march as they celebrate the signing agreement between the US and the Taleban during a rally in Quetta. — AFP

The agreement includes a commitment for the Taleban to release up to 1,000 prisoners and for the Afghan government to free around 5,000 insurgent captives-something the militants have cited as a prerequisite for talks but which President Ashraf Ghani has refused to do before negotiations start. The row has highlighted the tough road ahead, with the Taleban's decision to end a partial truce Monday complicating matters further. A defense ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP of overnight attacks on government forces in 13 of the country's 34 provinces. Two soldiers were killed in one of the attacks that happened in southern Kandahar province, a government statement said. An attack in Logar province near Kabul-which was not included in the defense ministry official's tally-killed five security forces, the provincial governor's spokesman Didar Lawang said. The halt to the limited truce, which began on February 22, ends what was a welcome reprieve for ordinary Afghans who have born the brunt of the deadly violence.

But experts said the move was unsurprising as both sides seek to exploit whatever leverage they hold to force the other's hand. "Of course violence will go up, was bound to happen. no surprise Ghani balking on prisoner release: 1 of his few levers," Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, tweeted. Kabul-based analyst Ahmad Saeedi told AFP the uptick in attacks reflected the insurgents' belief that "they have to keep the battlefield hot to be able to win on the negotiating table, as they did with the Americans."

'So far, so good'

Ghani's government last week sent a delegation to Qatar to open "initial contacts" with the insurgents but Taleban spokesman Suhail Shaheen yesterday said the militants would not meet Kabul's representatives except to discuss the release of their captives.

Apparent differences between the Doha agreement and a joint US-Afghan declaration released in Afghanistan underline the obstacles facing negotiators. The US-Taleban deal committed to the release of prisoners while the Kabul document only required both sides to determine "the feasibility of releasing" captives. In a statement, the UN's Afghanistan mission called for "continued reduced violence to maintain & enhance an environment conducive to the start of intra-Afghan negotiations". Since the deal signing, the Taleban have been publicly claiming "victory" over the US.

Speaking to Fox News, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo played down the militants' comments. "So I've seen lots of remarks. Just watch what really happens. Pay less attention to statements, pay less attention to things people say," Pompeo said. "Watch what happens on the ground. There's been a lot of work done at detailed levels about how this will proceed. So far, so good." —AFP

Modi hands over his social media accounts for Women's Day

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hand over his social media accounts on Sunday to celebrate inspiring women on International Women's Day, months after facing criticism over a series of high-profile rape cases. With more than 50 million followers on Twitter, Modi, 69, has one of the biggest followings on social media among world leaders. "This Women's Day, I will give away my social media accounts to women whose life & work inspire us. This will help them ignite motivation in millions," Modi said in a tweet yesterday.

He asked people to share entries of such women using the hashtag #SheInspiresUs, which became the top trending topic on Twitter about an hour after he posted his tweet. His support for the March 8 event came after he faced flak for failing to check violence against women following a series of rape cases late last year that triggered mass protests. In November, a 27-year-old vet was raped, suffocated and her dead body set alight on the outskirts of the southern city of Hyderabad. Another rape victim was set on fire and killed by a gang of men, including her alleged rapists, in December.

In the same month, a court sentenced a former lawmaker from Modi's ruling party to life imprisonment for raping a teenager. These cases highlighted India's grim record of sexual violence against women despite enacting some of the world's toughest laws after the gang rape of a Delhi student on a bus in December 2012, which sparked global outrage. One woman reported a rape every 15 minutes on average in India in 2018, according to government data released in January. — Reuters

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (center) talks with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) National President Jagat Prakash Nadda (2nd left) as Home Minister Amit Shah (right) and Defense Minister Rajnath Singh look on during a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) parliamentary committee meeting at the Parliament House yesterday. — AFP

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A staff member of the health authorities of the southern German federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg demonstrates on a negative sample the test for the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 in a laboratory in Stuttgart on Monday. — AFP

World failed to learn SARS lessons for COVID fight

The novel coronavirus outbreak has exposed a lack of global research on ways to combat the spread of infectious diseases, with health authorities failing to learn lessons from previous flare-ups, experts said yesterday. The last outbreak of worldwide significance was the SARS virus scare of the early 2000s, which killed 774 people. More recently the MERS virus killed more than 850 people, although the outbreak was largely contained to the Middle East.

Although scientists responded to both diseases, formulating treatment plans and eventually vaccines, experts say the new coronavirus epidemic shows there has not been any sustained, coordinated efforts on infectious diseases. "Too often, the surge of research attention and investment that novel outbreaks generate quickly wane when those outbreaks subside and other priorities take their place," Jason Schwartz, assistant professor at Yale's Department of Health Policy and Management, told AFP.

"SARS and MERS demonstrated the global health threat posed by coronaviruses and the need for a sustained investment in better understanding these viruses with a eye toward prevention and treatment strategies." Bruno Canard, a virologist at France's National Centre for Scientific Research, said that some countries, notably European Union members, launched coordinated research programs following SARS. But the financial crisis of 2008 squeezed out funding, he said, lamenting a "scientific world on financial life support."

For Johan Neyts, professor of virology and president of the Belgian-based, International Society for Antiviral Research (ISAR), the world missed a chance after SARS, which is closely related to the new coronavirus. "If we had invested starting in 2003 at the SARS epidemic looking for a medication that would be active against coronas by now we could have had a stockpile that would have been active against this new one," he told AFP.

"We missed an opportunity. It's a terrorist attack of a virus which we could have prevented, more people are going to die, it's really a shame." There are now seven known coronaviruses that are transmissible among humans. Canard said coordinated research could have produced a broad-spectrum treatment against all of them, given their genetically similar profile.

Cost 'peanuts'

But to do so scientific efforts would need government funding. Neyts estimated the cost of finding a coronavirus treatment safe to administer at scale to be Ä250-300 million ($275-325 million). "This is basically peanuts, if you compare that to the human suffering that we seeing now, and also to the economic losses," he said. As well as funding, medical research also takes time. Years, in fact. And Canard said the world is now reacting against the novel coronavirus from a standing start.

"To develop a molecule (against coronaviruses), that takes years," he said. "You need to have clinical trials and for that you need people who are sick with the virus." He warned that more coronaviruses are likely to spread among humans in years to come as we continue to destroy the habitats of species that carry the diseases. "We let down our guard and the acceleration of these viruses emergencies is going to be faster and faster due to climate change, biodiversity loss and deforestation," said Canard. — AFP

US Latinos started changing outcomes in 2018 - they may do so again in 2020

John Verdejo moved to North Carolina by way of the Bronx, with only basketball great Michael Jordan and the folksy humor of the Andy Griffith television show as references, neither particularly relevant to a Puerto Rican family in the mid-1990s. Two years ago he saw Raleigh elect its first Latino councilman, saw Latino voters help defeat Wake County's tough-on-immigration Republican sheriff, and now feels that energy continuing into the 2020 US presidential campaign.

"I have never received more phone calls, requests for meetings - party meetings, candidate meetings," from those courting Latinos, said Verdejo, a member of the state's Democratic National Committee. The 14-state Super Tuesday Democratic contests may test just how forcefully a Latino vote that shaped recent local races in North Carolina and flipped California Congressional districts in 2018 stands to influence the race for the White House.

This election will be the first in which Latinos form the largest minority voting group, at around 13.3 percent of eligible voters, according to recent estimates by the Pew Research Center. That is an 80 percent jump since 2000, and compares to a share of black voters that has been roughly level since then at around 12 percent, and a white share that has fallen 10 percentage points to an estimated 66 percent of the eligible electorate.

More notable, perhaps, in a US presidential system where state by state results determine the winner, Latino populations, which lean Democratic by about a two-to-one margin, could start making states like Texas, Florida, Arizona and North Carolina more competitive. US President Donald Trump, a Republican, won each of those in 2016.

'We do have a big say'

It's something Democratic candidates and activists have expected before, only to be disappointed by low registration and turnout. But they have reason to think this may be the year with Latino numbers growing so quickly, said Mark Lopez, Pew's director of global migration and demography research. The 70,000 Latino votes cast in North Carolina in 2018, for example, was just 4 percent of the total statewide vote, but that was double the showing in 2014's previous midterms. With a bulge of younger voters in the pipeline it may jump again.

By the time Super Tuesday wraps up, states accounting for about half the Latino population of the United States will have voted, and they may already be influencing who the party selects. A Pew poll of registered Latino voters nationally showed the top priorities included a stronger government role in health care and a higher minimum wage, dovetailing with some of US Senator Bernie Sanders' policy themes.

That may have helped Sanders' convincing win in the Nevada caucuses. It appears to be expanding his appeal in vote-rich California, which he lost in the 2016 Democratic primary to Hillary Clinton, who performed strongly in the south of the state. Latinos are helping recast California's traditional political geography, said Mark Baldassare, director of the Public Policy Institute of California, which found that around 53 percent of likely Latino voters there preferred Sanders.

"It is the economics, and it's attitudes about the role of government, and it's immigration," Baldassare said. Galvanized by Trump's election in 2016, Latinos turned out to vote in record numbers in 2018, and analysts expect more of the same this year. "We do have a big say in this election," said Lizbeth De La Cruz Santana, a 29-year-old grad student at UC Davis who has already voted for Sanders, in part because of his vow to cancel student debt and his positions on immigration.

In Santana's hometown of Fresno in California's farmbelt between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the city council turned majority Latino and majority Democratic in 2018, ending decades of dominance by white Republicans. The Central Valley's heavily Latino population, long ignored by national political candidates, is being actively courted, with Sanders and former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg establishing offices.— Reuters

'Refused/Angry/Rep': How text campaigns learn from voter replies

When Brian Durst got a text message from the campaign of US Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, the restaurant cook in Hawaii sent back a photo of himself wearing a 'Trump 2020' cap. Three minutes later, he got a reply from someone named Will from the Vermont senator's campaign asking if he had a second choice candidate. Durst shot back an angry message listing Vice President Mike Pence and members of Republican President Trump's family, and tweeted out a screenshot of the exchange.

As the 2020 presidential campaigns push out tens of millions of text messages to find potential supporters, some Americans are texting back to vent frustrations, argue about candidates' stances or try to convert the volunteers. But it turns out even uncooperative replies can be helpful data. Campaign texters log numerous details from responses, no matter what the content. They can use them to verify names and working mobile numbers, score how voters feel about the candidate and register their first and second choices as well as the issues the voter cares most about.

"That's where the gold is," said Thomas Peters, the founder and CEO of RumbleUp, a peer-to-peer texting company used by the Republican National Congressional Committee, which also allows campaigns to measure positive or negative sentiment in replies. The script for Elizabeth Warren's texters tells them to record details such as whether voters are concerned with the Massachusetts senator's electability and if they have "hot button issues" like college affordability.

A training webinar for Sanders' volunteers showed options to mark for reasons someone would not attend a rally, from whether they had moved to if they fit the category "Refused/Angry/Republican'. Political campaigns see peer-to-peer texting as an effective way to identify supporters, drum up volunteers and get out the vote: in the 2018 cycle, Democratic campaigns and political groups sent at least 350 million text messages, according to a report by progressive non-profit Tech for Campaigns.

These messages need to be sent by a human to not fall afoul of anti-spam laws which prohibit sending mass texts without an opt-in from recipients. Campaign volunteers and staffers use software to manually send out prewritten messages, which can be customized, to lists of phone numbers. Campaigns gather these phone numbers and other data from their supporters, who might have responded to events and surveys, and from voter registration lists which can have other information appended to them. Durst, for instance, said he had previously been registered as a Democrat. The parties can update their voter files with data gathered from texting campaigns.

In January, Trump's campaign director Brad Parscale tweeted a screenshot of a text he received from the Sanders campaign: "Haha," he texted back. "Your data is really really bad if you are texting me." Daniel Souweine, who founded the left-leaning political texting company GetThru after he ran Sanders' texting program in 2016, thinks campaigns will be increasingly sophisticated about how they use the information collected in text conversations. "They have literally every message that has been sent," he said.

Some voters try to throw a wrench in the works, however: The popular Twitter pundit @RespectableLaw recently listed ways that voters could waste the time of texters for former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg in particular by pretending to be undecided or asking a string of policy questions. The billionaire's campaign, which pays its digital organizers to send texts to their own social media networks, also uses peer-to-peer texting. "Never let them know who you really support. This is a data mining operation. Sabotage it wherever possible," said one of the tweets in @RespectableLaw's thread, which got 9,000 likes. — Reuters

Texas, Dems do battle for Latino vote

In Elizabeth Warren's Houston campaign office, one early morning in February, volunteers bustled around arranging chairs in a circle and tacking Spanish-language posters to the walls. They were soon joined by a dozen Latino voters, come to discuss the Democratic White House race - with days to go until "Super Tuesday" on March 3, when Texas and 13 other states vote to pick a challenger to President Donald Trump.

For an hour and a half, people of all ages - seniors, young adults, families with children - talked about immigration, healthcare and their experiences as Latinos living in a state where they make up a third of the electorate. "A lot of the time, we are kind of ignored as a community," said novelist Ariane Navarro, joined for the event by her husband and their two children. "I'm surrounded by educated Latinos, and we all believe that we do have a voice and we can make a change in Texas," the former teacher told AFP.

Most of all, Navarro is keen to help her younger family members register to vote, in line with a broader effort to boost turnout among the state's Hispanic community. Texas has been a Republican state for two generations, but Democrats made gains there in 2016 and 2018 - and the party is looking to Latinos, two thirds of whom lean Democratic, to reinforce the trend longer term.

"A lot of folks say Texas is a red (Republican) state; it's not: it's a non-voting state, so we want to make sure that we're reaching out to as many folks as we can," said Maria Martinez, in charge of national Latino community engagement for Warren. Turnout has been a persistent challenge in Texas: for the 2016 Democratic primaries it was 20 percent below the national average, and 10 percent lower than the national average for the presidential election.

'Meant a lot to me'

Hispanics are on track to become the largest population group in Texas by 2022, according to US census data. The state now counts 5.6 million Latino voters - 800,000 more than in 2016 and a 1.4 million increase since 2012. That mirrors the trend nationwide where a record 32 million Latinos are projected to be eligible to vote in 2020, surpassing blacks as the largest minority group in the electorate, according to Pew Research.

But voter turnout in the community is also notoriously low: Since 1996, Pew data shows that most eligible Latinos have not cast ballots in US presidential elections. With an eye on Super Tuesday, Warren's team organized a campaign tour specifically dedicated to the state's Hispanic community, with stops in cities like San Antonio, where 64 percent of the population is Latino. She is not alone in courting the growing demographic: A debate was organized in Houston in mid-February between students and a line-up of Democratic primary candidates.

Bernie Sanders - a self-declared Democratic socialist who leads polls of Texas Latino voters with 30 percent support - took part via video conference, earning lengthy applause. "It meant a lot to me that they at least took time out of their day... to speak with us and answer any questions that we had," said Victor Ibarra, a young health physicist.

Jolt Census Organizer Leslie Hernandez (left) shares a laugh with volunteers Carlos Ramirez (center) and Marlen Guerrero at the headquarters of Jolt in Houston on Feb 20, 2020. — AFP

'Safe space'

To really boost turnout will take more than ads in Spanish and canvassing, according to Antonio Arellano, the executive director of Jolt, an organization that encourages young Latinos to take on the problem themselves. Jolt last year launched an initiative called Poder Quince ("Power Fifteen"), which offers voter registration to guests at quinceaneras, the traditional celebration for when a Latina girl turns 15. It's designed to "harness the power of Latino culture and create a new tradition of civic engagement," said Arellano, 29, who is undocumented.

A volunteer with Jolt, Ibarra met AFP at the group's small office in east Houston, decorated with multicolored posters, electric candles and fringes of pink and yellow papier-mache. Rice crackers and peanut butter were spread on a table for snacking. The office is staffed one day a week by Ibarra and others who like him want to ensure Latino youth have a voice in the future. "We try to focus on young people because we want to let them know it's their responsibility to go out and inform their household," said Leslie Hernandez, Jolt's 22-year-old census organizer and volunteer supervisor.

For the half dozen high school students and young adult volunteers, voting in the Democratic primaries is just a drop in the ocean of political battles they want to lead: environmental issues, the census, the fight against racism. "As a Latina, I feel like I always carry a weight on my shoulders," says Hernandez, telling them: "You are in a safe space now." — AFP

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Kuwait Times
Established 1961

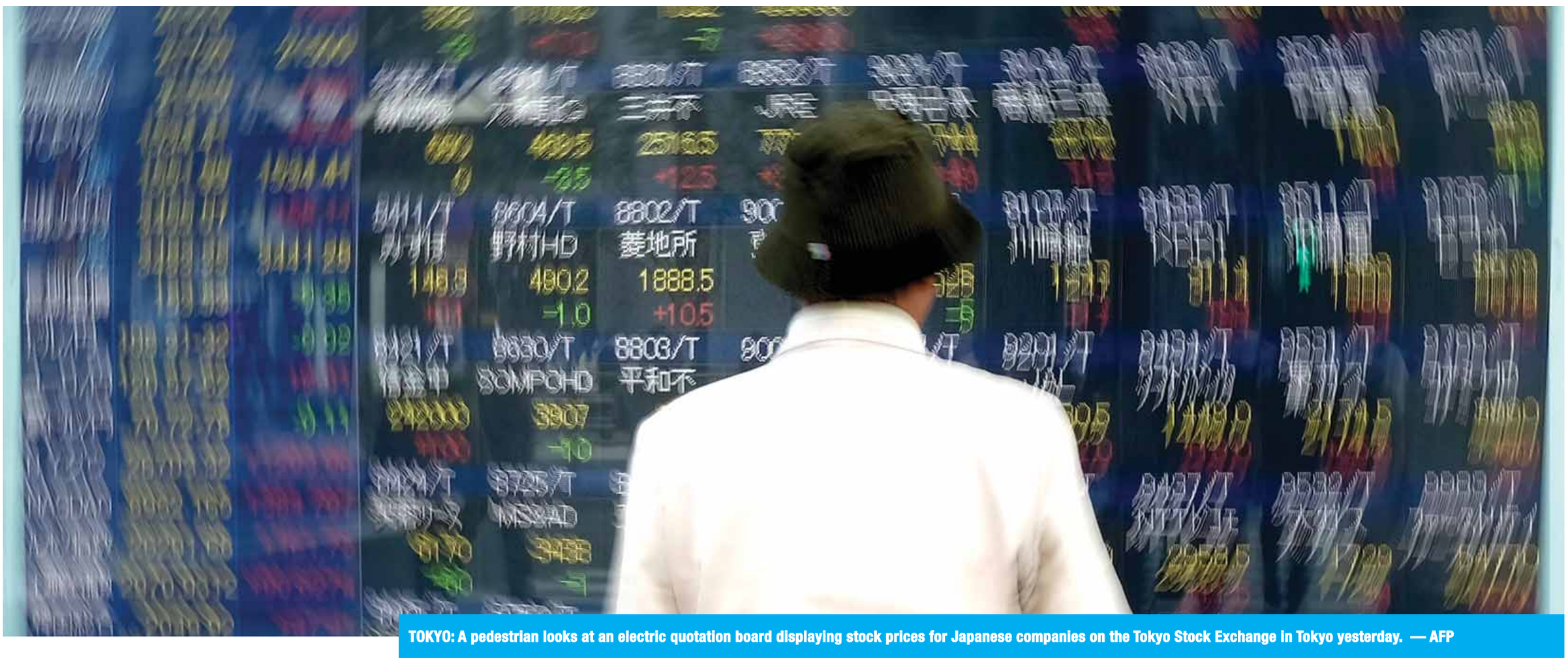
Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020

12 NBK Capital: Coronavirus eradicates market gains since 2020 beginning

13 Twitter staff told to work from home over corona virus fears

14 Ahli United Bank earns the Fastest Growing Banking Solutions Award



TOKYO: A pedestrian looks at an electric quotation board displaying stock prices for Japanese companies on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

G7 to deploy all policy tools to fight virus

Central banks to boost price stability, economic growth

TOKYO: Group of Seven finance officials said yesterday they would use all appropriate policy tools to achieve strong, sustainable global growth and safeguard against downside risks posed by the fast-spreading coronavirus. G7 finance ministers were ready to take action, including fiscal measures where appropriate, to aid the response, Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso told reporters. Central banks would continue to support price stability and economic growth.

"We reaffirmed our commitment to adopt all appropriate policy steps to protect the economy from downside risks posed by the coronavirus, and that we stand ready to cooperate further on timely and effective measures," Aso said after a G7 call.

He was short on specifics and said the desirable policy response would vary from country to country.

Asked if all appropriate policy steps would include both monetary and fiscal policies, Aso said: "Yes, anything will be included, both monetary and fiscal steps." The G7's united front offset anxiety over the coronavirus' rapid spread in dozens of countries and aided a recovery in world stocks and oil prices.

"This is a tug of war between hope and fear. Central banks are giving hopes with their potential stimulus," said Vasu Menon, senior investment strategist at OCBC Bank Wealth Management.

"The question is what they will do? Monetary policy is already very loose and interest rates are very low," Menon added. German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said the G7 had "all means" at its disposal.

"Should the need arise, we have all the means to counter a global downturn," Scholz said in a statement on Twitter. Global stocks suffered a rout last week on fears that the disruption to supply chains, factory output and global travel caused by the epidemic could deal a serious blow to a world economy trying to recover from the US-China trade war.

The coronavirus, which emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year, has spread around the world over the past week, with more new cases now appearing outside China than within.

There are more than 90,000 cases globally, with more than 80,000 of them in China, and infections appearing in 77 other countries and territories, with Ukraine the latest country to report its first case. China's death toll is 2,943, with more than 75 deaths elsewhere.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell "will lead a call with their G7 counterparts", the Treasury department confirmed in a statement. In addition to scrambling to respond to the outbreak which has now killed more than 3,100 people and infected over 90,000 as it spreads around the world, governments have also sought to calm fears of widespread economic disruption that saw major stock markets lose over 10 percent of their value last week. While yesterday's conference call will be the first effort to coordinate actions by the world's top economies, officials have already been making statements seeking to reassure investors that they stand ready to cushion shocks to markets or the wider economy.

"We stand ready to take appropriate and targeted measures, as necessary and commensurate with the underlying risks," European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said in a statement.

The Bank of England will "take all necessary steps" to support the UK economy from coronavirus fallout, said governor Mark Carney ahead of the G7 talks. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank issued a joint statement Monday pledging to help countries deal with the fallout from the epidemic.

"We will use our available instruments to the fullest extent possible, including emergency financing, policy advice, and technical assistance," the lending institutions said.

Powell had on Friday issued a statement pledging the Fed would "use our tools and act as appropriate to support the economy". Eurozone finance ministers are also set to hold a conference call today.

"There will be coordinated action," said French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire. Wall Street-which last week saw its worst performance since 2008 with a 12.4 percent drop-was cheered by the announcement, with the benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average jumping 5.0 percent on Monday.

