



Compulsory home quarantine for returnees from 7 countries

3 new coronavirus cases in Kuwait • MPs call to extend school closure, bar more expats

Arson suspected, maid arrested as kids laid to rest

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Following up on the Sabah Al-Ahmad house fire that killed eight Kuwaiti children on Saturday, criminal investigators yesterday arrested a housemaid who had escaped from the scene and is suspected to be involved in arson. However, the maid said she had fled due to fear of the flames and what happened to the children.

Eyewitnesses had reported seeing two Ethiopian housemaids fleeing the scene, leaving the children to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, amidst a state of utter sadness, huge crowds of mourners took part in burying the eight children of Sultan Al-Otaibi at Subhan cemetery.

HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolences to Otaibi, saying the tragic accident deeply sad-



KUWAIT: Mourners pray near the graves of eight children who died in a house fire at Subhan cemetery yesterday.

dened everyone. He prayed for the souls of the deceased and the surviving family members so they may be patient and bear the pain of the tragedy. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the bereaved father.

- CSC: Quarantined employees must not resume work
- Boursa slumps; CBK sets up \$33m fund to fight virus

- Saudi locks down Qatif region; 49 deaths in Iran
- Tourist in Egypt first confirmed virus death in Africa

By A Saleh, Faten Omar and B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry announced that all persons who have arrived in Kuwait from Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Lebanon, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Syria must follow preventive health procedures and guidelines, and are obliged to implement compulsory home quarantine for a period of two weeks from the date of departure. The Cabinet earlier banned flights from these countries for a period of one week due to the spread of COVID-19.

In an explanatory statement related to circular number 27 on the temporary suspension of flights from the abovementioned countries, the civil aviation authority said the suspension will end at midnight on March 13, 2020, adding that only Kuwaiti citizens and their first-degree relatives (parents, husbands, wives and children regardless of nationality) will be exempted from the entry ban provided they prove their relationship and undergo the standard medical procedures to be followed.

The civil aviation authority added that domestic helpers will be allowed in only if they



KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti trader checks stock prices from the outside after authorities stopped trading at Boursa Kuwait yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

arrive with their sponsors on the same flights. In addition, the statement noted that citizens of the abovementioned countries will only be allowed into Kuwait if they spend 14 days in a

non-infected third country. It added that passengers wishing to travel to any of the seven countries can do so via third country airports.

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Local

Kuwait Fights Coronavirus

Fear, panic is real as number of coronavirus cases rises

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Fear, panic and discrimination is rampant around the world as the number of deaths and cases of COVID-19 rises every day. Several doctors and health professionals have advised the public that it is not necessary to wear masks while walking on the streets, on the bus or at restaurants. Yet people are wearing them anyway just in case.

"I don't like to appear as if I am the only one not wearing it, so if I am using public transportation, I wear a mask, not because I am afraid of the virus, but because I am afraid of what people might think when I am not wearing it," a regular bus passenger told Kuwait Times yesterday. "I don't want to wear a mask because I heard the virus is not airborne, but people are wearing it, and I don't want to be different from them. So I bought the facemask even though it was expensive," she added.

Facemask prices have soared, and most pharmacies are not selling them as they have run out of stocks, along with those of sanitizers and rubbing alcohol. "I wanted to buy a facemask, sanitizer and alcohol, but many pharmacies all over Kuwait are no longer selling them," a woman said. "So I was happy when I approached a salesperson at a large grocery store in

Salmiya and asked for a sanitizer. Initially they told me stocks were over, but when I pleaded and said I have a baby to protect, the salesperson pitied me and gave me two bottles. They said they have been keeping it in storage because when they put them on the shelf, they are all gone within a few minutes," she told Kuwait Times. Some people said panic was created by the government too, when it ordered workers at all restaurants and cafes to wear facemasks and gloves. "The problem with this order is not the use of a facemask or gloves - the problem is when they use them but not follow the right instruction," a customer said. "What if the facemask is not changed for hours? What if they touch their mask and touch my food? What if they touch my food without cleaning their hands, or if the gloves are not changed often?" she asked.

All shisha cafes have also been closed in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Schools have been suspended and some flights have been halted. All over Kuwait, the behavior and attitude of people and the way they are communicating with each other has changed. Greeting by kissing and shaking hands is no longer acceptable. People now keep a calculated distance, especially with strangers. Sporting activities are also on hold, such as football and basketball matches and zumba and karate classes.



KUWAIT: People wearing protective masks cross the street in Kuwait City on March 2, 2020, amid a global outbreak of the novel coronavirus.—Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Livestock Company not affected by COVID-19

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait Livestock Company (Mawashi) CEO Osama Boodai said the company has not been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) and has been delivering its products to customers ordering through calls or the company's mobile app. "Our delivery vehicles are subjected to daily sterilization and constant routine inspections," Boodai said.

Boodai denied reducing the amounts shipped from livestock origin countries and stressed that the company reserves will cover demand as planned, as more sheep shipments will continually be shipped to cover local market demand. Responding to a question if the company follows any special precautionary measures with arriving shipments, Boodai said: "Our routine measures have always been in practice even before the coronavirus crisis, as we sterilize the vessels with special antibacterial substances before loading the cattle in order to protect it during its up to 14-day journey to Kuwait." He added that on arrival, all crewmembers are examined by the preventive medicine department and

all the sheep are examined by the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources.

Postal sector tour

Ministry of Services undersecretary Kholoud Al-Shehab and her technical office manager Abeer Al-Shereedah yesterday inspected the ministry's postal sector departments to make sure all COVID 19-related precautionary measures are put into practice. The tour also included the airport post office. Shehab also reviewed February's work statistics which showed that Kuwait Airways had delivered a total of 2,131 mailbags to the office and NAS delivered 4,491 mailbags, while total outgoing mail included 2,267 mailbags. Shehab also announced holding weekly contests to award the best three mail centers.

Speaking during the tour, the ministry's assistant undersecretary for postal sector affairs Mansour Al-Bader said a meeting will be held with the municipality to agree on a mechanism to dispose empty mailbags according to Environment Public Authority regulations. Mail traffic manager Siddiqah Khajah hailed the ministry's efforts in developing the postal sector and ensuring safety in