The gains yesterday carried over to markets in Asia and the Pacific where Australia's central bank slashed interest rates to a record low of 0.5 percent on fears the deadly coronavirus outbreak could push the country into recession. However Tokyo stocks lost early gains to close lower as investors grew skeptical about the outcome of the G7 financial chiefs meeting, market analysts said.

Europe's main markets were up more than two percent in yesterday's morning trading, and Wall Street was expected to rise at the opening bell. — Agencies

Dubai property market stability still a few years off

BENGALURU: The downward spiral in Dubai house prices will continue this year, albeit at a slower pace than in 2019, with oversupply remaining the biggest risk, a Reuters poll showed. Dubai is one of the seven territories of the United Arab Emirates and has a diversified trade and tourism economy, but its real estate market has been sluggish for most of the past decade. House prices are forecast to fall 4 percent this year and 1.3 percent in 2021 before stabilizing in 2022, according to 15 analysts and property market specialists in a Reuters poll taken between Feb. 16 and March 2. Reports from several consulting firms showed average Dubai property values dropped by more than 10 percent last year, roughly in line with predictions in a Reuters poll last November. The government doesn't publish an official measure of home prices.

Analysts are clearly optimistic about prospects stemming from the World Expo, which Dubai will host, starting in October through to April 2021. But downside risk remains. The biggest of these, according to 11 of the poll respondents, is a surplus of existing properties for sale.

"Oversupply is the single largest contributor to Dubai's declining residential prices, with continued project launches, coupled with rising levels of unsold developer inventory, continuing to place downward pressure on values," said Chris Hobden, head of strategic consultancy at Chestertons MENA. An economic downturn was considered the biggest downside risk by three of the analysts, with only one respondent pointing to a further decline in oil prices.

Dubai's economy grew 2.1 percent in the first half of last year, compared with 1.9 percent growth for 2018. However, risks from non-oil private sector activity and the economic fallout from the global coronavirus outbreak are likely to apply the brakes this year. Residential property is still rated relatively affordable, the poll suggested. On a scale of 1-10, from cheap to expensive, the median rating from the analysts was 6. A majority of the analysts said they expect a prolonged period of sub-par activity followed by recovery. "Further softening and probably stabilization is expected in the next couple of years. In the long term, we don't expect a huge spike," said Haider Tuaima, head of real estate research at ValuStrat.—Reuters

OPEC gathers in Vienna to discuss further output cuts

VIENNA: OPEC ministers were starting to arrive in Vienna yesterday where they will debate whether to cut oil production further as the spread of the coronavirus hits demand for crude worldwide.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies led by Russia, a group known as OPEC+, agreed in December to a collective cut in output of 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) until the end of March. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, has been voluntarily cutting an additional 400,000 bpd, meaning OPEC+ is effectively curbing its production by 2.1 million bpd in a bid to support oil prices.

But since then, the spread of coronavirus has weighed on economic activity worldwide and hit demand for oil. The International Energy Agency (IEA) said in February that demand in the first quarter of 2020 was expected to fall by 435,000 bpd compared with a year earlier, which would be the first quarterly decrease since the financial crisis in 2009.

OPEC has been discussing cutting oil production by 1 million barrels per day (bpd) on top of the existing cuts, among other options, as it seeks to stabilize falling prices. That's more than a cut of 600,000 bpd it initially proposed. Talk of a bigger reduction has helped Brent crude and WTI prices rebounded this week after the fell more than 20 percent from their 2020 peak in January on concerns about the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

Kuwait's oil minister said yesterday before heading to Vienna that he was optimistic about the outcome of the meetings and continued cooperation among OPEC+ countries. OPEC ministers will meet in Vienna on March 5 and then gather with ministers from non-OPEC countries on March 6.

A technical committee of the alliance is meeting on Tuesday to review market fundamentals while a ministerial committee will convene today at 1130 GMT. Russia is so far not convinced about the need for a bigger cut in production, and some sources have said OPEC members could shoulder any additional curbs themselves. But yesterday Leonid Fedun, vice-president of Russia's second-biggest oil producer Lukoil, told Reuters that an additional cut of up to 1 million bpd would be enough to balance the market and lift oil prices to $60 a barrel.

Brent crude was trading close to $53 a barrel yesterday, up from this year's low of $48.40 hit a day earlier. OPEC meetings usually attract big media coverage but this year the group is considering measures such as webcasting its news conference to restrict reporters' access to ministers because of the coronavirus outbreak. — Reuters

In this file photo, (Left to right) Russian Minister of Energy Alexander Novak, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) President, UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei and OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Sanusi Barkindo of Nigeria speak during a ministerial level meeting with OPEC members and non-members at the 175th OPEC Conference on December 7, 2018 in Vienna. — AFP

NBK Capital: Coronavirus eradicates market gains since 2020 beginning

Boursa Kuwait All Share Index down 4.0%, Premier Market Index down 4.31%

KUWAIT: In the Gulf, equity markets recorded broad declines with the exception of Bahrain and Oman. The S&P GCC Composite Index retreated by 7.24 percent during February bringing its total year-to-date losses to 8.69 percent, while the broader S&P Pan Arab Index declined by 6.96 percent accumulating losses of 7.66 percent since the beginning of the year. Leading the declines was the Qatari market with a loss of 9.12 percent for the Qatar Exchange Index. It was followed by the Saudi Tadawul All Share index which declined by 7.50 percent for the month.

Dubai's DFM General Index and Abu Dhabi's ADX General Index retreating by 7.18 percent and 4.94 percent respectively followed it. In Kuwait, declines were more moderate with the Boursa Kuwait All Share Index down 4.0 percent for the month and the Premier Market Index down 4.31 percent. Oman and Bahrain were the only positive market in the GCC with Oman's MSM 30 Index up 1.27 percent improving its year-to-date gains to 3.76 percent and Bahrain's All Share index marginally in the green with a gain of 0.17 percent in February and 3.12 percent for the year. Elsewhere in the Middle East, Egypt's EGX 30 declined by 6.54 percent while Morocco's MADEX and Jordan ASE Index declined by 2.19 percent and 1.71 percent respectively.

The decline in Emerging markets wasn't as severe as it was in their developed peers as emerging markets had already underperformed in January. The MSCI EM Index declined by 5.3 percent in February after having lost 4.69 percent during January, bringing its total year-to-date decline to around 9.8 percent which is in-line with global equity indices. Among the biggest losers in emerging markets were the Borsa Istanbul 100 Index and the Russian Stock Exchange which declined by 11.0 percent and 9.5 percent respectively in February. Declines in other Asian markets were generally moderate compared to other markets. The MSCI Asia ex-Japan retreated by 2.9 percent outperforming both Emerging and developed markets peers. The Shanghai composite recorded a decline of 3.2 percent, while the Taiwan Stock exchange declined by 1.8 percent. Elsewhere, India's Nifty 50 closed in the red at 6.4 percent, while the Brazilian Ibovespa and Mexico Exchange Indices declined by 8.4 percent and 6.3 percent for the month.

The last week of February was a historic week for US and global markets as fears of the coronavirus spread and its effect on financial markets and the global economy were the central focus of investors. US indices declined by as much as 12.8 percent for the S&P 500 and 14 percent for the Dow Jones during the last week of February making it the worst weekly decline since 2008, while volatility surged as the VIX reached a high 49.48 before closing the week at 40.11. The MSCI AC World index closed the month of February down 8.2 percent after declining by 11.6 percent during the last 10 days of the month when the global virus-induced market rout intensified. The MSCI EAFI, on the other hand, which represents the performance of developed markets outside of the US and Canada, declined by 9.2 percent for the month, bringing its year-to-date losses to 11.2 percent.

In the US, the market sell-off intensified during the last week of February erasing most of the gains recorded since the middle of the previous year. Major US indices closed deep in the red with the S&P 500 down 8.4 percent for the month, and the Down Jones Industrial Average and the Tech-heavy Nasdaq down 10.1 percent and 6.4 percent respectively. Treasury yields, on the other hand, sunk to all-time lows with the yield on the 10-year treasury bonds falling to 1.127 percent as at the end of February.

Fears of a global economic slowdown caused by the spread of the virus has crippled world markets and has increased speculation that the US Federal Reserve would slash rates by up to 50 bps in one or two cuts in its upcoming March and April meetings, with some analysts even estimating that the Fed might call for an emergency meeting to cut rates. In a rare statement, the Fed Chairman Powell, said on Friday that the federal reserve would "use our tools and act as appropriate to support the economy". The second estimate of the US

Gross Domestic Product for the fourth quarter of 2019 showed an annual growth of 2.1 percent, consistent with the advance estimate and the growth rate for the third quarter. Inflation remained muted as the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) for January increased to 1.7 percent y-o-y from a revised 1.5 percent in December, while the Core measure of PCE inched higher to 1.6 percent in January compared to 1.5 percent for the previous month.

Economic activity in the European Union remains weak; revised estimates for the fourth quarter European GDP showed a growth of 0.9 percent year-on-year, down from a revised 1.2 percent for Q3. Manufacturing activity, on the other hand, continues to improve as the Markit Manufacturing PMI climbed to 49.1 in February according to preliminary estimates up from 47.9 in December and 46.3 in November. European financial markets joined the global rout and declined steeply during the month in tandem with their global peers. The Stoxx Europe 600 was down 8.5 percent in February, while the German DAX and French CAC40 declined by 8.4 percent and 8.5 percent respectively resulting in losses of 10.3 percent and 11.2 percent for the two indices since the beginning of the year.

In the UK, the FTSE 100 retreated by 9.7 percent in February, accumulating losses of 12.8 percent since the beginning of the year. Manufacturing activity continued its recovery through the second month of the year; the Markit Manufacturing PMI jumped to 51.9 in February, up from 49.7 In January. Inflation also ticked higher with the headline and core measures of CPI increasing to 1.8 percent and 1.6 percent in January up from 1.3 percent and 1.4 percent respectively in December.

NBK Economic Report

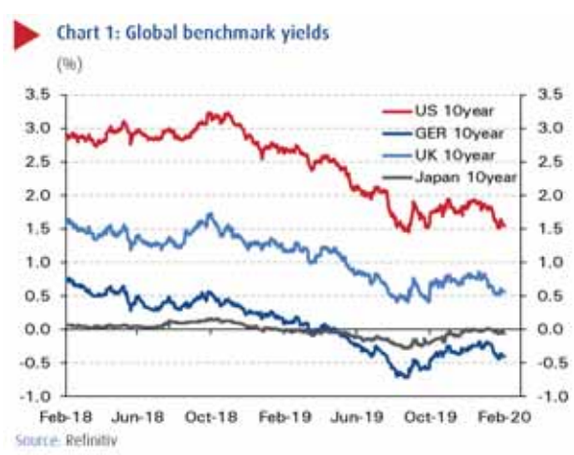
Global, GCC yields diverged in 4th quarter 2019

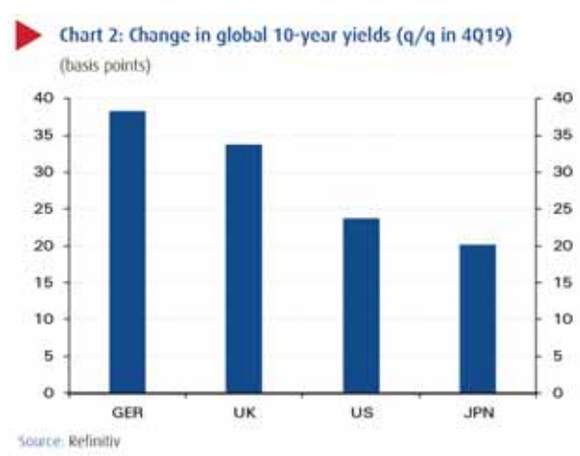
KUWAIT: An improved growth outlook, better economic data, easing trade tensions, and a more neutral Fed saw benchmark global bond yields trend higher in 4Q19. This followed a downtrend in yields in previous quarters driven by central bank dovishness, sluggish growth and trade uncertainty. GCC sovereign yields, which typically track their global counterparts, were mostly unchanged likely on the back of continued international interest and demand for regional debt, especially after the recent EMBI benchmark index inclusion, and as risk-return profiles remain attractive.

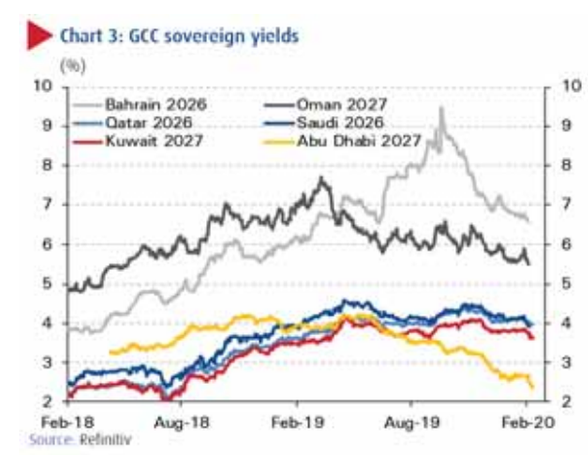
Looking forward, and following significant year-to-date decreases, further declines in yields are still possible given certain risks, which include an unexpected resurgence of trade tensions and coronavirus-related risks and their potential impact on global growth. GCC debt issuance was moderate in 4Q19 relative to previous quarters, standing at around $11 billion compared to circa $30 billion in 3Q19. Issuances have moderated possibly due to refinancing needs being already completed during the year. Issuances in 4Q19 were dominated by sovereigns and quasi-sovereigns in KSA and UAE, respectively.

Global yields trend up in 4Q19

Global benchmark bond yields rose in 4Q19, largely on easing trade tensions after the striking of a Phase 1 US-China trade deal in November, which was signed on January 15 2020. This led to an improved global growth outlook, prompting central banks to pause rate cuts and adopt a neutral monetary stance, thereby lessening the pressure on yields from dovish monetary expectations.







Confidence was also helped by a robust US labor market and a resilient US consumer sector. The improved sentiment was reflected in investors' risk-on attitude as global equities rallied in 4Q19 in sync with rising bond yields. The increase in bond yields was led by Germany's 10-year Bund (+37 bps q/q) followed by the UK gilt (+34 bps), the US 10-year (+24 bps) and finally Japanese sovereigns (+20 bps). While sovereign bond yields were generally lifted by an improved global economic climate, UK gilts in particular were also supported by lower political uncertainty on the back of the breakthrough in Brexit discussions and a decisive general election result.

The developments in terms of the Coronavirus will be a main factor impacting the direction of yields going forward. In addition, possible deterioration in trade discussions, political uncertainty from the upcoming US presidential election, as well as any escalation in tensions on the US-Iran front, may weigh on the global outlook and could impact yields negatively. Indeed, benchmark bond yields have reversed course so far in 2020, with the US 10-year down around 74 bps as of end-February to stand at an all-time low of 1.13 percent. Additional factors such as a maturing business cycle and higher stock market valuations (especially in the US) also have the potential to weigh down on yields. On the other hand, if Coronavirus risks subside then yields could increase from the record-lows that they have reached.

GCC yields mostly steady

GCC medium-term sovereign yields diverged from global trends in 4Q19, with yields in four out of six GCC countries broadly steady in 4Q19. Continued international interest in GCC debt likely dampened a potential increase in yields, driven by attractive risk-adjusted returns and inclusion of most GCC sovereigns in the global benchmark JP Morgan Emerging Market Bond Index (EMBI).

Oman and Bahrain witnessed a second consecutive quarter of sharp declines in sovereign bond yields, which decreased by 79 and 82 bps, respectively. The two countries continued to benefit from improved outlooks, and initially had much higher yields compared to their peers which gave them more room to fall. The two bonds are typically more volatile than their peers and yield/price movements are usually more pronounced. While GCC sovereign yields will continue to be impacted by the direction of global yields, there is another important factor that will influence the direction of GCC sovereign yields. Given the current global macroecoomic outlook, oil prices are expected to remain soft, which may increase the implied risk of GCC sovereign instruments and push their yields higher. Finally, any major adverse developments in terms of geopolitical risks will most likely drive up yields.

Moderate GCC issuance in 4Q19

GCC issuance (both domestic and international) in 4Q19 amounted to $11 billion, including $3.9 billion in Sukuk. This is modest in comparison to prior quarters, but gross issuance throughout 2019 was solid reaching $102 billion, and total outstanding debt (domestic and international) rose to $517 billion at the end of 2019 from close to $457 billion one year ago. Noteworthy is a $3.5 billion issuance in November, in three tranches with coupons ranging from 2.5 percent to 3.7 percent by Mamoura Diversified Global Holding, a UAE quasi-sovereign. Issuance may have eased in 4Q on the back of a lower need to refinance after the exceptionally strong run earlier in the year, driven in part by a large volume of maturities: around $43 billion in GCC bonds and Sukuk matured in 2019. With generally expansionary budgets and low borrowing costs, issuance has regained traction so far this year. More than $11 billion had been issued as of mid-February, most notable of which was a three-tranche $5 billion sovereign bond issuance by Saudi Arabia as well as a $3 billion issuance by QNB in Qatar.

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.840
Indian Rupees	4.225
Pakistani Rupees	1.985
Srilankan Rupees	1.679
Nepali Rupees	2.649
Singapore Dollar	221.240
Hongkong Dollar	39.287
Bangladesh Taka	3.588
Philippine Peso	6.057
Thai Baht	9.793
Malaysian Ringgit	78.312

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.708
Qatari Riyal	84.156
ani Riyal	795.841
Bahraini Dinar	813.600
UAE Dirham	83.422

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.637
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.230
Tunisian Dinar	113.830
Jordanian Dinar	432.390
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.609

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	306.200
Euro	343.560
Sterling Pound	393.310
Canadian dollar	230.830
Turkish lira	49.950
Swiss Franc	321.980
US Dollar Buying	298.750

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	305.850
Canadian Dollar	229.950
Sterling Pound	392.410
Euro	342.410
Swiss Frank	295.610
Bahrain Dinar	813.370
UAE Dirhams	83.675
Qatari Riyals	84.915
Saudi Riyals	82.455
Jordanian Dinar	432.670
Egyptian Pound	19.638
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.679
Indian Rupees	4.209
Pakistani Rupees	1.980
Bangladesh Taka	3.596
Philippines Pesso	6.030
Cyprus pound	18.190
Japanese Yen	3.835
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.639
Malaysian Ringgit	73.555
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.325
Thai Bhat	10.675
Turkish Lira	49.930
Singapore dollars	219.748

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.385990	0.399890
Czech Korune	0.005339	0.014639
Danish Krone	0.041559	0.046559
Euro	0. 333541	0.347241
Georgian Lari	0.108913	0.108913
Hungarian	0.000920	0.001110
Norwegian Krone	0.028846	0.034046
Romanian Leu	0.053936	0.070786
Russian Ruble	0.004612	0.004612
Slovakia	0.009183	0.019183
Swedish Krona	0.028006	0.033006
Swiss Franc	0.312827	0.323827
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.191980	0.203980
New Zealand Dollar	0.185228	0.194728
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.223968	0.232968
US Dollars	0.302100	0.306650
US Dollars Mint	0.302600	0.306650
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002892	0.003693
Chinese Yuan	0.042457	0.045957
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037258	0.040008
Indian Rupee	0.003624	0.004396
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002753	0.002933
Korean Won	0.000246	0.000261
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069482	0.075482
Nepalese Rupee	0.002611	0.002951
Pakistan Rupee	0.001337	0.002107
Philippine Peso	0.005872	0.006172
Singapore Dollar	0.214650	0.224650
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001324	0.001904
Taiwan	0.010088	0.010268
Thai Baht	0.009391	0.009941
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.806026	0.814134
Egyptian Pound	0.019367	0.022107
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000201	0.000261
Jordanian Dinar	0.426977	0.435977
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000102	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021207	0.045207
Omani Riyal	0.790176	0.798124
Qatar Riyal	0.083447	0.084287
Saudi Riyal	0.080567	0.081867
Syrian Pound	0.001299	0.001519
Tunisian Dinar	0.103719	0.111719
Turkish Lira	0.043247	0.053092
UAE Dirhams	0.082731	0.083563
Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076

Twitter staff told to work from home over coronavirus fears

Staff at Google's European HQ in Ireland told to stay away from work for a day

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter staff across the world were asked to work from home starting Monday in an effort to stop the spread of the deadly new coronavirus epidemic. At the same time, thousands of staff at Google's European headquarters in Ireland were told to stay away for the day after one employee reported flu-like symptoms.

The outbreak has spread across the world since emerging in central China late last year, killing more than 3,100 people, infecting over 90,000, and prompting a wave of travel restrictions.

Twitter's decision to ask its staff to avoid the office follows similar requests by governments in virus hotspots. "We are strongly encouraging all employees globally to work from home if they're able," Twitter human resources chief Jennifer Christie said in a Monday blog post.

"Our goal is to lower the probability of the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus for us-and the world around us." Working from home will be mandatory for employees at the company's South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan offices, Christie said.

South Korea has recorded nearly 5,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections-the largest number outside mainland China-along with 28 deaths. More than half of the cases have been linked to the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a secretive religious group often described as a cult. Japan's government has urged the closure of schools nationwide and employers to give their staff permission to work remotely.

Most civil servants in Hong Kong returned to work on Monday after they were asked to work from home for a month. The financial hub has recorded 100 cases of the infection. Twitter had already announced the suspension of "non-critical" business travel and events last week. Google employees some 8,000 staff and contractors in the Irish capital.

"We continue to take precautionary measures to protect the health and safety of our workforce," a spokesperson said in a statement. "In accordance with the advice of medical experts, and as part of that effort, we have asked our Dublin teams to work from home today."

Ireland has one confirmed case of COVID-19 — a man who returned from northern Italy. Google staff who have been in contact with their colleague with the flu-like symptoms have been told to monitor their health, while the company is using the situation to help test the company's readiness to deal with any outbreak. — AFP

In this file photo taken on May 02, 2019 a woman holds a smartphone with the logo of US social network Twitter, in Nantes, western France. — AFP

Jack Welch, iconic General Electric CEO, dead at 84

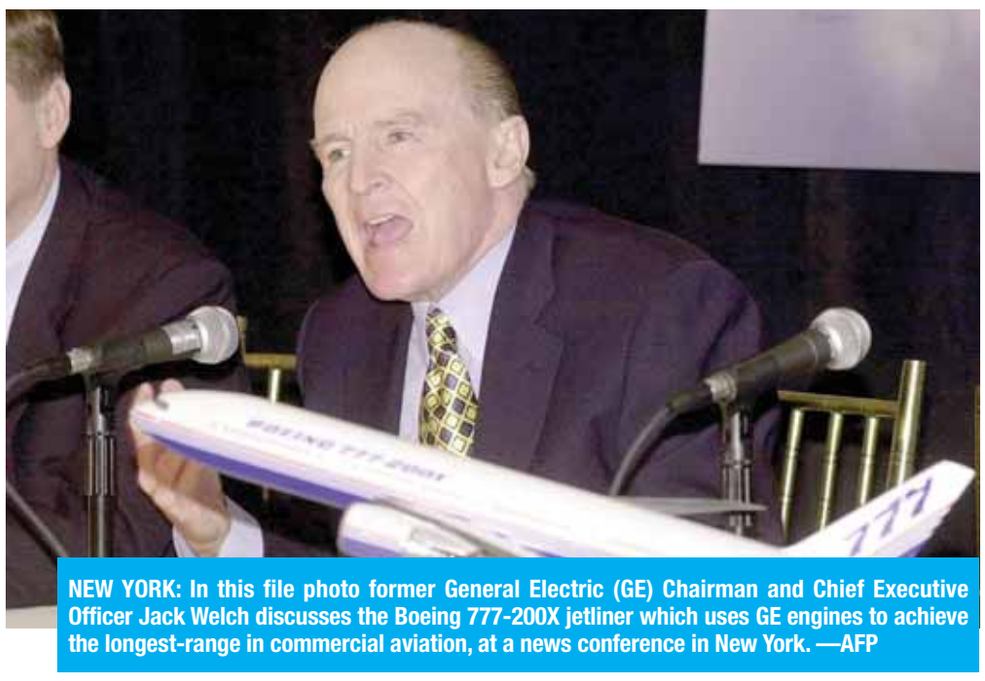
NEW YORK: Jack Welch, who built General Electric into a global industrial flagship and became one of America's best-known businessmen, died on Monday aged 84, the company said. Dubbed the "manager of the century," by Fortune magazine in 1999, Welch transformed GE into a sprawling conglomerate during his two decades as chief executive.

"Today is a sad day for the entire GE family. Jack was larger than life and the heart of GE for half a century. He reshaped the face of our company and the business world," company chief Larry Culp said in an email. Welch, the son of a railway worker and a homemaker, rose from his working class roots to ultimately expand GE beyond household appliances, healthcare and aeronautics into finance with GE Capital and media through NBCUniversal.

The company's market capitalization grew from $12 billion when he took over in 1981 to $410 billion on his departure. Welch's hard-hitting reforms at GE came at a cost, however, and he was criticized for firing thousands of employees.

"His no nonsense leadership style gave him a reputation of being hard, even ruthless, but also fair when making business decisions," Welch's GE biography said. As the layoffs mounted, he became known as "Neutron Jack" due to his reputation for eliminating workers and jobs without demolishing the buildings they worked in. The hard-charging executive said in a 2005 television interview that he hated the nickname.

President Donald Trump used the moniker to pay tribute to Welch. "There was no corporate leader like 'neutron' Jack," Trump tweeted. "He was my friend and supporter. We made wonderful deals together. He will never be forgotten," the president said. Welch was an ardent supporter of the Republican party.


NEW YORK: In this file photo former General Electric (GE) Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Jack Welch discusses the Boeing 777-200X jetliner which uses GE engines to achieve the longest-range in commercial aviation, at a news conference in New York. —AFP

World's biggest corporation

Born in Massachusetts, Welch earned a doctorate in 1960 and joined GE the same year as a chemical engineer in its plastics division, rising through the ranks to become vice chairman in 1979, then CEO two years later. Business analysts and investors praised on him for molding GE, which traces its roots to 1892, into a more formidable and diversified company. For a brief period it was the world's biggest corporation.

But his reign ended in a bitter failure when European regulators blocked GE's merger with Honeywell, another US industrial conglomerate. Welch handed over to his successor Jeff Immelt a few days before the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. Immelt's reign was also marked by the bursting of the Internet bubble and the global financial crisis, forcing him to sell off NBCUniversal to cable operator Comcast, while GE Capital, caught up in a subprime mortgage crisis, had to liquidate one asset after another.

Welch's high-flying business career enabled him to become immensely wealthy. Some estimates pegged his fortune at more than $600 million. He was involved in publishing several books including "Winning" and a biography, "Jack: Straight from the Gut," which became a New York Times best-seller.

Welch stayed in the public arena after his retirement. He co-wrote a regular column for BusinessWeek with his third wife Suzy, taught management classes and earned hefty sums from corporate speeches. But his company is now fighting for its survival, having been ejected from the Wall Street benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average, with a value of only $95 billion under its current chief executive. — AFP

Is it a currency? A commodity? Bitcoin has an identity crisis

LONDON: So bitcoin's a currency, right? Well, yes, it can be used to buy, sell and price goods much like dollars and euros. A commodity? Come to think of it, it does behave a lot like oil and gold - it can be bought and sold in cash markets or via derivatives such as futures.

What about a security? Many cryptocurrencies are, in a way. They're issued like stocks in "initial coin offerings" and used to represent shares in online projects.

The debate may appear abstract, with little bearing on the hard-boiled world of finance, but it is attracting increasing interest from economists and lawyers who say it could have major implications for the future of cryptocurrencies. How bitcoin and other digital coins are defined could shape how they are regulated around the world. In turn, the rules they are subject to could determine whether they make the leap from a niche to a mainstream asset.

So how will regulators treat them? In the United States, federal watchdogs say they see elements of both securities and commodities, but like most major economies have not come up with a set of rules. The European Union, however, will outline a framework this year, which could see crypto wedged into existing regulations, or a whole new set of rules created.

For market players, how bitcoin and its kin are regulated will have serious ramifications. Commodity markets operate with relatively little regulatory oversight. Securities, on the other hand, are typically subject to more onerous rules on price transparency, trade reporting and market abuse. "When we're going through the security process, we spend a lot of fees and lawyers to make sure we're in compliance," said Benjamin Tsai, president of Wave Financial, an investment manager in Los Angeles overseeing $40 million in crypto. "It's a lot more of a pain in the butt."

Character clues

Some of the cryptocurrency identity crisis lies in the fact that bitcoin was originally conceived as a means of payment, but now rarely bears the hallmarks of dollars, euros or pounds. It's of little use as a store of value because of its volatility, and is hampered as a means of exchange by its slow network and high transfer costs.

A booming bitcoin lending market is offering clues to its character. Bitcoin lending offers lines of credit to crypto firms earning money in cryptocurrencies, such as payment processors or miners, looking to secure traditional money for covering expenses. Also, traders who don't want to sell their bitcoin holdings use them as collateral to borrow cash for use in algorithmic or high-frequency trading.

For those lending money, relatively high yields are an attractive proposition in an era of rock-bottom rates. Key characteristics of this market, such as market-led price discovery and the motivation to seek liquidity, mirror that of commodities leasing, according to market players and economists. "The commodities markets (analogy) is very fitting," said Deeksha Gupta, an assistant professor of finance at the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh who has researched crypto. —Reuters

Foxconn says China factories operating at 50%

TAIPEI: Taiwanese tech giant and iPhone assembler Foxconn said yesterday its Chinese factories are operating at 50 percent of seasonal capacity and are expecting to take a hit for the current quarter due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Also known by its official name Hon Hai Precision Industry, Foxconn is the world's biggest contract electronics manufacturer and makes Apple's iPhones as well as gadgets for other international brands.

Foxconn employs more than one million workers across its vast network of factories in China, where operations have been affected by the deadly COVID-19 outbreak that emerged in central Wuhan before spreading to over 70 countries. The firm's chairman Young Liu told investors that its plants on mainland China are currently operating at "over 50 percent of seasonal demands" and are expected to resume normal seasonal capacity by the end of March.

The virus outbreak is having an impact on international supply chains and manufacturing given China's lynchpin role in the global economy. Apple said last month its revenue for the current quarter would be below its forecasts, and that the worldwide iPhone supply "will be temporarily constrained" because of the outbreak in China, where Apple manufactures most of its devices.

One of Foxconn's largest facilities in the central city of Zhengzhou is dubbed "iPhone City", where around 60 percent of the devices are assembled according to analysts.

Chinese state media Global Times said yesterday the Zhengzhou plant is short of 50,000 workers, or 22 percent of the plant's capacity. "We are working closely with local government agencies to resume operations in different batches and in an orderly fashion according to the regulations," Liu said. — AFP

Waymo raises $2.25bn to rev up autonomous cars

SAN FRANCISCO: Waymo said Monday it had raised $2.25 billion in its first external funding round to help the former Google car unit accelerate its deployment of autonomous cars and trucks. Born in a Google lab devoted to big-vision new technology, Waymo became a subsidiary of Alphabet in 2016 — and has been one of the tech giant's "other bets" that have been losing money in recent years.

Leading the investment round are the equity firm Silver Lake, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, and Mubadala Investment Company based in the United Arab Emirates. Other investors include the automotive supplier Magna International, venture firm Andreessen Horowitz and the automotive retailer AutoNation, as well as Alphabet. "We've always approached our mission as a team sport," said Waymo chief executive John Krafcik. "Today, we're expanding that team, adding financial investors and important strategic partners who bring decades of experience investing in and supporting successful technology companies building transformative products." With the new funding, Krafcik said, "we'll deepen our investment in our people, our technology, and our operations, all in support of the deployment of the Waymo Driver around the world."

Waymo has been operating an autonomous rideshare pilot program in Arizona, with some of the rides without any human driver, and has announced new tests in the US states of Texas and New Mexico. Waymo has also begun using the same technology for self-driving trucks that haul cargo bound for Alphabet data centers in Georgia. According to the company, the Waymo Driver technology has logged more than 20 million miles (32 million kilometers) on public roads across over 25 cities, and over 10 billion miles in simulation. — AFP

Why automakers are on a drive to sell electric cars in Europe

FRANKFURT: Carmakers are under pressure in Europe to sell more electric cars or face huge fines for breaching new emissions rules aimed at tackling global warming. The European Union set automakers a target to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent between 2007 and 2021, but they are collectively far short of this goal due to the popularity among drivers of heavy, polluting models such as SUVs. EU lawmakers also agreed in December 2018 a further cut in CO2 emissions from cars of 37.5 percent by 2030 compared with 2021 levels - raising the bar just as the fines from the previous target are about to kick in.

Why haven't electric cars gained traction so far?

Battery-driven cars take longer to recharge compared with the roughly three minutes needed fill up a petrol or diesel tank, although the exact time depends on the type of charger and the vehicle. Many countries have also been slow to roll-out charging points. According to Volkswagen's subsidiary Electrify America, a 240-volt charger can add 20 to 30 miles of driving range in an hour, depending on the capability of the vehicle, and a direct current fast charger takes between five and 30 minutes to add 100 miles of range.

Who is forcing carmakers to sell low emission cars?

EU lawmakers have set a general target that emissions from all new cars sold by an automaker should on average not exceed 95 grams of CO2 per kilometre by 2021. However, the target for individuals carmakers varies because it takes into account the starting weight of each companies' fleet in the base year of 2007.

What is the penalty for non-compliance?

Manufacturers will face a penalty of 95 euros for each gram of excess CO2 they emit compared with their individual targets. Evercore ISI analysts estimate carmakers face up to a combined 33 billion euros ($37 billion) in fines based on reported 2018 CO2 emissions levels. Analysts at PA Consulting estimate fines for individual carmakers would have been as follows, based on 2018 fleet emissions. The actual penalties are likely to be lower as carmakers sought to sell more hybrid and electric cars in 2019.

What investments are required?

Fitting more electric components will cost carmakers between 800 and 5,000 euros per vehicle to ensure compliance with 2021 targets, Evercore ISI say. Mild hybrid systems - where electric motors are used to assist a combustion engine - give rise to an additional cost of between 800 and 1,200 euros per vehicle, while plug-in hybrids - where the electric motor can take over - add 2,000-5,000 euros. Until now, the auto industry has relied on profits between 500 and 1,500 euros per vehicle in the mass market, and between 2,000 and 5,000 euros for a premium vehicle. — Reuters

Ahli United Bank earns the Fastest Growing Banking Solutions Award

IF honors AUB's risk-centric sharia audit approach in Kuwait since 2017

KUWAIT: In a new accomplishment to be added to its record of achievements, which strengthen its leading position in the banking industry, Ahli United Bank (AUB) was named the "Fastest Growing Sharia Compliant Banking Solutions in Kuwait Award 2019" by International Finance (IF), a renowned world-class business and finance magazine.

IF relied in bestowing this award to AUB on a set of criteria, with the foremost being that AUB's Internal Sharia Audit is the first of its kind to adopt a risk-centric Sharia audit approach in Kuwait since 2017. In addition, Internal Sharia Audit includes a group of qualified Sharia audit professionals who combine banking expertise as well as Sharia audit, supervisory knowledge and experience. This highlights the success of AUB's in enabling the role of Sharia Supervisory Board to develop banking products and services, support developing AUB's business operations in alignment with Sharia principles, ensure AUB carries out its business activities in compliance with the Islamic banking principles, and innovate new Sharia-compliant banking solutions.

The awarding institution announced that the first level of evaluation was done by an Internal Evaluation Team, after which, the details are forwarded to an External Evaluation Agency to perform with the final level of evaluation. Upon receiving the evaluation report, IFM announced the awards' winners on their website.

Abdullah Tareq Al-Shuaib, Head of Internal Sharia Audit at AUB, received the award during the award ceremony held in the United Arab Emirates. Commenting on this achievement, Dr. Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, AUB Board Chairman, shared his heartfelt congratulations to all AUB staff, especially Fatwa & Sharia Supervisory Board (FSSB) for playing a major role in overseeing all AUB's banking transactions, products and services to ensure compliance with Islamic Sharia laws.

Dr. Al-Mudhaf underlined that since converting its business activities to comply with Islamic Sharia on the 1st of April 2010, AUB has been unlocking its utmost potential and leveraging its long-established experience spanning over 78 years of the Kuwaiti market to provide a unique set of Sharia-compliant, state-of-the-art banking services.

Al-Mudhaf also emphasized that AUB winning this award is a clear demonstration of its successful application of Islamic Sharia principles. It also reflects AUB's endeavors to achieve its goal of promoting its status as the most preferred for clients who seek to the best Sharia-compliant products and services that meet their requirements and improve their standard of living beyond their expectations. We are, therefore, motivated to exert our utmost efforts to provide the best Islamic banking solutions that continue to attain the trust and satisfaction of our clients".

Abdullah Al-Shuaib with the award

stc, Huawei jointly sign go-to-market strategic MoU

KUWAIT: stc a leading service provider in Saudi Arabia, standing out with strong business capabilities and wide coverage, has announced Solutions by stc developed a new partnership with Huawei-a leading global provider of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and smart devices to enrich its ICT products and solutions offered to enterprise customers within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The MoU was signed between by Omar Al-Nomany, CEO of Solutions and Dennis Zhang, CEO of Huawei Tech Investment Saudi Arabia in Riyadh. This agreement sets a milestone for deeper collaboration between Huawei and Solutions by stc. Both parties will leverage their expertise to jointly build the latest innovated solution delivery across the Kingdom. Both parties are confident this will create win-win business models, unlock opportunities, and achieve higher profit on the three strategic industries Oil & gas, Healthcare and SME. Omer Al-Nomani, CEO of Solutions said: "Solutions by stc is fully committed to deliver a safe and agile experience to our enterprise customers. Through this strategic collaboration with Huawei, we are looking forward to provide more industries with seamless, secure, and convenient digital solutions."

Dennis Zhang, CEO of Huawei Tech Investment Saudi Arabia, said: The joint effort will contribute to a stronger business service and solutions, where, Huawei, its partners, and stc will all share in the results of success.

S African economy enters recession

PRETORIA: South Africa entered its second recession in two years in the final quarter of last year, as agriculture, transport and construction contracted, data showed yesterday.

The recession is another setback to President Cyril Ramaphosa's efforts to revive the economy and stave off a downgrade of the country's sovereign debt to below investment grade by the rating agency Moody's. Statistics South Africa said the economy shrank 1.4 percent in the fourth quarter, following a revised 0.8 percent contraction in the third quarter. Economists polled by Reuters had predicted a contraction of 0.1 percent. "The economy is in recession again. That is two consecutive quarters of contraction, after being in recession in the first two quarters of 2018," Joe de Beer, Stats SA's deputy director-general for economic statistics, told reporters.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, agriculture declined 7.6 percent, transport 7.2 percent, construction 5.9 percent, electricity 4 percent and retail 3.8 percent, the data showed. The rand extended losses against the dollar after the data. Gross domestic product shrank 0.5 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter after expanding 0.1 percent the quarter before. The economy expanded 0.2 percent in the 2019 calendar year compared with 0.8 percent in 2018. "You can lay a lot of the blame on (power utility) Eskom and the load-shedding (power cuts). But you must also blame government-reform is happening way too slowly," said Wayne McCurrie, an FNB portfolio manager .

Regular power cuts as Eskom fails to meet electricity demand have seen a steady decline in South African business and consumer confidence. Spending shrank 1.2 percent in quarter-on-quarter terms after contracting by a revised 0.4 percent in the third quarter, Stats SA said.

South African retailers have struggled to increase earnings as cash-strapped shoppers spend money on food rather than higher-margin discretionary goods such as electronics, hurting the likes of Walmart-controlled Massmart.

Banks have also struggled to increase their earnings at home and are increasingly relying on businesses elsewhere in Africa to maintain their performance. Nedbank, one of South Africa's four largest banks, yesterday reported a near 7 percent drop in full-year profit and revised a key profitability target as the worsening economy pushed up defaults and cut demand for credit.

Last week, the National Treasury cut its 2020 economic growth forecast to 0.9 percent and said it would cut the public-sector wage bill to contain a rising budget deficit. "The Treasury is now clearly on a pro-growth trajectory," Razia Khan, chief Africa and Middle East economist at Standard Chartered Bank. "The shock nature of this GDP print highlights just how urgent an exercise that is, and how there is no room to get it wrong." — Reuters

Australia, Malaysia cut interest rates on virus fears

SYDNEY: Australia's central bank yesterday slashed interest rates to a record low and said it was ready to provide further action if needed as policymakers around the world pledge economic support against the impact of the coronavirus. In lowering rates by 25 basis points to 0.50 percent, Reserve Bank of Australia boss Philip Lowe warned global growth was expected to be lower in the first half of 2020 and COVID-19 was also having a "significant effect" domestically.

Australia's education and travel sectors, which are heavily reliant on China-where the outbreak started-have been particularly hard hit and surrounding uncertainty is also likely to impact spending. "Given the evolving situation, it is difficult to predict how large and long-lasting the effect will be," Lowe said in a statement. "Once the coronavirus is contained, the Australian economy is expected to return to an improving trend."

"Policy measures have been announced in several countries, including China, which will help support growth," he said. "In most economies, including the United States, there is an expectation of further monetary stimulus over coming months."

He added that the bank would continue to monitor developments "closely" and was "prepared to ease monetary policy further" if necessary. Donald Trump jumped on the cut, using it to attack the Federal Reserve and push for a similar move at home.

"Our Federal Reserve has us paying higher rates than many others, when we should be paying less," he tweeted. "Jerome Powell led Federal Reserve has called it wrong from day one. Sad!" he added, referring to the Fed chief. The announcement came as other institutions including the Federal Reserve, Bank of Japan and European Central Bank said they were ready to step in to mitigate the economic pressure of the outbreak, which the OECD said could send global growth to its lowest level since the financial crisis. "The RBA became the first developed market central bank to cut in response to the coronavirus, paving the way for other banks to ease over coming weeks," said TD Securities' Prashant Newnaha. Though the RBA struck an optimistic tone about the future, analysts have predicted the country's economy could contract unless the virus is contained.

"There is expectation of further stimulus over coming months in most economies," said Newnaha. "The RBA's focus on offshore central bank developments... implies this is not the end of the RBA easing cycle, even if fiscal support is forthcoming."

Despite a record 29 years without a recession, it had already been flagging owing to growing unemployment, stagnant wages and high household debt. Economic growth was a modest 1.7 percent in 2019, prompting the central bank to slash rates three times in less than six months. A crippling drought and devastating months-long bushfire crisis have also dealt a blow, with the government saying the dry spell had taken a quarter of a percentage point off expansion in gross domestic product. One bright spot noted by the RBA was stronger house prices, with an uptick in the Sydney and Melbourne markets coming in recent months after a lengthy slowdown.

Malaysia's central bank cut its key interest rate yesterday to the lowest level since 2010 to combat the impact of the new coronavirus, which has battered economies worldwide. Bank Negara Malaysia slashed the rate by 25 basis points to 2.5 percent, as expected by economists, in its second cut this year. It came as Australia's central bank reduced rates to a record low and as other institutions including the Federal Reserve, Bank of Japan and European Central Bank vow action. — AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's central bank cut its key interest rate yesterday to the lowest level since 2010 to combat the impact of the new coronavirus.— Reuters

Fed vs COVID-19: What can the US central bank do?

WASHINGTON: Wall Street has tanked, some factories in China have shuttered and businesses and investors fear the new coronavirus could damage the global economy and maybe even cause a recession. The US Federal Reserve says it's ready to take action. What can it do, and will it actually benefit the economy?

Statement to reassure markets

In its worst week since the 2008 global financial crisis, Wall Street lost about 12 percent last week, and $3.5 trillion in equity value evaporated into the virus-infected air. As the death toll climbs, investors seem particularly worried about the spread of the virus to more countries, with the hit to the economy coming at a moment when growth was already fragile.

The Federal Reserve is supposed to focus on the domestic economy, not worry about day-to-day stock movements. But in a crisis, markets look to the central bank for reassurance. Fed Chair Jerome Powell responded Friday with a statement to calm the situation. He acknowledged the coronavirus "poses evolving risks to economic activity," and said the Fed is "closely monitoring developments."

And the kicker: "We will use our tools and act as appropriate to support the economy." Investors read that as a promise to cut the benchmark interest rate, and stocks rallied Monday. "The Fed is trying to show the nation that it's awake ... and it will provide support for the economy as need be," Alan Blinder, former vice chair of the central bank, said on CNBC.

Cut rates at scheduled meeting

The Fed's traditional and most powerful tool to affect the economy is the federal funds rate, the benchmark used to determine the cost of all forms of lending from credit cards to home mortgages.

The Fed raises the rate when it wants to slow the economy and ward off inflation, and cuts when it wants to provide stimulus by making borrowing less expensive, boosting consumption and investment.

The Fed's policy committee meets eight times a year, and markets and most economists overwhelmingly expect US central bankers to vote to cut the key rate at their next meeting March 17-18. The problem is the benchmark rate remains at a very low range of 1.5-1.75 percent, following three rate cuts last year.

Many economists warn another rate cut would be ineffective, since the virus is hitting supply rather than demand, and acting now will hamper the Fed's ability to react to a downturn driven by a contraction in consumption, which drives two-thirds of the US economy. "A cut in two weeks would be somewhat of a panic move as well" and "does nothing to change the economy facing a health crisis," economist Joel Naroff told AFP. "Assuming that the epidemic passes... much if not most of the impediments to growth will pass as well, and the economy will be able to revive without any help."

In dire circumstances, like at the height of the 2008 global financial crisis, policymakers will not wait for a scheduled meeting but hold a conference call to take emergency action. That has the psychological effect of showing the Fed is responsive to events, but also can add fuel to inflamed fears. And unlike in 2008, when the financial system seized up, the current epidemic has caused factories to be shuttered and transportation to grind to a halt. — AFP

S African unions threaten dispute

JOHANNESBURG: South African trade unions said yesterday that they would lodge a formal dispute if the government doesn't honor a three-year public-sector wage deal, a step that could lead to months of arbitration and culminate in a strike. Unions are in a militant mood after government officials said last week that they couldn't afford to pay public servants wage increases due in April and asked to renegotiate the deal struck in 2018.

Finance Minister Tito Mboweni said in his annual budget speech that he wanted to make 160 billion rand ($10.3 billion) of cuts to the public-sector wage bill over the next three years. NEHAWU, one of the largest public sector unions, said it had rejected government's request to review the wage deal and that it did not intend to discuss it further. "On April 1, if there is no implementation we will file a dispute and enforce the agreement," NEHAWU spokesman Khaya Xaba said.

Trade union federation FEDUSA echoed that view. "We are going to be declaring a dispute ... we don't want to open any discussions on a matter that was settled in June 2018 already," General Secretary Riefdah Ajam told Reuters.

If unions file a dispute, then the matter must be submitted for conciliation within 30 days. If the conciliation fails, it will head to arbitration and could end in a strike that cripples schools, hospitals and police stations. Vukani Mbhele, a spokesman for the Department of Public Service and Administration, said the ministry was talking to unions informally.

He said unions hadn't told the ministry about their plans to lodge a dispute and that officials would deal with the matter when it arises at the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council.

The fight over public-sector wages has big political and economic implications for South Africa. Some unions are important allies of President Cyril Ramaphosa's governing African National Congress. Ramaphosa is battling to preserve the country's last investment-grade credit rating, from Moody's, which is scheduled to review that rating later this month. On Monday, Ramaphosa signalled his support for curbing the public-sector wage bill. Economists have long argued that the government should take a tougher line with unions over public-sector wages, which account for around a third of state spending. — Reuters

Writer Abdullah Abbas Bowair recently organized a special ceremony to celebrate the 14th anniversary of appointing HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as Crown Prince as well as celebrating the national anniversaries. The ceremony, held under the auspices of Sheikha Maymounah Al-Sabah, was attended by diplomats, dignitaries and families of the martyrs. Speaking on the occasion, Bowair reviewed HH the Crown Prince's legacy starting with his childhood, his growing up in a ruler's house and the posts he had assumed prior to becoming the Crown Prince. Bowair also reviewed HH the Crown Prince's personal traits as a human being.

ICSK students celebrate Kuwait's National and Liberation Day

Kuwait is the land of opportunities. To be a part of this state it is a matter of our pride and privilege.

A thankful heart and an attitude of gratitude is the only way to reciprocate the numerous benefits that we receive. Keeping the magnitude of its thankfulness the school organised a special assembly on National and Liberation Day of Kuwait. To honor the nation, there occurred a flag hoisting by our Principal Mrs Sherly Dennis and Vice-Principal Mrs Sheeja C which was followed by the Kuwait national anthem.

The listening ears could be formed for the thoughtful speech that listed the nation's glory and grandeur. The demonstration of Kuwait's glory was covered through a skit. The National and Liberation Day of Kuwait were marked by the Kuwait air show which made the crowd waiting with enthusiasm.

As junior we recreated the magical air show which was widely applauded by the students. Each country brought its culture and tradition which was inculcated into the heritage of Kuwait. Embracing the traditional culture, there was a dance performance which heated the audience remarkably. To add colour to the day, KG students dressed up in Kuwait flag colour along with matching accessories.

Principal Mrs Sherly Dennis addressed the assembly and Vice-Principal Mrs Sheeja C congratulated the students and the teachers who conducted the assembly.

KKK organizes Daasotsava Bhakti Sankula - 2020

State of Karnataka is enriched with Daasa culture, which had contributed immensely to its literature, culture, art & philosophy. Daasa tradition in Karnataka was part of the Bhakti movement which flourished from around 15th century and it extended considerable spiritual influence over the masses. Kuwait Kannada Koota (KKK), a socio-cultural association for the people of Karnataka in Kuwait, organized its annual Daasotsava in remembrance of these saints, thereby displaying the rich cultural heritage of the state.

The program started with a warm welcome address by Mrs Spoorthy Kamath, convener of cultural committee. Divine invocation prayer by Mrs Vasantha Ashok and Mrs Sandhya Arun set the trend for the event.

This was followed by lighting of the traditional lamp by the 2020 executive committee, comprising of President Rajesh Vittal, Vice President Sandeep Chabba, General Secretary Praveen Kumar Shetty and Treasurer Pradeep Rao. The president, while welcoming the gathering, spoke about the importance of Daasas in Kannada literature & history and briefed about the series of upcoming programs.

Cultural programs started with fancy dress competition by Koota children comprising of all age group starting from infants to elder children. This program stole the show as the efforts and time invested by children and their parents were clearly visible.

2019 executive committee was felicitated by the current committee for wonderfully managing Koota affairs and programs. This was followed by the release of Koota magazine "Marala Mallige", comprising of informative articles, drawings, poems etc., entirely contributed by the association members. The event's main attraction "Vrindavana Leelavarana", a colorful dance drama spectacularly portrayed by 54 Koota children, was very well appreciated and received by the attendees. Association children who successfully completed 10th and 12th were felicitated as a token of encouragement. Executive committee gave away prizes to children who excelled in the stage competitions which was held earlier. Audience was treated to a divine and melodious Bhajan program conducted astutely by the ladies and men. Koota women performed Bhajan Kolata, along with ladies bhajan, in a well-coordinated manner. Vote of thanks was proposed by the secretary of Koota, thanking those who contributed for the success of the event. Another attraction was a quiz competition "Rasa Prashne", conducted efficiently between the programs, by Mahesh Shiramgond.

The whole event was planned and executed astutely by the cultural committee under the leadership of Convener, Mrs Spoorthy Kamath. Public Relations Committee, led by Mrs Suparna Dambal, welcomed the members in a vibrant & colorful way, showcasing a beautifully erected divine mantap. The program ended with a sumptuous satvik lunch, sponsored by the senior Koota member, Ramachandran Seetharaman.

Air pollution 'pandemic' shortens lives by three years: Study

PARIS: A 'pandemic' of air pollution shortens lives worldwide by nearly three years on average, and causes 8.8 million premature deaths annually, scientists said yesterday. Eliminating the toxic cocktail of molecules and lung-clogging particles cast off by burning oil, gas and coal would restore a full year of life expectancy, they reported in the journal Cardiovascular Research.

"Air pollution is a larger public health risk than tobacco smoking," lead author Jos Lelieveld of the Max Planck Institute in Mainz, Germany told AFP. "Much of it can be avoided by replacing fossil fuels with clean renewable energy."

Compared to other causes of premature death, air pollution kills 19 times more people each year than malaria, nine times more than HIV/AIDS, and three times more than alcohol, the study found. Coronary heart disease and stroke account for almost half of those deaths, with lung diseases and other non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure accounting for most of the rest.

Only six percent of mortality stemming from polluted air is due to lung cancer. "Our results show there is an 'air pollution pandemic'," said senior author Thomas Munzel of the Max Planck Institute's departments of chemistry and cardiology. "Both air pollution and smoking are preventable, but over the past decades much less attention has been paid to air pollution than to smoking, especially among cardiologists."

The worst-hit region is Asia, where average lifespan is cut 4.1 years in China, 3.9 years in India, and 3.8 years in Pakistan. In some parts of these countries, toxic air takes an even steeper toll, other research has shown. In India's Uttar Pradesh — home to 200 million — small particle pollution by itself slashes life expectancy by 8.5 years, while in China's Hebei Province (population 74 million) the shortfall is nearly six years, according to the Air Quality Life Index, developed by researchers at the Energy Policy Institute of Chicago.

African lives are also foreshortened by 3.1 years on average, with people in some nations — Chad, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire — losing 4.5 to 7.3 years. Among wealthier nations, the Soviet Union's former satellite states have the deadliest pollution, especially in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. "We show that about two-thirds of premature deaths are attributable to human-made pollution, mainly from fossil fuel use," Munzel said. "This goes up to 80 percent in high-income countries," he added. "5.5 million deaths worldwide a year are potentially avoidable."

Impact 'significantly underestimated'

Unavoidable excess mortality stems from natural dust storms, such as in central Asia and northern Africa, along with forest fires, though both phenomena are being amplified by manmade climate change, according to climate scientists.

The least-impacted regions of the world are the Americas, western and northern Europe, and small island states. The figure of 8.8 million premature deaths from outdoor air pollution each year is double estimates from World Health Organization (WHO). "The impact of air pollution on cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases was significantly underestimated," Lelieveld explained, echoing a conclusion from other recent research.

Air pollution causes damage to the blood vessels through greater oxidative stress, leading to increases in blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, heart attacks and heart failure. The revised number for China is 2.8 million premature deaths each year, two-and-a-half times the WHO estimates. The researchers said there are signs in India, China and other emerging economies that people are growing intolerant of life-shortening toxic air. "The realization that air pollution is a major health risk can contribute to the willingness to phase-out fossil fuels — with the co-benefit of reducing climate warming," Lelieveld said.

To assess the impact of air pollution on life expectancy, the researchers applied data on exposure to micro-particles (PM2.5) and ozone for the year 2015 to models that simulate how chemical processes in the atmosphere interact with natural and manmade pollutants, and data from the Global Burden of Disease. — AFP

App that detects jaundice in newborns could save lives

WASHINGTON: A smartphone app that lets users check the eyes of newborn babies for jaundice may be an effective, low-cost way of identifying which cases need treatment, scientists reported Monday. Jaundice, a liver problem which causes the skin and whites of the eyes to turn yellow, causes 114,000 newborn deaths and 178,000 cases of disability a year.

Three-quarters of the deaths occur in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, meaning the results of this new pilot study — published in the journal PLOS ONE and led by researchers at the University College London (UCL) — could be an important boost to health care professionals in poorer regions.

Senior author Terence Leung, from UCL's medical physics and biomedical engineering department, said: "In many parts of the world, midwives and nurses rely on sight alone to assess jaundice. However, this is unreliable, especially for newborns with darker skin. "Our smartphone-based method provides a more robust assessment, ensuring serious cases do not go unnoticed. While we await the evidence of a larger trial, we believe that this method, used as an app, could help to prevent the deaths of newborn babies due to severe jaundice worldwide." — AFP

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- Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
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- Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
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- Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
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- Laparoscopic mini bypass
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- Fellow of American College of Surgery
- Canadian Board of General Surgery
- Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
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- American Board of Surgical Critical Care

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

Academic Certificates – Training
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- (IFSO) member .
- Faculty member of (BEST).
- Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.
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- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
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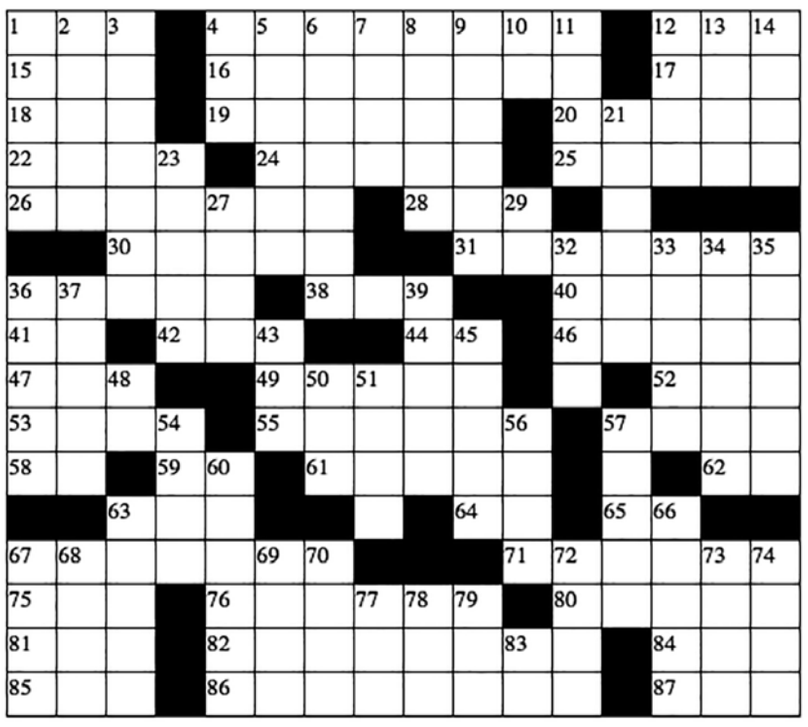

ACROSS

1. Standard time in the 8th time zone west of Greenwich, reckoned at the 120th meridian west.
4. A composer of sacred songs.
12. An honorary degree in science.
15. Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.
16. Speak out against.
17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
18. Greenwich Mean Time updated with leap seconds.
19. Somewhat late.
20. The capital of Morocco.
22. Any of various minerals consisting of hydrous silicates of aluminum or potassium etc. that crystallize in forms that allow perfect cleavage into very thin leaves.
24. An occasion for excessive eating or drinking.
25. With the mouth wide open as in wonder or awe.
26. A small cloth bag filled with dried beans.
28. Goddess of fate.
30. A city in southeastern South Korea.
31. Stain (furniture) black to make it look like ebony.
36. Lower in esteem.
38. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
40. Large antelope with lightly spiraled horns of desert regions of North Africa.
41. A blow that renders the opponent unconscious.
42. A federation of North American labor unions that merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1955.
44. A radioactive gaseous element formed by the disintegration of radium.
46. The state of being contaminated.
47. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
49. Genus of erect herbs of the Middle East having showy flowers.
52. United States musician (born in Japan) who married John Lennon and collaborated with him on recordings (born in 1933).
53. (informal) Exceptionally good.
55. A town in northern France on the Strait of Dover that serves as a ferry port to England.
58. A public promotion of some product or service.
59. A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).
61. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
62. A heavy precious metallic element.
64. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
65. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
67. Any of various aromatic herbs of the genus Monarda.
71. Having a woven pattern.
75. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
76. A port city and resort in Andalusia in southern Spain on the Mediterranean.
80. The capital and largest city of Bangladesh.
81. A crystalline rock that can be cut and polished for jewelry.
82. Generalized edema with accumulation of serum in subcutaneous connective tissue.
84. A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
85. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
86. A town in southeastern New Mexico on the Pecos River near the Mexican border.
87. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. Exactly vertical.
2. French composer noted for his experimentalism and rejection of romanticism (1866-1925).
3. A baroque musical composition (usually for a keyboard instrument) with full chords and rapid elaborate runs in a rhythmically free style.
4. A unit of force equal to the force that imparts an acceleration of 1 foot/sec/sec to a mass of 1 pound.
5. A cylindrical drawstring bag used by sailors to hold their clothing and other gear.
6. The largest of the islands comprising Antigua and Barbuda.
7. A cut of meat taken from the side and back of an animal between the ribs and the rump.
8. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
9. Be inherent in something.
10. A white trivalent metallic element.
11. A three-tone Chadic language.
12. A island in the Netherlands Antilles that is the top of an extinct volcano.
13. A sudden very loud noise.
14. The specified day of the month.
21. A temporally organized plan for matters to be attended to.
23. Squash bugs.
27. Cattle that are reared for their meat.
29. A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
32. Profane or obscene expression usually of surprise or anger.
33. A manner of speaking that is natural to native speakers of a language.
34. A married male American Indian.
35. Obtain through intimidation.
37. A committee having supervisory powers.
39. Depressing in character or appearance.
43. Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
45. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
48. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
50. A boy or man.
51. (Greek mythology) The Muse of history.
54. Mentally or physically infirm with age.
56. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
57. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
60. Covered with paving material.
63. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
66. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
68. Evergreen trees and shrubs having oily one-seeded fruits.
69. (Irish) Mother of the Tuatha De Danann.
70. (botany) Of or relating to the axil.
72. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
73. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
74. God of love and erotic desire.
77. The sign language used in the United States.
78. The state of matter distinguished from the solid and liquid states by.
79. Someone who engages in arbitrage (who purchases securities in one market for immediate resale in another in the hope of profiting from the price differential).
83. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.

Yesterday's Solution

S	A	T		A	N	T	H	E	M	I	S		G	A	D
C	R	O		M	I	R	A	B	E	A	U		A	G	E
A	U	G		P	H	A	L	S	A		N	G	W	E	E
M	I	S	G	U	I	D	E		G		B	A	K	E	D
			A	L	L	E	Y		R	E	E	D			
P	A	S	S	E				H	E	X	A	D	R	O	L
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S	T	A	Y		S	A	O	N	E				J	A	N
C	U	T				M	E	D	A	L		S	A	N	A
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			F	A	T	I	M	A		K	H	A	L	K	A
V	I	C	T	R	O	L	A			S	C	R	E	E	D
E	C	O	S	O	C		M	A	M	M	A		M	B	A
D	E	D		O	U	T	B	R	E	A	K		M	A	N
A	D	E		M	E	L	A	M	I	N	E		A	B	A

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

As the world economy continues to boom, Aries, don't be surprised if you're surrounded by new work possibilities. More than one chance to increase your income could come your way today. The problem will be wading through all these opportunities and trying to decide which is the most appealing and workable for you. List your options and outline the pros and cons of each. Writing things down can sometimes make them clearer.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You should be feeling especially creative at this time. Social events could put you in touch with some exciting new people, Taurus. Contact with those in interesting professions could open up new personal and intellectual avenues to explore today. New friends could come your way, and your romantic situation should intensify. Expect some exciting discussions and the opportunity to learn more about the professions and personalities of the people around you.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

One or more exciting new people could come into your life today, perhaps through friends or group activities of some kind. They might actually visit you in your home. Expect to be inspired and motivated by your contact with these people and others, Gemini, and to have a lot of new possibilities for your future running through your head. You might also begin to contemplate a move. Enjoy your day.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today is likely to prove very busy, Cancer, and full of interesting, unusual developments. You might find yourself having to run a lot of errands in your neighborhood, perhaps also making a few short visits. A lot of letters and phone calls, some with intriguing news, could also be on your agenda at this time. It could take some time for you to process all the information and make sense of it.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Opportunities to increase your income by working out of your home could well present themselves today. There might be more than one, and you could be tempted to take them all on. Think about this carefully before you commit, Leo. You're feeling energetic today, but that could flag on future days. Consider the situation honestly and objectively before making any firm decisions. You don't want to regret it later.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Paperwork regarding financial matters may need to be executed at some point today, Virgo. You're in the mood for some adventure, perhaps physical or romantic. You might be tempted to participate in challenging sports, such as river rafting or downhill skiing, or you might decide to attend a group meeting and see what opportunities for contacts - not to mention romantic partners! - come your way. Take care! Have fun, but move ahead with caution.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today, Libra, a subject that particularly interests you could cause you to delve into obscure sources to shed more light on it. Your intuition should help, but today you're more inclined to search for solid evidence. You might find what you seek in an unusual place and in an unconventional way. You might want to carry a notebook and pen with you today, even if it's just to the corner store!

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Today should find you continuing to work toward cherished career and other goals. Love matters may come to the forefront, Scorpio. If you're currently involved, unexpected events could bring you that much closer to your partner. If you aren't involved, you could meet someone exciting, perhaps through some kind of group activities. Also, a longtime friend could suddenly appear to you in a new light. Whichever it is, expect some interesting developments.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A lot of effort, energy, and enthusiasm that you've put into various business or personal projects in the past could finally pay off today. Don't be surprised if you receive some unexpected praise or acknowledgement for your work. Friends and your special someone are likely to be very proud of you for this, Sagittarius, so don't be surprised if you receive a lot of compliments and congratulations. Go out and celebrate tonight!

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Unexpected communications from people far away could open up new opportunities regarding career, education, travel, or other broadening experiences. As a result, Capricorn, new friendships could develop, as well as new ideas and possibly exciting new goals. Modern technology could play a major role in this development. A trip by air could be on the horizon, probably to a place you've never been before. Don't be too overwhelmed by it all!

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Career and business continue to play a powerful role in your life now, as new ideas, new people, and considerations as mundane as modern equipment open up new doors for you, Aquarius. In addition, romantic involvements could intensify. If you're currently committed to someone, expect to grow closer. If you're involved but not exclusive, a proposal could be on the horizon. If you aren't involved, don't be surprised if you meet someone new and exciting.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Sudden changes in your romantic situation could occur today, Pisces. If you're currently committed to someone, expect some surprising propositions from your partner. If you're involved but not committed, a marriage proposal might be in the picture. If you aren't currently involved, you could meet someone new and exciting under unusual circumstances. Make sure you look your best today, even if you're only running down to the supermarket!

Wordsearch Puzzle

Old TV Shows 2

Find and circle all of the old TV shows that are hidden in the grid.
The remaining letters spell the name of an additional old TV show.

R	M	S	M	D	O	S	I	L	V	E	R	S	P	O	O	N	S	
E	I	A	N	Y	T	S	E	R	C	N	O	C	L	A	F	T	E	
Z	S	L	B	N	Y	N	I	G	H	T	C	O	U	R	T	N	C	
I	T	L	O	A	P	B	S	T	R	A	H	W	E	N	O	O	V	
L	E	A	N	S	R	E	N	O	S	I	R	P	Y	Z	A	I	F	
A	R	D	A	T	T	N	I	T	H	R	Y	O	T	C	R	A	F	
U	E	F	N	Y	F	S	A	N	J	N	E	H	H	G	M	S	L	
Q	D	L	Z	A	U	O	P	B	N	H	G	E	I	E	O	F	I	
E	M	O	A	D	L	N	G	A	Y	I	O	N	H	U	R	O	N	
L	U	W	Y	F	L	S	N	R	L	J	I	O	T	C	E	J	T	
K	N	R	E	R	H	R	I	I	E	A	O	E	K	V	D	E	S	
C	S	I	L	Y	O	E	W	Y	N	T	R	N	I	E	I	F	T	
I	T	A	L	R	U	T	O	Y	S	L	S	F	E	H	R	F	O	
R	E	T	A	R	S	N	R	I	I	A	I	B	S	S	T	E	N	
E	R	T	V	E	E	U	G	M	T	I	T	I	E	N	H	R	E	
V	S	E	G	B	G	H	I	E	A	C	F	N	I	W	G	S	S	
A	W	R	I	Y	R	T	A	W	H	E	E	H	A	W	I	O	F	
M	A	A	B	A	S	M	A	C	G	Y	V	E	R	F	N	N	L	
C	T	B	U	M	O	H	W	R	O	T	C	O	D	S	K	S	A	

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Old TV Shows 1

S	I	L	L	I	G	E	I	B	O	D	E	E	R	A	N	N	O	D
W	A	L	T	O	N	S	P	E	Y	T	O	N	P	L	A	C	E	T
A	F	N	G	I	X	A	T	V	H	O	D	D	C	O	U	P	L	E
L	L	E	A	R	M	E	R	E	H	W	E	S	L	E	T	S	O	Y
A	I	R	A	M	E	M	U	R	P	H	Y	B	R	O	W	N	V	D
L	P	M	E	R	E	E	Y	L	M	I	A	M	I	V	I	C	E	O
J	P	A	E	T	G	L	N	Y	S	Y	M	N	K	S	T	Y	B	O
E	E	D	V	F	N	S	F	H	L	E	C	O	O	O	P	E	O	D
T	R	A	I	L	I	E	R	I	O	E	R	N	D	N	J	Y	A	Y
S	E	B	T	Y	T	M	C	L	R	R	R	C	E	S	N	A	T	D
O	D	O	I	I	H	I	L	L	G	R	N	A	A	G	Q	A	K	W
N	I	U	G	N	G	T	A	B	A	O	I	E	D	N	R	U	C	O
S	H	T	U	G	I	D	S	I	E	C	M	N	T	L	E	E	A	H
M	W	Y	F	N	L	O	S	L	A	N	I	E	T	E	I	E	M	D
P	A	O	S	U	N	O	I	L	L	O	C	D	R	I	D	K	R	E
O	R	U	R	N	O	G	E	I	I	E	S	A	E	P	N	U	R	G
E	D	T	S	N	O	R	T	E	C	H	I	P	S	M	Y	T	A	D
H	Y	N	A	P	M	O	C	S	E	E	R	H	T	E	O	L	I	M
O	O	R	A	G	N	A	K	N	I	A	T	P	A	C	Y	W	E	N

ALICE
BEN CASEY
BEVERLY HILLBILLIES
CHIPS
CANNON
CAPTAIN KANGAROO
DOBIE GILLIS
DONNA REED
DR. KILDARE
EMERGENCY
FLIPPER
FLYING NUN
FUGITIVE
GOMER PYLE
GOOD TIMES
GREEN ACRES
GREEN HORNET
HOWDY DOODY
I SPY
IRONSIDE
JETSONS
KOJAK
L.A. LAW
LASSIE
LOVE BOAT
MAD ABOUT YOU
MAUDE
MEDICAL CENTER
MIAMI VICE
MOD SQUAD
MOONLIGHTING
MURPHY BROWN
ODD COUPLE
PEYTON PLACE
RAWHIDE
RIFLEMAN
RIN TIN TIN
SOAP
ST. ELSEWHERE
TAXI
THREE'S COMPANY
WALTONS

The hidden TV show is: THE MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW

Daily Sudoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

Kuwait Times
Established 1961

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020

This handout photos taken by Saype and Valentin Flauraud shows a giant biodegradable land art painting by French-Swiss artist Saype at the "Monument of Heros" (monument des heros) in Ouagadougou. This 200 meter-long fresco covering approximately 5000 square meters was created using biodegradable pigments made from charcoal, chalk and water. This art piece is the fifth step of the worldwide project "Beyond Walls" aiming at creating the longest symbolic human chain around the world, promoting values such as togetherness, kindness and openness to the world. — AFP photos

'BODY ART' PIONEER ULAY DIES AT 76

In this file photo taken on March 9, 2010 in New-York, German conceptual artist Ulay attends the 'Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present' exhibition opening night party at The Museum of Modern Art. — AFP

German conceptual artist Ulay, a pioneer of "body art" performances, has died, the Ljubljana-based Ulay Foundation announced Monday on its Facebook page. He was 76. "It is with our immense sadness that we write to inform you of the passing of one of the greatest artists of our time, the pioneer of Polaroid photography, the father of performance art, the most radical, the one and only, ULAY, who has left for another journey," the announcement read.

Ulay, whose full name was Frank Uwe Laysiepen, was born in 1943 in Germany and won international recognition in the early 70s experimenting with Polaroid pictures and later while collaborating for 12 years in performances with his then partner Marina Abramovic. They rose to prominence with a 1988 performance marking the end of their partnership, in which they walked along the Great Wall of China from opposite ends and then met in the middle, silently wishing each other farewell.

They met again in 2010 when Abramovic was performing a piece at New York's Museum of Modern Arts titled "The Artist Is Present", involving Abramovic sitting silently as visitors took turns sitting across from her. Ulay surprised Abramovic by appearing as one of the visitors, prompting one of the few moments of movement from Abramovic in the piece when the visibly moved pair clasped hands. Abramovic wrote in an Instagram post: "He was an exceptional artist and human being, who will be deeply missed. On this day, it is comforting to know that his art and legacy will live on forever." One of Ulay's latest projects was the film "Project: Cancer", which documented events after his cancer diagnosis in 2011. Ulay divided his time between Amsterdam and Ljubljana from 2009, according to Slovenian media. — AFP

Tom Hanks becomes honorary Greek citizen

Tom Hanks was awarded honorary Greek citizenship on Friday, the state Athens News Agency said, adding an official touch to a long love affair with the country. A document that confirmed the distinction was signed by Greek president Prokopis Pavlopoulos, ANA said. The 63-year-old actor and filmmaker's wife, producer Rita Wilson, is also of Greek origin on her mother's side.

There is considerable pride in Greece that Hanks, one of Hollywood's most bankable stars, has a summer house on the picturesque island of Antiparos and visits every year. Hanks has said that he feels "110 percent Greek...I'm more Greek than a Greek is" by being married to Wilson, producer of 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding.' — AFP

Tom Hanks

Suspended Grammys CEO fired by Recording Academy

In this file photo Recording Academy president and CEO Deborah Dugan speaks during the 62nd Grammy Awards Nominations Conference at CBS Broadcast Center in New York City. — AFP

The embattled former CEO of the Recording Academy, the organization behind the Grammys, was fired Monday, the latest development in the body's infighting saga. The academy announced the termination of Deborah Dugan's contract in a letter, published in full by entertainment news outlet Variety, that circulated among the organization's members, citing "consistent management deficiencies and failures." The decision comes just over a month after Dugan was suddenly suspended days before the 2020 Grammy Awards show on accusations of misconduct and bullying, after which she filed an explosive complaint accusing the body of silencing her concerns over sexual harassment and voting irregularities.

"While I am disappointed by this latest development, I am not surprised given the Academy's pattern of dealing with whistleblowers," Dugan said in a statement sent to AFP by her legal team. "Instead of trying to reform the corrupt institution from within, I will continue to work to hold accountable those who continue to self-deal, taint the Grammy voting process and discriminate against women and people of color," she continued. "Artists deserve better. To me, this is the real meaning of 'stepping up.'"

Her last line was a jab at her predecessor Neil Portnow, who in her complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission she accused of raping a foreign female recording artist, an allegation he has flatly denied. Dugan replaced Portnow-who left his position after saying women should "step up" for industry recognition-last May, becoming the first woman to lead the Recording Academy.

In 2018 the organization created a task force in response to a major backlash that the Grammys are consistently too male and too white. Dugan's lawyers, Douglas Wigdor and Michael Willemin, vowed Monday the academy's "leadership and its attorneys will be held accountable under the law." — AFP

Fury as Kanye West hymn service pushes out transgender show

US rapper Kanye West was at the center of a storm Monday after a Paris show by an acclaimed transgender performer was cancelled at the last minute to make way for one of his religious services. The mercurial singer took over the Bouffes du Nord theatre in the French capital for one of his famous "Sunday Service" gospel hymn sessions during Paris fashion week.

His wife Kim Kardashian turned up for the service in an almost sprayed-on latex brown suit, one of three figure-hugging Balmain looks she wore during the course of the day. But French trans performer Phia Menard was furious that her "Maison Mere" ("Mother Ship") show was pulled at just one day's notice to make way for the golden couple of American pop culture, claiming the audience was told it was cancelled for "technical reasons".

Menard-one of the discoveries of the Avignon festival in 2018 — refused take the news lying down, with her and her fans lambasting the theatre and West as an "imposter" on social media. She accused the theatre of lying "so they could cash in on a religious ceremony and the money the Donald Trump-supporting rapper" could pay them, the 49-year-old juggler wrote on Facebook on Monday. Menard said she felt she had been treated with "contempt". "I am an artist, a trans woman, the director of a company, and I refuse to accept this denial and contempt," said the performer, who transitioned in 2008.

Latexing the Kardashians

The Bouffes du Nord told AFP that it cancelled Menard's show that because of the "technical incompatibility of the two events". "The 98 people who had bought tickets were contacted and most came to her show the night before while the rest were reimbursed," the theatre's management added. The theatre, once the base of the legendary British theatre director Peter Brook, dubbed "the father of the fringe", insisted that its "support for creativity, even at its most demanding, remains total."

West is in Paris to show the latest collection for his Yeezy label Monday. The 42-year-old singer once dreamed of becoming the first black American head of a major Paris fashion label. But his friend and former fashion adviser Virgil Abloh pipped him to it in 2018 when the Off-White creator took over Louis Vuitton's menswear line. West was joined at the service Sunday by his wife, their daughter North West and his sister-in-law Kourtney Kardashian, also dressed head-to-toe in latex. Kim Kardashian was tied up and robbed at gunpoint of more than nine million euros ($10 million) worth of jewelry during Paris fashion week in 2016. The haul included the engagement ring West had given her, which was reportedly worth $4.5 million. — AFP

US rapper Kanye West and Kim Kardashian

This combination of pictures shows animal-shaped handbags created by US fashion designer Thom Browne during the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos

Paris Fashion show

Models present creations by Thom Browne during the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos

Models present creations by Alexander McQueen during the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos

Splash: The forefront fashion brand in raising awareness on sustainable development

Q: Tell us about Splash vision for the future of the Middle East's fashion market.

A: As one of the region's leading fashion brands, Splash aims to strengthen the adoption of sustainable business practices in the Middle East fashion industry.

It is a fact that fashion impacts the environment on a daily basis with textile manufacturing affecting the environment through the constant and relatively huge emissions of greenhouse gas, water withdrawal, the release of toxins into our ecosystem, amongst other effects.

Thus, being sustainable is a core quality within Splash and as a socially and environmentally responsible fashion brand, our vision is to encourage consumers to be part of creating a better, more sustainable future.

Q: How do you see the Kuwaiti market?

A: eCommerce has changed the way consumers shop globally and Kuwait is no different. Consumers today want to nab the latest fashion pieces from the comfort of their homes, office or on the go.

Kuwait is a key market for the group and Splash's recent entry into online retailing in the country is in response to the changing way consumers shop today. Customers are at the heart of everything we do at Splash and the new dedicated website delivers several exclusive online offers, products and services. The friendly design assures easy navigation across various product categories, as well as convenient returns/cancellations and secure payment options. Designed to offer a more compelling browsing and shopping experience, the website's content has been tailored to showcase products and promotions relevant to fashion fans in Kuwait.

Raza Beig, Chief Executive Officer of Splash and Fashion Director of Landmark Group.

Customers can choose from a selection of convenient payment options - pay by card at the time of online purchase or by cash with no additional charges at the time of delivery. With a flagship store offer of latest fashion arrivals, shoppers can score free shipping on online orders above KWD 9.

Q: Splash launched last year an exclusive limited edition collection for Ramadan and Eid. Is there any new collection to be launched soon?

A: New collection announcements will be shared in due course.

Q: Splash revealed that 40% of its collection is 100% organic and sustainable. Tell us more.

A: Splash has been at the forefront in raising awareness on sustainable development. We have advanced our sustainability initiatives and reiterated our existing goals to deliver fashion by producing 80 per cent of our products using sustainable and ethically sourced materials.

Our design, sourcing and quality teams are contributing to the goals by spending more time researching and sourcing sustainable fabrics and manufacturing methods. With the adoption of sustainable solutions and new technology, the brand will significantly decrease its carbon footprint.

The brand uses recycled polyester, produced from discarded plastic bottles, that further leads to less plastic ending up in the ocean. Splash also makes clothes with eco-friendly fabrics such as Tencel, 100 per cent Organic Cotton and Lenzing Viscose, across several of its fashion lines which is now 80 per cent sustainable.

Q: What are the main sustainability issues in the fashion industry today and how does your brand subvert them?

A: Sustainability is critical for fashion as it is known that the fashion industry is a leading contributor to pollution as well as significant consumer of water. In addition, plastic represents a new environmental and health threat as the overuse of plastic is negatively impacting the planet and contributes to different forms of environmental pollution, including water pollution.

With this top of mind, Splash has become the largest user of recycled polyester in the Middle East and North Africa region, recycling 5.7 million bottles. Compared to the traditional process of using new polyester, this process saves enough energy to power the United Arab Emirates for 10 minutes.

100% of the denim produced by Splash is sustainable primarily by two ways- one by using sustainable raw materials and two by employing eco-friendly garment processing techniques. Splash Eco-denim range is produced using water saving processes and advanced machinery that consumes 70% less water & 30% less energy as compared to conventional denim, saving millions of gallons of water annually.

Using FSC paper since 2015 has also allowed Splash to reduce 200 metric tons of plastic waste in garment tags and packaging for over four years now.

We also spearheaded the Better Cotton Initiative, Splash being the first brand in the Middle East to procure sustainably produced cotton for use in its apparel.

Our recent inspirational sustainability campaign, The Aquarium of Truth, is aimed at promoting awareness to conserve the ocean, and strengthening the adoption of sustainable business practices in the fashion industry.

Also, this year, we launched the Splash 2020 annual calendar that promotes the adoption of sustainable fashion for sustainable growth. The calendar conveys a strong message that humans are not simply the offenders, but also the ultimate victims of global warming. The calendar urges customers to come together for this significant cause.

As one of the region's leading fashion brands, we want to encourage consumers to consciously incorporate alternatives into their everyday lives for a better future.

Q: How many branches do you have? Do you have a plan to expend in other countries?

A: Currently, Splash has over 200 stores in 14 countries worldwide. We are looking forward to growing e-commerce presence in new markets across the Middle East in the near future.

Q: How can you handle competition in the fashion market? Do you have plan to attract your competitors' customers?

A: Fashion is a very dynamic industry and every fashion brand must constantly innovate to stay ahead of the curve. The competition has and is going to be strong, but it only pushes us to innovate and better ourselves.

As a brand we understand fashion and consumer trends and we want our customers to feel they're buying from a conscious retailer who offers the right trend at the right time and at the right price.

Q: How has the brand's design philosophy evolved over the years?

A: When we started, we were a trader, buying out of South-East Asia and selling it in this market. With the advent of European brands, we changed our business model to that of a design house and built a team of in-house designers, who study international trends and catwalks. Our designers work closely with buyers to bring affordable trendy fashion to consumers. For a brand that is built on the ethos of design, it is constant evaluation that is required more than a dramatic change year after year.

Q: What are Splash's future goals?

A: Sustainability is a strong focus for the brand. We plan to further advance our sustainability initiatives in 2020 and aim to produce 80 per cent of our products using sustainable and ethically sourced materials.

This photo shows architect Kotchakorn Voraakhom (center) taking a photo with architecture students after a tour of the Thammasat Urban Farming Green Roof at Thammasat University in Pathum Thani.

This aerial photo shows an overview of the Thammasat Urban Farming Green Roof.

— AFP photos

Meet Thailand's secret weapon in climate change battle

Bangkok's future hangs in the balance. Rising sea levels, unchecked development, groundwater extraction, and rapid urban population growth has left millions vulnerable to natural disasters-scientists warn the city itself may not survive the century. New analysis by the Nestpick 2050 Climate Change City Index says the Thai capital could be hardest hit by global warming.

This aerial photo shows an overview of the Thammasat Urban Farming Green Roof, designed by landscape architect Kotchakorn Voraakhom, at Thammasat University in Pathum Thani.

And while it is not alone facing such a threat-Venice, New Orleans, and Jakarta are predicted to be underwater by 2100 — it does have a secret weapon in its battle to negate the impact of a hotter planet: renowned architect Kotchakorn Voraakhom who preaches mindful development over mindless construction.

"We are talking life and death in this situation," says the 39-year-old who is hoping to bring Bangkok back from the brink, as scientists warn extreme weather-flooding and droughts-could ravage the city, leaving as much as 40 percent submerged in the next decade. Kotchakorn says: "I don't want to face it with fear. At this moment we have a chance to make change... We have to do it right now to show the coming generations that this is possible. It is not about sitting and waiting and doing the same thing." No one can accuse the Harvard graduate of resting on her laurels: She made her name showing how the effects of climate change can be mitigated by ensuring the issue is at the heart of city planning.

She and her firm Landprocess created the internationally acclaimed Chulalongkorn University Centenary Park, an 11-acre (4 hectares) space in central Bangkok, which tilts downward at a three-degree angle, allowing rainwater to flow through the flanking grass and wetlands. Water that's not absorbed by the plants runs down to a pond at the base of the park, where it can be stored and filtered for use during dry spells or released gradually. In cases of severe flooding, the park can hold up to a million gallons of water.

Global rising star

Kotchakorn rails against Bangkok's unchecked development-more than 10 million live in the metropolis packed with skyscrapers, factories, malls and hotels-warning that an "addiction to growth" at all costs is jeopardizing its ability to thrive.

"We think about how we're going to have more growth in our annual development... What if we shift the orientation from growth to really consider our actions on the environment, listen to the land more," she says. "It doesn't mean I am against development but I want it to be very meaningful, very mindful, and at the right pace-so we don't actually kill our future." Today her ideas have been embraced at home, and abroad-she gave an acclaimed TED talk in 2018, and last year TIME Magazine included her in its "100 Next" list of global rising stars.

But convincing clients, authorities, and other businesses to see the big environmental picture has not been easy in a mega-city obsessed with economic targets and expansion. Driving change as a woman in a patriarchal society has been an additional challenge, but Kotchakorn insists there is "power" in being different, particularly in an industry dominated by older men offering only "conventional ways of thinking".

Many of her ideas were initially dismissed, but she held firm, explaining: "I feel that was based on their fear. But it's not my fear." "Women offer different kinds of judgment, different kinds of attitude towards problems... We have to bring that diversity to the table and create better decisions," she adds.

Things must change

A turning point came in 2011, when Thailand endured its worst floods in half a century, which left more than 800 dead nationwide with hundreds of thousands displaced. Bangkok, built on once-marshy land and surrounded by natural waterways, was hard hit. Then came the World Bank warning that 40 percent of it would be inundated by 2030. It was clear then things needed to change, says Voraakhom, who grew up in the capital and says air quality has deteriorated rapidly, as has food quality and security because of the heavy use of pesticides.

In 2018, she created Asia's largest rooftop farm, which mimics the region's famed rice terraces where run-off travels down layers of crops, conserving both water and soil. Winding around the 22,400 square-meter (241,111 square feet) rooftop is a jogging path and a lawn. Later this year she will unveil plans to transform a vast, unused bridge crossing the Chao Phraya river into a park with bicycle lanes, bringing more green space to a place with precious little of it.

Photo shows architect Kotchakorn Voraakhom posing for a photo.

"If you just do a normal building, it's just going to be the same. It's just another building. But if you create (something new), you actually could touch and change their way of living, their way of eating, their way of understanding of sustainability." Kotchakorn has even greater ambitions for the city she grew up in-she wants to "reclaim" the more than 1,000 canals that snake through Bangkok that are currently used for sewage. "Canals have so much life, so much potential to be public green space and a skeleton of the whole city," she explains.

Hailing her late mother as her inspiration, and her 11-year-old daughter as her motivation, she hopes her work will solve problems for generations to come. She says: "Being a mother is really helping to push me to create hope and solutions for the next generation. You see that the things you build will last after your life."— AFP

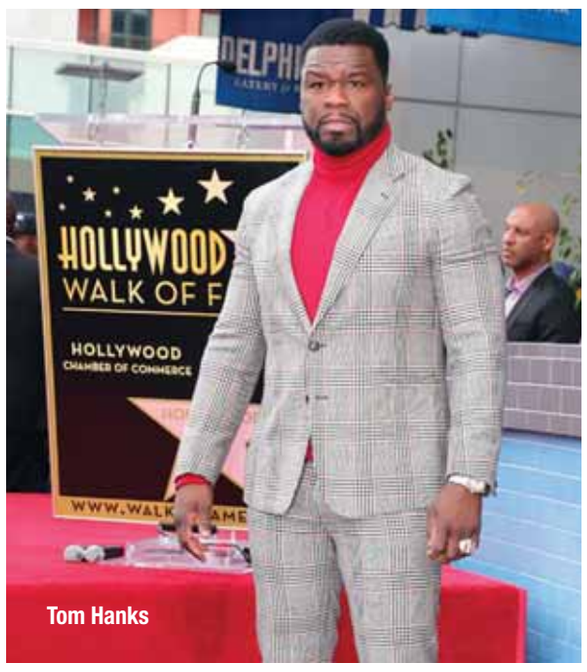
50 Cent vows to executive produce Pop Smoke's posthumous album

50 Cent has vowed to executive produce late rapper Pop Smoke's posthumous album. The 'In Da Club' hitmaker is determined to finish the record and has even reached out to fellow rappers Drake and Roddy Ricch to get them involved. Alongside two snaps of himself outside and inside his private jet, 50 - whose real name is Curtis James Jackson III - wrote on Instagram: "i'm on the move listening to Pop smoke, i decided i'm gonna executive produce and finish his album for him.#abcforlife #starzgettheapp #lecheminduroi #bransoncognac (sic)".

And in a separate post he shared a picture of himself and Roddy, and added in the caption: "Tell @roddyricch i'm looking for him, i need him on Pop album. #lecheminduroi #bransoncognac #abcforlife #starzgettheapp (sic)" Roddy then responded with the shaking hand emoji and said: "Say less."Curtis then followed up the post and this time tagged 'God's Plan' hitmaker Drake. He wrote: "see i got @roddyricch on deck, this s*** gonna be stupid @champagnepapi where you at *****, don't start acting light skinned on us. #abcforlife #starzgettheapp #lecheminduroi #bransoncognac (sic)"

Just days before his tragic passing at the age of 20, Pop had released the LP 'Meet the Woo 2'. The 'Welcome to the Party' rapper died after he was shot dead on the morning of February 19 at around 4:30am at a property in Hollywood Hills, California, after two men broke into the house. There was a gathering at the home and police confirmed two men wearing masks shot the star - whose real name is Bashar Barakah Jackson - multiple times before fleeing on foot.

The up-and-coming star was rushed to Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre in West Hollywood in an ambulance, but was pronounced dead when he arrived at the facility. However, the investigation into his death has since "hit a roadblock", as witnesses have reportedly changed their stories or given a version of events that is "provably untrue". A private memorial was held in Brooklyn days after Pop's death. Meanwhile, a Paris nightclub paid tribute to the popular star with a hologram last week. A digital likeness of the rapper appeared on stage at Yard Club and performed his hit song 'Dior'. The venue posted on Instagram: "During yesterday's #YARDWinterClub, we paid tribute to Pop Smoke, who died suddenly last week. "It was important to us, important to you, important in short."— Bang Showbiz



Tom Hanks

Classifieds

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

الطيران المدني
Civil Aviation
State of Kuwait - دولة الكويت

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Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

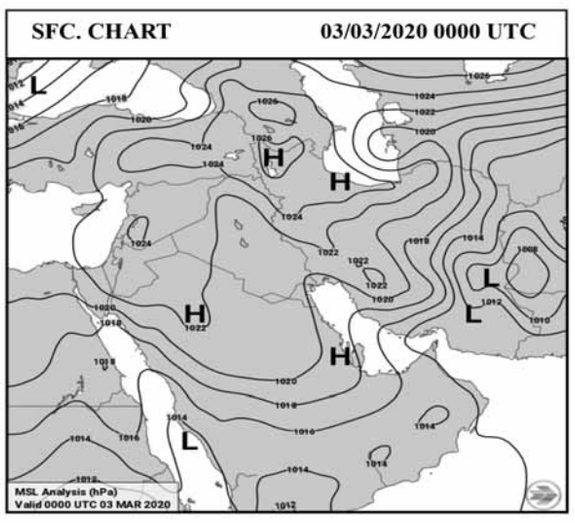
BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Rather cold with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	24 °C	16 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	23 °C	13 °C
ABDALY	24 °C	09 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	24 °C	12 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	23 °C	14 °C
SALMIYAH	22 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	22 °C	16 °C
NUWAISIB	22 °C	11 °C
WAFRA	24 °C	11 °C
SALMY	22 °C	09 °C

SFC. CHART 03/03/2020 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures MAX.	Temperatures MIN.	Wind Direction	Wind Speed
Wednesday	03/04	Warm	25 °C	11 °C	NW	15 - 38 km/h
Thursday	03/05	Warm	26 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Friday	03/06	Warm and Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for scattered rain later on	27 °C	10 °C	SE	15 - 45 km/h
Saturday	03/07	Warm with a chance for rising dust and some scattered clouds will appear	28 °C	13 °C	SE-NW	15 - 50 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:54
Sunrise	06:13
Zuhr	12:00
Asr	15:19
Sunset	17:48
Isha	19:05

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	23 °C
MIN. Temp.	16 °C
MAX. RH	50 %
MIN. RH	24 %
MAX. Wind	N 43 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

This is to inform that, I Gireeshkrishnan Oonnikrishnan, holder of Indian Passport Number H9245077 do hereby change my name format to Surname: Oonnikrishnan, Given name: Gireesh Krishnan.
(C 5650) 4-3-2020

I Abdul Raheem Shabandri Mohammed Sadath holder of Indian Passport No. N5193192 issued at Kuwait on 16/02/2016. In my Passport my name is written as Abdul Raheem Shabandri Mohammed Sadath. As my correct name is Mohammed Sadath Abdul Raheem Shabandri. Mohammed Sadath (given name) and Abdul Raheem Shabandri (Surname). **(C 5648)**

I, Antonio Jose Dcunha holder of Indian Passport No. M6716579 residing in Kuwait at present having permanent address Gurudev Shakti Flat S-3 2nd P.O Caranzalem Ilhas Goa Pin code 403002 would like to change my name from Antonio Jose Dcunha to Antonio Jose Dacunha as per my birth certificate.

I, Antonio Jose Dcunha holder of Indian Passport No. M6716579 residing in Kuwait at present having permanent address Gurudev Shakti Flat S-3 2nd P.O. Caranzalem Ilhas Goa Pin Code 403002 would like to change my father name from Mariano Santana Dcunha to Mariano Santana Dacunha as per my birth certificate.

I, Antonio Jose Dcunha holder of Indian Passport No. M6716579 residing in Kuwait at present having permanent address Gurudev Shakti Flat S-3 2nd P.O. Caranzalem Ilhas Goa Pin Code 403002 would like to change my Mother name from Maria to Maria Augusta Carmeline Vicente as per my birth certificate. **(C 5649)**

I Sajan Rajasekharan Nair Indian Passport holder No. Z5425150 issued in Kuwait hereby change name of my son as it appears in his Indian Passport No. M6717548 issued in Kuwait from Given Name: Kashinath Nair to Surname: Nair and Given Name: Kashinath for all future purposes.
(C 5647)
2-3-2019

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578

إعلان توظيف

شركة كبرى تطلب التخصصات التالية

1- مهندس تكييف خبرة 10 سنوات في صيانة التشيلرات بأنواعها
2- مراقب تكييف خبرة 10 سنوات في صيانة التشيلرات بأنواعها
3- فني كنترول تشيلرات خبرة 8 سنوات
4- فني تكييف خبرة 8 سنوات في صيامة التشيلرات بأنواعها

شرط وجود شهادات لإثبات الخبرة ويفضل من لديهم اعتمادات بالوزارات برجاء ارسال السيرة الذاتية على ايميل
Basel1375@gmail.com

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Please provide us with your CV, Experience certificates and Ministries approvals on
Basel1375@gmail.com

Flight Schedule

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 4/3/2020

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
ETH	3620	Addis Ababa	00:01
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10
JZR	254	Amman	00:45
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55
KAC	102	London	00:55
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30
MSR	618	Alexandria	01:35
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10
KAC	418	Manila	04:25
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40
JZR	540	KTM	04:45
KAC	382	Delhi	05:00
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10
JZR	112	Doha	05:35
JZR	502	Lahore	05:35
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10
THY	770	Istanbul	06:15
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00
BAW	157	London	07:05
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:10
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10
KAC	622	Doha	08:30
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35
JZR	408	Ahmedabad	08:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45
RBG	553	Alexandria	09:50
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50
AXB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35
SYR	341	Latakia	11:55
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05
AHY	119	Baku	12:05
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35
RBG	213	Sohag	13:45
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50
FDB	059	Dubai	14:15
MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	14:20
KAC	752	ELQ	14:20
KAC	672	Dubai	14:25
KAC	742	Dammam	14:35
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
KAC	774	Riyadh	14:40
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45
KAC	118	New York	14:50
KAC	364	Colombo	14:50
KAC	286	Dhaka	14:55
KAC	618	Doha	15:00
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
KAC	788	Jeddah	15:25
JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
JZR	732	Cairo	15:50
KAC	562	Amman	15:50
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:55
RBG	211	Luxor	16:10
JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25
QTR	1072	Doha	16:35
KAC	198	Baku	16:35
JZR	612	Tbilisi	16:40
JZR	116	Doha	16:40
FDB	051	Dubai	16:45
KAC	546	Cairo	16:45
CLX	8703	Luxembourg	16:55
SAW	705	Damascus	17:00
FEG	341	Sohag	17:20
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:25
SVA	504	Madinah	17:30
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
JZR	302	Istanbul	18:15
FDB	063	Dubai	18:15
JZR	124	Dubai	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
QTR	1080	Doha	18:30
RJA	640	Amman	19:10
KAC	156	Istanbul	19:20
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	744	Dammam	19:35
JZR	104	Bahrain	19:55
KNE	233	Riyadh	20:00
KAC	104	London	20:05
KAC	776	Riyadh	20:05
OMA	647	Muscat	20:20
KAC	616	Bahrain	20:25
MSC	411	Asyut	20:30
QTR	1088	Doha	20:30
KAC	674	Dubai	20:55
DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:55
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
ALK	229	Colombo	21:20
KAC	172	Frankfurt	21:30
UAE	859	Dubai	21:30
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
KLM	445	Amsterdam	21:50
KAC	168	Paris	22:00
KAC	564	Amman	22:00
RBG	217	Asyut	22:00
KAC	620	Doha	22:00
QTR	1082	Doha	22:05
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
AIC	975	Chennai/Goa	22:25
SVA	514	Riyadh	22:30
KAC	786	Jeddah	22:50
GOW	061	CNN	23:00
JZR	002	LGW	23:05
JZR	128	Dubai	23:15
MSC	401	Alexandria	23:15
JZR	736	Cairo	23:30
FDB	071	Dubai	23:45

Departure Flights on Wednesday 4/3/2020

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AZG	566	Baku	00:01
AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
JZR	407	Ahmedabad	00:05
MSC	412	Asyut	00:15
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
BBC	144	Chittagong	00:45
JZR	409	Delhi	00:50
ETH	3621	Addis Ababa	01:00
AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
JZR	111	Doha	01:55
KAC	285	Dhaka	02:00
KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
KAC	417	Manila	02:30
DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
MSR	619	Alexandria	02:35
IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
KAC	621	Doha	04:20
PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
JZR	713	Sohag	04:30
KAC	103	London	05:00
IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	167	Paris	07:35
KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
THY	771	Istanbul	08:35
FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
JZR	001	LGW	08:40
KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
BAW	156	London	09:10
KAC	545	Cairo	09:30
QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
KAC	101	London	09:45
KAC	561	Amman	09:45
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
KAC	751	ELQ	10:00
KAC	117	New York	10:00
UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
KAC	197	Baku	10:10
KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
RBG	212	Luxor	10:30
KAC	617	Doha	10:35
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
JZR	611	Tbilisi	10:45
QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
AXB	890	Mangalore	12:10
MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
SYR	342	Latakia	12:55
JZR	115	Doha	13:00
QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
AHY	120	Baku	13:05
GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
MSR	611	Cairo	13:25
SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
KAC	105	London	14:00
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
RBG	218	Asyut	14:25
QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:05
MSR	576	Sharm el-Sheikh	15:05
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
KAC	775	Riyadh	15:45
KAC	673	Dubai	15:50
KAC	563	Amman	16:00
SVA	501	Jeddah	16:00
KAC	743	Dammam	16:20
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	785	Jeddah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:35
JZR	735	Cairo	16:50
JZR	103	Bahrain	16:50
KAC	615	Bahrain	16:55
KAC	283	Dhaka	17:00
KAC	503	Beirut	17:05
RBG	554	Alexandria	17:10
KAC	361	Colombo	17:30
KAC	357	Kochi	17:35
KAC	619	Doha	17:35
JZR	405	Kochi	17:40
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
FDB	052	Dubai	17:45
JZR	539	KTM	17:50
KAC	331	Trivandrum	17:55
SAW	706	Damascus	18:00
KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
QTR	1073	Doha	18:00
JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
FEG	342	Sohag	18:20
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:20
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
SVA	505	Madinah	18:30
KAC	301	Mumbai	18:35
JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	381	Delhi	18:45
JZR	721	Alexandria	18:55
CLX	8703	Hong Kong	18:55
FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
JZR	253	Amman	19:20
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
RJA	641	Amman	20:10
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	353	Bengaluru	20:35
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:50
JZR	401	Mumbai	20:55
OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
MSC	406	Sohag	21:30
DLH	624	Dammam	21:45
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
QTR	1089	Doha	21:55
JZR	701	Asyut	22:15
KAC	205	Islamabad	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KLM	445	Bahrain	22:50
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
RBG	214	Sohag	23:00
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
KAC	383	Delhi	23:20
QTR	1083	Doha	23:25
SVA	515	Riyadh	23:25
KAC	795	Madinah	23:30
KAC	543	Cairo	23:30
KAC	303	Mumbai	23:40
GOW	062	CNN	23:55
KAC	351	Kochi	23:55

Turkey's drones provide crucial edge in Syria war

ANKARA: Turkish news channels have been dominated this week by a steady stream of black-and-white drone footage showing the destruction of Syrian regime targets in rebel-held Idlib. Domestically produced drones have given Turkey a vital edge in its latest operation against Syrian forces. They have become a symbol of national pride as the country seeks to shed its reliance on outside powers and become a leading defense exporter. "Turkey's use of drones in this operation is unprecedented in modern military history," said defense analyst Arda Mevlutoglu. "Their effective use seems to have changed the dynamics of the Syrian civil war and diplomatic maneuvers."

Armed drones have proved especially important in Idlib, where Turkish fighter jets would be at risk due to Russia's control of the airspace. Moscow appears not to be targeting Turkish drones, seeking to avoid further escalation ahead of talks between presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin later this week. Drone strikes have killed dozens of Syrian troops over the past week after Turkey launched an operation into Idlib, aimed at pushing back a regime assault that has forced nearly a million civilians to flee their homes.

It marks the culmination of years of investment and evolution for Turkey, whose military has become one of the most experienced users of drones. That is in large part because it has used them extensively against its own citizens. Ankara has claimed it has killed hundreds of Kurdish militants in southeastern Turkey in recent years. Domestically produced drones have made Turkey much more effective on the battlefield in Syria, said Ozgur Eksi, editor-in-chief of C4Defence magazine. Turkish forces had destroyed more than 100 regime tanks in just a few days in Idlib, he added. "If they tried to do this without drones, in any other way, it would have taken longer and there would have been a greater loss of Turkish life."

The Idlib operation is the first time Turkey has used drones in large numbers simultaneously for artillery and surveillance, said Mevlutoglu. They can also identify and illuminate targets for fighter jets operating from across the border. "This provides high precision long-range strikes, enabling Turkey to bypass the Idlib airspace yet managing to inflict heavy casualties to Syrian Arab Army targets," Mevlutoglu said.

Much of the credit for Turkey's drone industry has gone to Selcuk Bayraktar, an engineer who trained in the United States. He is also President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law. Turkey has an estimated 94 TB2 drones produced by his family's company, Baykar, according to Dan Gettinger, of the Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College, New York. The TB2 is a small drone that can carry limited munitions, but enough to destroy armoured vehicles. It has been used in Idlib alongside the Anka drone from the state-owned Turkish Aerospace.

Bayraktar yesterday told CNN Turk broadcaster Turkey had become "one of the most advanced countries in terms of operational ability" in the field of drone technology. Military information company Jane's reported last year that Erdogan had promised 600 million lira (around $100 million) for the development of Baykar's TB2 and Akinci drones. The Akinci, first flight tested in December, can fly up to 40,000 feet for 24 hours, and carry more munitions. Turkey is the "leader of a group of new nations that are investing a lot in this technology and trying to make an impact", Gettinger said.

Turkey's interest in drones dates back to the 1990s, and a series of bad experiences with external suppliers demonstrated that it could not rely on others. It struggled to procure US drones because Congress did not want them used against Kurdish militants in Turkey and Iraq. Its attempt to buy Israeli drones was a disaster. It took years to take delivery of 10 Heron drones purchased in 2005, which then had technical issues.

Erdogan took direct control over the defense industry in 2018 ahead of the shake-up of the presidential system. He has made it a priority for Turkey to become one of the top 10 defense industry exporters in time for the republic's 100th anniversary in 2023. Self-sufficiency is also crucial for Turkey as its relations have become strained with NATO partners. They have refused to back Ankara's operations in Syria, particularly against Kurdish militants.

FAMAGUSTA, Cyprus: In this file photo taken on Dec 16, 2019, the Bayraktar TB2 drone flies at Gecitkale Airport in the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). — AFP

There is also money to be made. Turkish drones have been exported to Qatar and Ukraine, and a deal is believed to be close with Tunisia, Gettinger said, while some have also been sent to support the UN-recognized government in Libya. It is also working with Indonesia, Pakistan, Ukraine and others to help them build their own drones using Turkish technology. "Turkey has very aggressively marketed its drones overseas. It takes great pride in its drone industry," Gettinger said. — AFP

Sharia fintech: Startups race to tap growth

JAKARTA: Like millions of other Indonesians, Gandi Iswara had for years carried a wad of currency notes for dropping into donation boxes after prayers at mosques in suburban Jakarta. From late last year, though, the 35-year-old engineer switched to a more convenient option: Whipping out his mobile phone, firing up a digital payment app from Google-backed GoPay and tapping the QR code stickers that are now affixed to the boxes.

His digital conversion took some time, as Iswara initially held the view that all rewards and discounts offered by e-wallets conflicted with Islam. "At first, I thought e-wallets resulted in usury, which is forbidden by Islam. But after a while I found them convenient in daily life," he said. Winning over conservative Muslims like Iswara in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country is both a challenge and multi-billion dollar opportunity for fintech firms that are riding its mobile Internet boom and aim to sell financial services.

Of Indonesia's 270 million population, half lacks bank accounts but most now have mobile phones. Questions about compliance with Islamic law are a significant hurdle for the adoption of digital payments and other fintech services, industry executives say. Known as sharia, the law strictly prohibits charging interest, or "riba", and clerics in Indonesia disagree on whether the popular cashback rebates and discounts given by digital wallets qualify. Social media videos in Indonesia on whether e-wallets are "haram" - prohibited by Islam - or incorporate "riba" rack up hundreds of thousands of views.

Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body has even issued an edict deeming virtual money acceptable, as long it met specific conditions. To showcase the compliance of their services with Islam, fintech firms are organizing forums with Islamic scholars and sponsoring religious festivals. Newer startups are tailoring services for Indonesia's growing body of "born-again" Muslims, known as the "hijrah" movement at home.

GoPay, which is part of ride-hailing firm Gojek, has partnered with the Indonesian Mosque Council since November to enable digital donations, including "zakat", or compulsory alms giving, in its 800,000 mosques, CEO Aldi Haryopratomo said. Zakat alone amounts to over $500 million annually in Indonesia. "It has made it much easier for people to pay alms," said Budi, chief administrator of Jakarta's Istiqlal mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, referring to digital payments services.

Rival LinkAja, which was formed by a consortium of Indonesia's top state-owned firms, has launched similar donation efforts. It is now readying LinkAja Sharia, which will offer a range of financial services specifically targeted at conservative Muslims and only accept money from Islamic banks. Backed by companies including telco Telkomsel and Bank Mandiri, LinkAja is currently seeking to raise $200 million in outside financing, sources told Reuters. The company declined to comment on its funding.

The scale of 'sharia-fintech' in Indonesia is small, so far, with Islamic fintech startups disbursing about 1 trillion rupiah ($73.15 million) in sharia-compliant loans in 2019, a four-fold increase from 2018, according to the Indonesia Sharia Fintech Association. But with all forms of Islamic banking accounting for only 6 percent of Indonesia's $580 billion in banking assets, there is room for growth.

The sector is also getting a policy push. The country's vice vice-president, cleric Ma'ruf Amin, took over Indonesia's National Islamic Finance Committee in January and has cited the growth of Islamic fintech as a key national priority. Some of the startups say they are finding their appeal extends beyond Muslims. One of them is peer-to-peer lender ALAMI, created by three ex-bankers, which has disbursed over $7.5 million in sharia-compliant financing to small and medium enterprises since May, and plans to become a digital bank.

CEO Dima Djani said that although conservative Muslims are its main target, others also are choosing it as an ethical banking option. "They see the fact we are focused on sharia principles as a sign of integrity," he told Reuters. Muhamad Fajrin Rasyid, president of Bukalapak, one of Indonesia's top e-commerce companies which offers a sharia-compliant investing service, concurs. "Many of our customers are from other religions," he said. "Some people tell us that sharia is not only for Muslims, it represents ethical financing." — Reuters

Passengers from 10 nations need...

Continued from Page 1

to remain in isolation for 14 days to make sure they are healthy. The education ministry yesterday discussed preparations to resume schools which have been suspended for two weeks from March 1. The ministry said all school activities will be cancelled and students and teaching staff will undergo thermal screening.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday the Assembly has not yet decided whether to hold the March 10 regular session and that a decision will be taken before Saturday. MPs Mohammad Al-Dallal, Osama Al-Shaheen and Abdullah Fahhad submitted a proposal calling to establish a research center to combat diseases and epidemics to develop vaccines and drugs. MP Majed Al-Mutairi called on the government to extend the school holidays to prevent any possible breakout of the coronavirus.

The world has entered uncharted territory in its battle against the deadly coronavirus, the UN health agency warned, as new infections dropped dramatically in China yesterday but surged abroad with the US death toll rising to six. Globally, the virus has killed more than 3,100 people and infected over 90,000 even as a clear shift in the crisis emerges, with nine times as many new cases recorded outside China as inside, according to the World Health Organization.

China has imposed draconian quarantines and travel restrictions to keep large swathes of the population indoors - a strategy that appears to have paid off as new cases have been generally falling for days. While Italy has locked down towns, other countries have stopped short of imposing mass quarantines and instead have discouraged large gatherings, delayed sporting events and banned arrivals from virus-hit nations. Twitter told staff across the world to work from home.

South Korea, Iran and Italy have emerged as major COVID-19 hotspots, which emerged from a market that sold wild animals in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. South Korea, the biggest cluster outside China, reported 851 new cases, its biggest daily increase, sending its total past 5,000 while its death toll rose to 28. "The entire country has entered a war with the infectious disease," South Korean President Moon Jae-in said.

By contrast, China reported 125 new cases yesterday - its lowest daily increase in six weeks - with all but 11 infections in Hubei province, of which Wuhan is the capital. The nationwide death toll rose to 2,943 with 31 more deaths, with some 80,000 total cases. China has even confirmed 13 imported infections, including eight Chinese nationals who worked at the same restaurant in northern Italy's Lombardy region.

Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province are imposing 14-day quarantines on people arriving from countries with a severe epidemic. "We are in uncharted territory," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Monday. "We have never before seen a respiratory pathogen that is capable of community transmission, but which can also be contained with the right measures." Community transmission means infections within a population are not imported from another virus-hit area.

The US is now facing a potential epidemic, with six people dying in the northwestern state of Washington, where officials warned residents the battle against the disease was shifting from containment to mitigation. Five of the deaths were in King County, which has more than two million residents and is home to Seattle, a major commercial and transportation hub. The White House, which has been accused of downplaying the threat from the virus, struck a bullish tone.

Vice President Mike Pence declared that a treatment "could literally be available by this summer, or early fall". He was likely referring to remdesivir, an antiviral drug developed by the pharmaceutical firm Gilead that has already been used to treat one US patient and was moving toward two expansive final stage trials in Asia. Pence also announced American pharmaceuticals were forming a consortium to fight the virus, and that South Korea and Italy would screen all their airline passengers bound for the US.

Despite its world-class hospitals and cutting-edge research, the US is viewed as vulnerable to an epidemic because of glaring disparities in healthcare availability, with nearly 28 million people without coverage. Chinese officials have touted progress in their own battle against the epidemic, and in another sign of growing confidence, 19 provinces resumed inter-provincial bus services on Sunday, state media said.

Saudi bars Gulf citizens, residents...

Continued from Page 1

Iran hosts several important shrines and pilgrimage sites for Shiites, who make up a minority of Saudi Arabia's population. The Saudi foreign ministry tweeted a video yesterday reminding citizens of an existing ban on travel to Iran, which is locked in a struggle with Saudi Arabia for regional supremacy. Saudi Arabia took several measures last week to prevent the spread of the disease to the kingdom, banning foreigners arriving for the Muslim umrah pilgrimage, Gulf Arab citizens visiting Makkah and Madinah, and tourists from at least 25 states where the virus has been found.

SPA also said that Saudi citizens or residents entering from a GCC country must inform authorities upon arrival in the kingdom of any travel outside the GCC in the preceding 14 days. The kingdom will cooperate with any GCC country that wishes to apply the same procedures to travellers from the kingdom, it added. Saudi Arabia's Center for Disease Control late on Monday urged citizens to postpone non-essential travel to Germany and France, where more cases have been reported.

Meanwhile, major concerts and sporting events in Gulf states have been cancelled or postponed. There have been at least 2,476 cases of the virus in the Gulf region, mostly in Iran where 77 people have died. Cases have also been reported in other Middle East nations. In the United Arab Emirates, a tourism and business hub, this month's electronic music Ultra festival at Abu Dhabi's 25,000-capacity Du arena and K-pop concert Music Bank at Dubai's 17,000-capacity Coca Cola Arena have been cancelled.

Electronic group Major Lazer, whose members include renowned DJ Diplo, and DJ Afrojack were scheduled to perform at Ultra. Ultra organizers cited travel restrictions imposed by some countries and airlines due to the rapidly spreading virus in its reasoning for cancelling the two-day festival. Music Bank organizers cited the spread of the epidemic in South Korea, which is the highest outside China, and elsewhere.

Conferences, concerts and sporting events are a major draw-card for foreign visitors to the UAE, which has reported 21 cases of coronavirus. Dubai's flagship international art fair "Art Dubai", scheduled for this month, has been postponed. A women's forum in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi was postponed while a yoga festival in Abu Dhabi and a Hindu Holi festival in Dubai were cancelled. The opening round of the 2020 World Triathlon Series scheduled in Abu Dhabi this weekend has been postponed. American rapper and producer Russ will now perform in Dubai in November instead of March because of the virus. "I know, wild lol (laugh out loud) but outta my control," he said on Twitter.

The Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES), due to take place in the sultanate in March, has been postponed to September, the organizers told Reuters. Oman yesterday confirmed six new cases of coronavirus, taking the total there to 12. Qatar has cancelled a defense exhibition and Bahrain postponed two oil and gas conferences from this month to the second half of the year. Saudi Arabia's Health Ministry said yesterday that people entering the kingdom by land, including via the causeway linking the country with Bahrain, were being screened.

The coronavirus has claimed 77 lives in Iran, officials said yesterday, as the emergency services chief became the latest high-ranking official to be infected in the deadliest outbreak outside China. Iran has scrambled to halt the rapid spread of the virus, shutting schools and universities, suspending major cultural and sporting events, and cutting back on work hours. Yesterday it announced another 11 deaths and 835 new infections - the biggest increase in a single day since the COVID-19 outbreak began in the Islamic republic nearly two weeks ago.

"According to the latest figures, 835 new patients have been added" to the overall number of infections, Iran's stand-in deputy health minister Alireza Raisi said. "Unfortunately, we have 11 new deaths, and with this amount we have reached 2,336 new confirmed cases and a total of 77 dead," he said in remarks aired live on state television. The national emergency services chief Pirhossein Kolivand was the latest high-profile official to contract the illness, a spokesman for the services told AFP.

Confirmation of his infection came a day after Tasnim news agency reported that the virus claimed the life of Mohammad Mirmohammadi, 72, a member of the Expediency Council which advises Iran's supreme leader. It also comes a week after the country's original deputy health minister, Iraj Harirchi, fell ill with COVID-19. Harirchi admitted he had tested positive a day after he had coughed and wiped sweat from his brow during a news conference that was beamed live around the country on Feb 25.

But the judiciary said a jailed British-Iranian woman, whose husband said she feared she had been infected behind bars in Tehran, was "in perfect health". Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was arrested at Tehran airport in April 2016, is serving a five-year term for sedition at Evin prison. "Yesterday she talked to her family by phone. There has been news about her recently that was fake news," judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili said.

Iran announced on Feb 19 its first two deaths from the coronavirus in Qom, a center for Islamic studies and pilgrims from abroad. The country now has the highest death toll for any country outside China, where the virus has killed more than 2,900 people since late December. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Iranians to stick to hygiene guidelines to prevent the novel coronavirus from spreading. "The healthcare guidelines for preventing infection from this virus should be observed," said Khamenei, who was seen on state television wearing gloves as he planted a tree.

Khamenei said Iran was being transparent with its figures on the outbreak and accused other countries of trying to conceal them. "The #Coronavirus has affected many countries," he was quoted as saying on his official Twitter account. "Our officials have reported with sincerity and transparency since day one. However, some countries where the outbreak has been more serious have tried to hide it. Of course, we ask God to heal the sick in those countries too," he added. Iran on Saturday dismissed a BBC Persian report that the real number of coronavirus deaths in the country was more than 200. The United States and Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders have accused Iran of concealing information about the outbreak. — Agencies

Price drops Dodgers debut, Bonifacio's single lifts Nationals over Marlins

Nunez hit two-run homer to help Baltimore gain a tie

ARIZONA: David Price took the loss Monday in his Dodgers spring debut as Los Angeles fell 6-2 to the Cincinnati Reds on Monday in Goodyear, Ariz.

Price struck out three but surrendered two runs on three hits and two walks in 1 1/3 innings. He was acquired earlier this month in a trade that also sent outfielder Mookie Betts to the Dodgers. Jesse Winker had two hits, two runs and two RBIs for the Reds.

NATIONALS 3, MARLINS 2

Emilio Bonifacio delivered the decisive single to center with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning to give Washington a victory over Miami in West Palm Beach, Fla. The Marlins scored both their runs in the fourth with Jesus Aguilar's tiebreaking single to right giving Miami a 2-1 lead. The Nationals knotted the score in the fifth when Adrian Sanchez homered.

CARDINALS 6, TWINS 1

Jose Godoy recorded a two-run single to help St. Louis knock off visiting Minnesota at Jupiter, Fla. Gilberto Celestino had a run-scoring double for the Twins.

BLUE JAYS 4, PIRATES 0

Right-hander Matt Shoemaker struck out five and gave up one hit in 2 2/3 scoreless innings to help host Toronto blank Pittsburgh at Dunedin, Fla. The Pirates had just three hits — all singles — against six Blue Jays' hurlers.

TIGERS 11, RED SOX 11

Travis Demeritte slugged his second homer of the game, a three-run shot with two outs in the bottom of the ninth, to cap a six-run inning as Detroit rallied to salvage a tie with Boston at Lakeland, Fla. Marcus Wilson, Bobby Dalbec and Connor Wong went deep for the Red Sox.

RAYS 3, ORIOLES 3

Renato Nunez hit a two-run homer to help Baltimore gain a tie with visiting Tampa Bay at Sarasota, Fla. Michael Perez hit a solo blast and Ji-Man Choi smacked a two-run shot for the Rays.

CUBS (SS) 9, ANGELS 4

Kyle Hendricks struck out three in three perfect innings as a Chicago split squad downed Los Angeles in Mesa, Ariz. The Cubs' Kyle Schwarber hit a three-run double.

PADRES 3, WHITE SOX 1

Starter Chris Paddack pitched three scoreless innings for the win as San Diego topped Chicago in Phoenix. He allowed two hits and a walk while striking out one. White Sox starter Dallas Keuchel yielded one run on six hits in four innings.

RANGERS 3, INDIANS 2

Robinson Chirinos went 2-for-2 with an RBI as Texas defeated Cleveland at Surprise, Ariz. Indians leadoff hitter Delino DeShields finished 2-for-3 with an RBI.

GIANTS 8, DIAMONDBACKS 1

Zach Green hit a three-run homer, and Austin Slater, Joey Rickard and Mauricio Dubon each had two hits to lead San Francisco past Arizona at Scottsdale, Ariz. John Hicks hit a solo shot for the Diamondbacks.

PEORIA: File photo shows Ian Miller #79 of the Chicago Cubs bats against the Seattle Mariners during the MLB spring training game at Peoria Stadium on February 24, 2020 in Peoria, Arizona. — AFP

ROCKIES 9, MARINERS 6

Ryan McMahon, Sam Hilliard, David Dahl and Drew Butera homered for Colorado in a victory over Seattle at Peoria, Ariz. Jarred Kelenic went deep for the Mariners.

PHILLIES 6, BRAVES 4

Christian Bethancourt hit solo homers in the seventh and ninth innings, and Philadelphia erased a 4-0 deficit to beat Atlanta in North Port, Fla. Johan Camargo knocked in two runs while Cristian Pache went 3-for-3 for the Braves.

A'S 5, CUBS (SS) 2

No-hit for the first five innings, Oakland scored two runs in the sixth inning and three in the eighth to beat Chicago at Mesa, Ariz. Only one of the Athletics' runs came home on a hit: an eighth-inning RBI single by Luis Barrera. Cubs starter Alec Mills struck out three in three scoreless innings. — Reuters

Raisman lashes 'offensive' gymnastics abuse deal

LOS ANGELES: Olympic gold medallist Aly Raisman lashed out on Monday at a settlement put forward by USA Gymnastics for the Larry Nassar abuse scandal, describing the proposals as "offensive" to survivors of the jailed team doctor's crimes.

In an interview with NBC television's Today morning news show, Raisman accused USA Gymnastics of attempting to prevent release of details which would show how Nassar was able to abuse athletes for years.

Raisman's criticism followed reports last month that a tiered settlement system would be used to pay damages to Nassar's victims, with payments ranging from $82,550 to $1.25 million. However attorneys for hundreds of women abused by Nassar have said the deal is insufficient, arguing it releases too many individuals and organisations from further claims, including the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee and former USA Gymnastics chief Steve Penny.

"It's honestly offensive," Raisman said Monday. "It shows they don't care. They're just trying to push it under the rug and hoping people will forget about it when they watch the Olympics this summer."

The 25-year-old, a member of the US women's team which won gold at the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympics, has been backed by former team-mate Simone Biles, who has also voiced dismay over the proposed settlement.

BILES ANGUISH

In a series of posts on Twitter on Saturday, Biles spoke of her anguish at the ongoing wrangling, accusing USA Gymnastics and US Olympic chiefs of failing to conduct an independent investigation into the scandal.

"Ugh at the airport. Heading to team camp," Biles wrote. "Still want answers from USAG and USOPC. Wish they BOTH wanted an independent investigation as much as the survivors & I do. Anxiety high. Hard not to think about everything that I DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT!!!"

In a following post she added: "Don't THEY also want to know HOW everything was allowed to happen and WHO let it happen so it NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN? Shouldn't people be held accountable? Who do I ask??? I'm torn at this point."

Both Raisman and Biles have said they were abused by Nassar, 56, who was jailed for life in 2018 for a catalogue of abuse involving more than 250 girls.

WASHINGTON: File photo taken on July 23, 2018 sexual abuse survivor from the Larry Nassar sexual abuse case Aly Raisman (2nd L) listens during a hearing before the Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security Subcommittee of Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

Raisman, who in a tweet on Saturday accused USA Gymnastics and the US Olympic Committee of a "massive cover-up", said the failure to obtain accountability over the scandal was "devastating".

"It's incredibly draining. USA Gymnastics, United States Olympic Committee — they refused to take any accountability to address the issue, to figure out what went wrong." "I personally would like to see USA Gymnastics and the United States Olympic Committee release all their documents and data because they are not doing that. They're not answering our questions."

The outcry over the settlement comes with US gymnasts, including Biles, preparing for July's Olympic Games in Tokyo. Raisman, who is now retired, spoke of her pride in her former team-mates' preparations for the Olympics despite the settlement controversy.

"I've been watching the gymnasts, and I'm really proud of them," Raisman said. "I think that they're doing an amazing job. I am heartbroken that this is still going on." — AFP

Ex-Astro Giles would return World Series ring

TORONTO: Relief pitcher Ken Giles is prepared to return his World Series ring from the 2017 season with the Astros, saying he wasn't aware of the sign-stealing plot while with Houston. "It crushed me to learn about the stuff that went on when I was there," Giles, now a member of the Toronto Blue Jays, told the Toronto Sun. "I had no idea. I had no clue whatsoever. I was blindsided by the commissioner's report. Up until then, I honestly didn't believe it. Just crazy."

Giles is the latest member of the pitching staff to claim no knowledge of the cheating scandal. Giles, like most relievers, spent the entirety of most games in the outfield bullpen. He was traded to the Blue Jays in July 2018. Giles said the ring the team won in 2017 brings a lot of mixed emotions, but mostly hurt.

"Whatever they ask, I would oblige. Because what was going on at the time was not OK," Giles said. "It just hurts. If they want it back, I'll be true to whatever needs to be done."

• Tampa Bay Rays minor league outfielder Garrett Whitley was struck in the face by a foul ball that flew into the dugout during the team's spring training game against the Baltimore Orioles at Sarasota, Fla.

The Rays said Whitley sustained a right facial injury, and he was transported to a nearby hospital to undergo X-rays and other testing. Rays manager Kevin Cash told reporters that Whitley never lost consciousness.

Whitley, 23, was seated inside the third base dugout in the fourth inning when right-handed-hitting Renato Nunez of the Orioles hit a scorcher toward Whitley. The ball cleared the grass and struck a dugout step, then slammed into Whitley's face. Whitley was immediately taken from the dugout for treatment.

• Texas Rangers right-hander Corey Kluber returned to the mound for the first time since he sustained a broken arm in May 2019.

Kluber pitched three innings against the Los Angeles Dodgers, his first start since he was hit by a line drive on the mound against the Miami Marlins. Then with the Cleveland Indians, Kluber was ready to return after a rehab assignment last season, but he sustained an oblique injury. He was traded to the Rangers in the offseason.

Kluber struck out four and allowed two runs in his spring debut. He is in the final season of his contract, but the Rangers have a $14 million option for 2021 on the 33-year-old.

• Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder/first baseman Cody Bellinger is dealing with discomfort in his side.

While the injury prevented Bellinger from playing in the team's spring training game against the Cincinnati Reds, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts told reporters that he was not overly concerned. Roberts said Bellinger's injury was not related to his participation in Albert Pujols' charity golf event on Sunday.

Bellinger, 24, followed up winning the NL Rookie of the Year in 2017 by capturing NL MVP honors in 2019.

• Pittsburgh Pirates left-hander Steven Brault has a strained muscle in his throwing shoulder, and he will be evaluated in two weeks, the team announced.

Brault split last season between the rotation and the bullpen. He posted a 4-6 record with a 5.16 ERA and 1.50 WHIP in 113 1/3 innings over 25 appearances (19 starts). The 27-year-old has allowed two runs on four hits in 2 1/3 innings in two appearances this spring. — reuters

Johnson to skip Tokyo Olympics

LOS ANGELES: Former world number one Dustin Johnson has become the first high-ranking golfer to withdraw from this year's Olympic games, with his agent citing a tight schedule for the withdrawal, reports said Monday.

World number five Johnson, who by current rankings would be eligible for a place amongst the US squad for Tokyo, pulled out of the 2016 Olympics due to concerns over the Zika virus.

The 35-year-old's decision to skip the Olympics comes as the sporting world grapples with turmoil from the coronavirus outbreak, which has forced the cancellation of several high-profile events across the globe.

However Johnson's agent David Winkle told ESPN that his client had opted to skip Tokyo because of the PGA Tour's condensed tournament schedule. "You just can't do it all, given the newly compressed schedule," Winkle told ESPN. "Dustin and others learned a lot about themselves and what works for them last year, so I applaud him for not overextending himself and keeping his personal priorities in line."

Winkle said Johnson was instead targeting the lucrative FedEx Cup playoffs, which start 11 days after the Olympic golf tournament wraps up. "Dustin gave the Olympics a great deal of thought and we discussed the pros and cons of him participating at length," Winkle said in comments to Golfweek.

"At the end of the day, it's a matter of personal preference and priority. As much as he would be honored to be an Olympian, the FedExCup Playoffs are also very important to him. — AFP

Racing hopes to be in a league of its own, thanks partly to Pogba

LONDON: French football World Cup winner Paul Pogba is the unwitting inspiration for the Racing League, a series hoping to attract a fresh fanbase for horse racing, its founder Jeremy Wray told AFP.

Wray was speaking at the launch at the historic Queen's Club — usually associated with the Wimbledon warm-up tennis tournament. The series will see 12 teams — each with three to four trainers, three jockeys and totalling 30 horses — contesting 36 races all worth £50,000 ($64,000).

The races over various distances will be hosted by four UK racecourses and take place on six consecutive Thursdays beginning on July 16, with all of them televised. Points will be allocated from the winner (25) down to 10th place (1), with the winning team scooping bonus prize money — the amount is yet to be announced — at the end of the series.

There will also be a "hands and heels" policy where the jockey will only be able to use the whip for safety purposes. Wray says his "Hallelujah moment" came three years ago when he was in a sports bar in London.

"On one screen there was football and Pogba was taking a free-kick for Manchester United, you knew that because his name was on the back of his red shirt," said CEO of Championship Horse Racing Wray. "On the other screen there was a race with the sound turned down and I was probably the only person who recognised it was Brighton.

"There was a three-way photo finish and the guy next to me at the bar asked me who are the jockeys? I said 'No idea'. "Who is the photo between? I again said I had no idea. I suddenly realised the sport is anonymous.

"It was the Hallelujah moment. We had to do something." Wray, former chairman of Swindon Town football club, said the jockeys will have their names on the back of their silks as they want to "showcase elite athletes".

He also said it might help to find new personalities to fill the considerable vacuum that will be left when superstar Italian Frankie Dettori eventually retires. "If you take a straw poll of people outside the sport to name three jockeys I can tell you number three is Lester Piggott and that is 40 years out," said Wray.

"Frankie is in a league of his own and is wonderful for the sport. "Jumps jockey AP McCoy is the second name people mention and he has also retired. There are a whole load of elite athletes on the flat that people know nothing about."

'TWILIGHT HORSES'

Wray says, though, a key motive is to encourage a new fanbase — there will be a 'Super' fan chosen for each team and one of them will share in the bonus prize money. "One can't be complacent — the numbers of spectators are dwindling," he said.

"The average age of both owners and spectators is going in the wrong direction. "The question is how do you engage these people. "We are not knocking innovations out there but they are going to the top level of racing and aimed at the same people.

"I am sure a lot of things won't work but hopefully there are innovations we introduce that will work and attract people by shaping it in a different way." Wray believes the league will also benefit trainers who are unable to compete financially at the sales when it comes to buying Group class horses.

"It is a great chance for smaller to middle ranking trainers," he said. "It is a great opportunity to show 'I am good at this job as well'." One of those trainers, George Baker, told AFP attracting younger spectators is crucial as the demographics when you go to a midweek meeting at Brighton are "scary". — AFP

South Africa to face Australia in T20 WCup semis as rain hits tournament

Group B runners-up England play unbeaten Group A winners India

MELBOURNE: South Africa will face defending champions Australia in the women's Twenty20 World Cup semi-finals after their match against the West Indies was washed out yesterday, leaving India to take on England.

The Proteas needed to avoid defeat against the already-eliminated West Indies to top Group B and with the match in Sydney abandoned without a ball being bowled, they earned a point to ensure that happened.

"I couldn't have asked for better, our first goal coming here was to get to the semi-finals," said skipper Dane van Niekerk.

"Generally in these tournaments, we've lost at crucial times, whereas in this tournament, whenever we've been down we've got up again. It's nice that everything is slowly but surely coming together."

South Africa have never beaten four-time champions Australia, who suffered a big blow yesterday with star allrounder Ellyse Perry ruled out of the tournament with a hamstring injury.

"What better way to do it (beat Australia) than in a World Cup semi-final. We're not used to the bigger-stage games, but hopefully everything comes together for us," she added ahead of the match in Sydney on Thursday.

Group B runners-up England, the 2009 champions, play unbeaten Group A winners India on the same day.

Earlier, qualifiers Thailand ended their inaugural World Cup on a high, posting their biggest ever T20 international score before the heavens opened and their clash with Pakistan was also called off.

They had lost all three of their previous games, with a highest total of 82.

But, after winning the toss at Sydney Showground, they stunned Pakistan with their aggressive batting approach, racing to 150 for three off 20 overs.

Pakistan, who upset 2016 champions West Indies in their opening game before losing the next two, would have needed their record run chase to win but didn't face a ball. "The openers were positive and aggressive and they did very well," said Thai captain Sornnarin Tippoch.

"We had an opportunity to come here and play against the big teams. I think it is good for us. We want to keep doing well. People at home will be happy, same as us. They will be cheering."

Natthakan Chantam and Nattaya Boochatham posted the second highest opening partnership of the tournament, 93, before Boochatham fell for 44.

Chantam made 56 with some late big-hitting from Nannapat Khoncharoenkai and Chanida Sutthiruang ensuring Thailand passed their previous record of 133 for eight recorded against the Netherlands last year.

"It gave us the lesson that during cricket no team is bigger or smaller, you have to be on your toes every time," said Pakistan skipper Javeria Khan, adding that overall the tournament had been positive for her team.

"We'll walk away with our heads held high and our girls played some good cricket." — AFP

SYDNEY: Thailand's Natthakan Chantam plays a shot during the Twenty20 women's World Cup cricket match between Pakistan and Thailand in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

Golden Knights look to bounce back against Devils

LAS VEGAS: After having their franchise record-tying eight-game win streak snapped in surprising fashion by the Los Angeles Kings, the Vegas Golden Knights conclude a four-game homestand when they host the New Jersey Devils in Las Vegas.

Sunday night's 4-1 loss to the last-place Kings, who have the fewest points in the Western Conference and second-fewest in the NHL, represented a wasted opportunity for Peter DeBoer's squad to build on its lead in the ultra-competitive Pacific Division, where the top four teams are bunched within six points entering Monday.

"It doesn't matter what team you're playing, two points is two points, and they're pretty important right now," Vegas forward Reilly Smith told reporters after the game. "We let two points slip away tonight."

"You look at the standings, everyone seems to be winning with us," defenseman Nate Schmidt told NHL.com. "It's hard to drop a game like that, but we've been playing really well the last couple of weeks."

Indeed, even after Sunday's loss the Golden Knights are still 10-3-1 since the start of February.

Anze Kopitar scored two goals in the first 7:39 and rookie goaltender Calvin Petersen stopped 42 shots to pace Los Angeles. Vegas lost despite outshooting the Kings, 43-17, including 37-8 over the final two periods and an eye-popping 19-1 in the third.

"I think if we played that same way against them another nine times we'd probably beat them all nine," Smith said. "They scored a couple goals early and it seemed like we were getting enough chances (but) we just weren't finding the back of the net. You play 82 games in a season you are going to run into nights like these. I think we did enough to win. It just didn't pan out."

Now comes a game against New Jersey, which sits in last place in the Metropolitan Division. The Golden Knights, who play 10 of their final 14 games on the road (including two at second-place Edmonton), can ill afford another home slip-up.

"I think our mindset has to be every game, no matter who we're playing, the top team in the West or the bottom team in the East, or vice versa, these points are so important for us," said center Paul Stastny. "We've got a big game to end off our homestand, and we're going to want to end that on a positive note."

Despite its not-so-lofty ranking in the Metro, New Jersey has played well recently. The Devils are 6-2-2 over their past 10 games and are riding a six-game point streak (4-0-2) that matches their longest of the season.

New Jersey comes in off a 3-0 victory at Anaheim on Sunday as Pavel Zacha scored a pair of power-play goals and Cory Schneider, playing in his third game since being recalled from Binghamton of the American Hockey League, stopped 34 shots to register his first NHL shutout since Feb. 21, 2019.

"My teammates did their job tonight," Schneider said. "For me, it's just about doing my job. The game felt good tonight in terms of my performance and how I felt."

This is the second of two regular-season meetings between the two teams. Vegas, behind a Jonathan Marchessault hat trick, won the first one 4-3 on Dec. 3 in Newark, NJ. — Reuters

LAS VEGAS: File photo shows Marc-Andre Fleury #29 and Alec Martinez #23 of the Vegas Golden Knights defend the net in the first period of their game against the Los Angeles Kings at T-Mobile Arena on March 1, 2020 in Las Vegas. — AFP

England replace handshakes with fist bumps over coronavirus fears

MELBOURNE: England players will not be shaking hands on their tour of Sri Lanka and will use fist bumps instead to greet each other following the coronavirus outbreak, skipper Joe Root said.

Root's team were laid low by flu and gastroenteritis in South Africa and are cautious following the coronavirus outbreak that has killed over 3,000 people and infected more than 89,000 globally.

"After the illnesses that swept through the squad in South Africa, we are well aware of the importance of keeping contact to a minimum," Root told reporters before flying to Sri Lanka on Monday night for a two-test series.

"We've been given some really sound and sensible advice from our medical team to help prevent spreading germs and bacteria." "We are not shaking hands with each other - using instead the well-established fist bump - and we are washing hands regularly and wiping down surfaces using the antibacterial wipes and gels we've been given in our immunity packs."

England will play the first of their two practice matches from Saturday before the first test in Galle from March 19 while Colombo hosts the second test from March 27.

Sri Lanka confirmed the first case of coronavirus in the country in January but Root expected the tour to go on as planned. "There is no suggestion that the tour will be affected. But, of course, it is an evolving situation so we are in regular contact with the authorities and will proceed as advised," added the Yorkshire player. —Reuters

Glory seekers Penarol branch out into cricket and rugby

MONTEVIDEO: A decade ago, Penarol were named South America's football team of the century. It's one of the biggest and most successful clubs on the continent having won the Copa Libertadores five times and their national title on 50 occasions.

But now, Uruguay's most successful football club is aiming for titles in cricket and rugby too. Uruguay is football mad and Penarol's black and yellow shirt is instantly recognizable but seeing it running up and down a cricket or rugby pitch takes some getting used to.

"Two years ago, there was a story in the press saying that cricket was being played in Uruguay and that's when we started taking more of an interest," said Leonardo Vinas, the president of Penarol's cricket section.

Cricket was being played on a makeshift pitch alongside Montevideo's promenade by Indian expats working for the multinational Tata Motors. "We got involved with the Indian community here in Uruguay who brought a sport that practically hadn't been played in the country for 60-70 years," added Vinas.

Penarol actually started life in 1891 as a cricket club when it was known as the Central Uruguay Railway Cricket Club, before it was renamed in 1913 as Club Atletico Penarol.

It was a sports club established by British railway workers in the Penarol neighborhood of the capital Montevideo. "In the first year, Penarol only played cricket ... the next year it started playing football and it was football that took root amongst Uruguayans," said Daniel Vinas, who runs the Penarol rugby club, and is Leonardo's brother.

"Through football (Penarol) developed into one of the main sports clubs in South America." Penarol is one of eight teams playing in the Uruguayan cricket league, although almost all the players are Indian expats working for Tata.

'PENAROL HAS THE TOOLS'

It's also one of six teams to join the new South American club rugby championship — Super Liga Americana de Rugby — alongside Brazilians Corinthians, Olimpia Lions of Paraguay, Chile's Selknam and Ceibos from Argentina, with Colombians Cafeteros Pro partially taking part as well.

"Penarol is a club that has recently invested a lot in minority sports, which is really good," said Alejandro Nieto, the captain of the club's rugby team, which will play its first ever competitive fixture on Wednesday against Selknam.

"In Uruguay the most popular sport is football and Penarol is flying the flag in this, so the idea of such a popular club supporting minority sports is so they grow." Uruguay has a number of historic rugby teams playing in the national amateur league, such as multi-sports clubs Montevideo Cricket Club, which is more than 150 years old, and Old Boys, over 100 years of age and originally made up of ex-alumni from Montevideo's British schools.

But for the country's first ever professional rugby team, the Uruguayan Rugby Union picked Penarol to run the franchise. "The big difference (to other amateur rugby teams) is that Penarol has the tools to grow this sport," said Nieto.

"The aim is that (rugby in) Uruguay grows and Penarol is a great vehicle for that." According to Pablo Aversente, the president of the rival Victoria Cricket Club, "the name of Penarol means something to people. "If tomorrow Penarol play hockey, they will attract people, if tomorrow Penarol play polo, people will go to see them."

'WE'RE COMPETITIVE'

But the club is not just taking an interest in these minority sports to help them grow. "Penarol always look to compete at their level, and to win," said Leonardo Vinas.

"We're not a social club and never have been. We're a competitive club." When it comes to the rugby club, Penarol is looking to make history. "With rugby we'll try to see if we can be South American champions, to become the only club in South America to become continental champions in three sports," said Daniel Vinas.

"We've already been champions in football and basketball." So too, though, have Corinthians and Olimpia, meaning there is more at stake than just the title of rugby's South American champions.

Winning the Super Liga Americana might be beyond Corinthians, though, as Penarol thrashed them 47-14 in a friendly last week. — AFP

Athletic players will walk off pitch for racist abuse

BARCELONA: Striker Inaki Williams said his Athletic Bilbao team mates will walk off the field if he is racially abused from the stands again. The Spain international, born in Bilbao to a Ghanaian father and a Liberian mother, was the subject of racist chants in January when Athletic drew 1-1 at Espanyol in La Liga after he was substituted.

The Catalan club identified 12 fans who had been involved in the abuse. Williams told Movistar programme 'Universo Valdano' on Monday that Athletic will stop playing even if they are automatically handed a defeat.

"If it happens again I will count on the support of a lot of people," said Williams. "I know that my team mates would have left the pitch with me (at Espanyol). I have spoken to them and the next time we will leave the field, even if they give us a defeat.

"In the 21st century it is something we cannot allow. Your skin colour, face or sex doesn't matter. We cannot allow anything like this." The club could not immediately be reached for comment. — Reuters

Arsenal reach FA Cup quarter finals to ease Euro woe

Torreira stretchered off while receiving oxygen

PORTSMOUTH: Arsenal bounced back from their Europa League heartache to reach the FA Cup quarter finals as goals from Sokratis Papastathopoulos and Eddie Nketiah sealed a 2-0 win at Portsmouth on Monday.

Mikel Arteta's side desperately needed a morale-boosting success after Olympiakos snatched a late winner to knock them out of the Europa League at the Emirates Stadium. Arteta said his players were still feeling "very down" several days after that kick in the teeth, but they survived an early barrage from third-tier Portsmouth to avoid more misery in the FA Cup fifth round. Sokratis put Arsenal ahead just before half-time and Nketiah bagged the second soon after the interval. Arsenal's record 13 FA Cup triumphs featured two with Arteta in the team in 2014 and 2015.

The 37-year-old would love to end his first season in charge with another victory lap around Wembley, especially given their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League are hanging in the balance. "We'll keep going because we love this competition. We're on the right path," Arteta said.

"It's a difficult place to come but I have faith in these kids. They always respond and I always knew they would do that. "They have to learn from the difficult moments and manage them but they have the talent and desire and look how hard they work."

Arsenal hadn't been knocked out of the FA Cup by a team outside the top two divisions since losing to Wrexham in 1992. A repeat of that embarrassment would have been a huge blow, so it seemed something of a gamble when Arteta made nine changes against a Portsmouth side who had won 21 of their previous 27 fixtures in all competitions.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Mesut Ozil were absent, while Alexandre Lacazette and Nicolas Pepe were on the bench. Pablo Mari made his debut at centre-back after joining on loan from Flamengo in January and David Luiz, Matteo Guendouzi and Lucas Torreira were among the starters.

Torreira lasted less than 15 minutes before the Uruguay midfielder was left writhing in pain after falling awkwardly following James Bolton's tackle. Referee Mike Dean ruled Bolton's crunching challenge had taken the ball, but Torreira needed four minutes' treatment before being stretchered off while receiving oxygen.

"Lucas was very sore and is in a brace. He will be assessed in a few days and then we will know more," Arteta said. Portsmouth's fall from grace after winning the FA Cup in 2008 was nothing short of spectacular.

Revived by a 2017 takeover from American billionaire Michael Eisner, who has had stints in charge of Paramount Pictures and Disney, Portsmouth are no longer a 'Mickey Mouse' club. They are chasing promotion from League One, have reached a second successive Football League Trophy final and tore into Arsenal early on.

Kenny Jackett's side had a glorious chance to take the lead when Steve Seddon's cross picked out Gareth Evans, but he headed wide from 10 yards. Arteta's team gradually began to impose themselves and Gabriel Martinelli nodded over from close-range after Reiss Nelson's cross curled behind the young Brazilian.

Arsenal made the breakthrough four minutes into first half stoppage-time when Nelson's cross found Sokratis and the Greek defender cushioned a fine volley past Alex Bass from 10 yards. Buoyed by that confidence boost, Arsenal doubled their lead in the 51st minute when Nelson again caused havoc with a teasing cross. This time Nketiah was the beneficiary as the 20-year-old's first touch squeezed him between two Portsmouth defenders for a close-range finish that made it three goals in his last five games. With Portsmouth running out of steam, the two-goal lead was more than enough for Arsenal, whose fourth win in five games would have been even bigger but for Bass's superb save from Bukayo Saka's dipping strike. — AFP

PORTSMOUTH: Arsenal's English striker Eddie Nketiah (C) takes on Portsmouth's English defender James Bolton (L) and Portsmouth's English midfielder Cameron McGeehan (R) during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Portsmouth and Arsenal at Fratton Park stadium in Portsmouth, southern England. — AFP

Should we be ashamed of our success: UEFA chief

AMSTERDAM: UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin told European football's administrators yesterday that they can be proud to be in charge of the most popular, wealthiest and best football in the world.

In a surprisingly blunt message, the Slovenian told his organisation's annual congress that they should not be ashamed of the success of tournaments such as the Champions League and the Euros — nor the huge amount money they generate.

"Should we be ashamed of our success? To be considered by many as the most important sports organisation in the world?" he asked the assembled delegates from 55 European countries. Breaking with the usual diplomatic approach at such events, Ceferin, who followed FIFA president Gianni Infantino to the podium, directly compared UEFA's revenue to FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

"In the current four-year cycle, from 2016 to 2020, UEFA will have generated more than 15 billion euros in revenue - more than double the 6.6 billion euros or so that FIFA will make over the same period, and twice as much as the IOC is able to generate in the same cycle," said Ceferin, who also offered a comparison to the NFL in the United States.

"The total cumulative TV audience for a month-long UEFA Euro (tournament) is more than 30 times that of the American Super Bowl," he said. "The UEFA Champions League final is the most-watched annual football club event in the world.

"Should we be ashamed of this commercial success? Should we be ashamed that, together, we, the national associations, leagues and clubs, have made European football the greatest success story of modern-day sport?"

Ceferin then listed the on-field success of European nations before insisting that the huge revenues were only justifiable if UEFA stuck to "purpose over profit" and continued to support grassroots football and social campaigns.

Without making specific reference to any proposal, Ceferin said: "When purpose over profit becomes profit over purpose, it is time to raise the alarm. Football is not simply a business like any other. It has a history, tradition and structure that must be respected.

"The football pyramid is delicate and must not be knocked off balance. Certain projects, some devised on other continents with the backing of governing bodies, are particularly worrying," he said, attacking the idea of closed leagues or ending promotion and relegation. "Our principles, history, tradition and structure have enabled football to dominate other sports and enabled European football to dominate the rest of the world. Calling them into question would be a death sentence for our sport," he said.

In his closing remarks, not including in the pre-written script of his speech, Ceferin also said officials should remember their role. "No football administrator, no matter the size of the ego should think we are the stars of the game. We are only the guardians of the game." — Reuters

Live — Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ITALIAN CUP

Juventus FC v AC Milan	**22:45**
beIN Sports	

ENGLAND FA CUP

Leicester City v Birmingham City FC	**22:45**
beIN Sports	
Tottenham Hotspur v Norwich City	**22:45**
beIN Sports	
Sheffield Wednesday FC v Manchester City	**22:45**
beIN Sports HD 2	

SPAIN COPA DEL REY

CD Mirandes v Real Sociedad	**23:00**
beIN Sports	

FRENCH CUP

Olympique Lyonnais v Paris Saint-Germain	**23:10**
beIN Sports HD 6	

Tottenham's Lloris to miss FA Cup tie

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur will still be without goalkeeper Hugo Lloris for their FA Cup fifth-round tie at home to Norwich City, manager Jose Mourinho confirmed yesterday.

The France international has still to recover from the groin problem that saw him miss the weekend's Premier League loss to Wolves ahead of the visit of the Canaries today.

Lloris has joined star striker Harry Kane, South Korea forward Son Heung-min and midfielder Moussa Sissoko on Spurs' injury list, although Mourinho hopes he will be available again for this weekend's league match at Burnley.

"(On Monday) I was not sure that he couldn't play (on Wednesday). He can't. I'm going to wait for good news for Saturday, I hope he can," Mourinho told reporters. "It's not the kind of injury where we know he's not ready to play for three, four or five weeks.

"He's not playing (on Wednesday) but I cannot tell you he's not playing Saturday because maybe he can." Teenage rising star Troy Parrott could feature against Norwich, however, with the 18-year-old striker set to be on the bench at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Parrott made a brief substitute appearance in the 3-2 defeat by Wolves and the scored during his 45 minutes of action for Spurs' Under-23s on Monday. "He's a very young kid with a lot, a lot, a lot to learn," said Mourinho.

"He has qualities. He has potential but he's not an end product. He has a lot to learn, a lot to develop at every level. "He's going to be on the bench again (on Wednesday). A few minutes he played already, he already has two Premier League appearances which is not normal for an 18-year-old kid. He's a privileged one.

"I think he understands the privilege of being part of the first team, training every day, learning with experiences players and coaches, with very people also in the academy. He's a privileged one. Step by step." — AFP

Man City must maintain 'big club' mentality: Guardiola

LONDON: Pep Guardiola urged his Manchester City squad to maintain their hunger for more trophies after picking up the eighth of his four-season reign with a third consecutive League Cup. City have more cup success in sight as they travel to Sheffield Wednesday in the FA Cup fifth round today and lead Real Madrid 2-1 after the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie.

Guardiola has now won 29 trophies in his managerial career after similarly successful spells at Barcelona and Bayern Munich and he wants City to match the demands of those European giants going forward. "I learnt in the big clubs I was at before, and in their history, when they win a trophy they go and take a shower, and they are thinking in that moment about the next one," said Guardiola yesterday.

"It is so nice what we have done in that competition in the last three years but in this game we have another final. "Away in the FA Cup is always difficult because of how important this competition is for the clubs in this country. We can go through to the quarter-finals and that is what we have to do."

The appointment of Guardiola has accelerated City's rise to the top of the English game after Roberto Mancini and Manuel Pellegrini also won Premier League titles backed by the billions spent by the club's Abu Dhabi-based owners. Sunday's success was City's 11th major trophy since ending a 35-year wait for silverware by winning the 2011 FA Cup under Mancini.

"There is a lot of effort behind this," added Guardiola. "The most important thing was the league when Roberto Mancini was here. It changed the mentality of the club. The first one is always the most difficult one and Roberto Mancini and his people and players did it, then other people came after them and continued the process."

Injuries have helped halt City's attempt at a third straight Premier League title as they trail runaway leaders Liverpool by 22 points. Leroy Sane has missed most of the season due to a cruciate ligament injury suffered in the Community Shield in August. The German winger is now back in training, but Guardiola will not rush him back to feature in midweek.

"He is not ready. (After) six months, (it) needs a process. When you start (back training) you feel good but still it is not (right), especially confidence," said Guardiola. "He is doing the normal steps to come back but maybe it will be easier to play in the Premier League, which we don't have chance to win, than in this cup competition. We need to be incredibly focused all the way through." — AFP

LONDON: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola celebrates on the pitch after the English League Cup final football match between Aston Villa and Manchester City at Wembley stadium on March 1, 2020. — AFP

Wobbling Juve, Inter aim for cup glory amid coronavirus chaos

MILAN: Juventus and Inter Milan can get their seasons back on track with Italian Cup semi-final return-legs midweek, which take place amid Serie A fixture chaos caused by the coronavirus. Locked in a battle for the league title the pair have been overtaken by surprise package Lazio as the city of Rome remains relatively untouched by COVID-19, which has caused havoc in the north of the country, killing 52 people.

Inter, who travel to Napoli tomorrow hoping to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg at the San Siro, haven't played in Italy since being beaten at Lazio on February 16 as the virus concentrated in the Lombardy and Veneto regions. Their home match against Sampdoria and the weekend's schedule title clash with Juve were both postponed, provoking a furious reaction from the club's CEO Beppe Marotta, who wanted the match played behind closed doors.

Two Europa League last 32 matches against Ludogorets is all Inter have had for preparation in that time, and their disrupted schedule comes in the midst of a dip in domestic form that has left the former league leaders third behind Lazio and traditional rivals Juve.

They face stiff opposition in Napoli, who look a side reborn since Gennaro Gattuso replaced Carlo Ancelotti as coach in December. They have surged up the Serie A table into sixth and impressed when they held Barcelona to a draw at the Stadio San Paolo in midweek.

The reigning league champions meanwhile host AC Milan in the other semi-final on Wednesday in a match that will be open to the public, or at least a portion of it. The Italian government decreed a halt to sports events in the regions of Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna and provinces in Liguria and Le Marche badly hit by the virus until March 8, unless the event is held behind closed doors.

The decree also bans fans from those areas from making away trips. Juventus announced that only fans from from areas not named by the government would be able to travel to Turin (in Piedmont) to watch the match.

They face a Milan side whose only defeat in 2020 so far came against Inter in a thrilling derby last month and who were unlucky to come away from the first leg with only a 1-1 draw. However Maurizio Sarri's side will be favourites despite ropey recent form that has seen them lose to Napoli and Hellas Verona and scrape past relegation fodder Brescia and SPAL. Their 1-0 defeat to Lyon in the Champions League led to questions over Sarri's future on the Juve bench, and should Milan reach the final with a first ever win at the Allianz Stadium the calls for his dismissal will only become louder. — AFP

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020

25 Price drops Dodgers debut, Bonifacio's single lifts Nationals over Marlins

26 South Africa to face Australia in T20 WCup semis as rain hits tournament

27 Arsenal reach FA Cup quarter finals to ease Euro woe

Heat beat Bucks for second time

MIAMI: Host Miami Heat held reigning NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo to 13 points and became the first team to beat the Milwaukee Bucks twice this season, winning 105-89 on Monday night. Miami is 2-0 against Milwaukee, which has the best record in the NBA at 52-9. The Heat have struggled on the road (13-18) but have the third-best home record in the league (26-4). Miami got 18 points apiece from Jae Crowder and Jimmy Butler, and Bam Adebayo added 14 points and 13 rebounds. Antetokounmpo was removed from the game with 4:33 left in the fourth quarter as Miami had a 15-point lead. His 13 points tied his season low. He made just 6 of 18 shots from the floor, including 0 of 4 from 3-point range. He had three assists and a game-high 15 rebounds.

CHICAGO BULLS 109 - DALLAS MAVERICKS 107

Otto Porter Jr. scored 18 points in his first action since November, and Chicago held on to edge visiting Dallas. Porter shot 7 of 11 from the field in his return from a broken foot that caused him to miss 51 games. He played 17 minutes. Coby White scored 19 points to lead Chicago, and Denzel Valentine finished with 17. Tim Hardaway Jr. paced the Mavericks with 26 points, and Luka Doncic had 23. Dallas pulled to 108-107 when Dorian Finney-Smith made a 3-pointer with 4.9 seconds left. Finney-Smith had just connected from beyond the arc with 15.3 seconds remaining. Chicago's Wendell Carter Jr. made one of two free throws on the next possession, and Doncic missed a desperation heave at the buzzer.

NEW YORK KNICKS 125 - HOUSTON ROCKETS 123

Julius Randle's free throw with 4.6 seconds left sealed host New York's victory over Houston. RJ Barrett tied a career high with 27 points and Randle finished with 16 points and 16 rebounds for the Knicks, who raced to a 21-point, first-half lead before staving off a furious rally by the Rockets. New York's Mitchell Robinson added 12 points and 13 rebounds. James Harden had 35 points and went 16 of 16 from the free-throw line for the Rockets, who had their six-game winning streak snapped. Russell Westbrook scored 24 points, his 31st straight 20-point effort, but missed a potential game-tying jumper at the buzzer.

PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 130 - ORLANDO MAGIC 107

CJ McCollum matched his season high with 41 points, leading Portland to a victory at Orlando. Playing without injured All-Star sidekick Damian Lillard (groin), McCollum shot 14 of 24 overall and 6 of 12 on 3-point attempts en route to the second-most points scored in Orlando by a Magic opponent this season. James Harden had 54 points at Orlando in December. Nikola Vucevic countered with a team-high 30 points for Orlando, but it wasn't enough to prevent the Magic from losing their second straight after a three-game winning streak.

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 127 - ATLANTA HAWKS 88

Gorgui Dieng and Jonas Valanciunas posted double-doubles to lead a balanced Memphis attack as the visiting Grizzlies trounced Atlanta. Dieng had 17 points and 10 rebounds, his ninth double-double of the season, and Valanciunas had 15 points and 15 rebounds, his 30th double-double of the season and his fourth in a row. The Grizzlies had nine players score in double figures in claiming the first game of a three-city road trip. Trae Young scored a team-high 19 points for the Hawks, but he sank only 5 of 17 shots from the floor.— Reuters

Olympic chiefs prepare for 'successful' Tokyo 2020

LAUSANNE: The International Olympic Committee said yesterday it was busy with preparations for a "successful" Summer Games in Tokyo in less than five months and at a time when the coronavirus outbreak is widening.

IOC president Thomas Bach, speaking at the opening of the Olympic body's two-day executive board meeting in Lausanne, said: "We are preparing for a successful Olympic Games, Tokyo 2020." The IOC, he later added, remained "fully committed to" and "very confident of" that success.

"We will continue this regular consultation with this taskforce to be able to address any development which would occur." Many sporting events around the world have either been cancelled or postponed in the wake of the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

More than 3,100 people have died and over 90,000 have been infected in more than 60 countries worldwide. The vast majority of cases are in China, but South Korea, Italy and Iran have emerged as the countries with the most cases outside the epicentre.

The virus has infected at least 230 people across Japan and been linked to five deaths. Following its board meeting, the IOC issued a statement in which it "expressed its full commitment to the success of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020".

The IOC heard a report on "all the measures taken so far to address the coronavirus situation, which was followed by a comprehensive discussion". "A joint taskforce had already been created in mid-February, involving the IOC, Tokyo 2020, the host city of Tokyo, the government of Japan and the World Health Organization (WHO)," the IOC said.—AFP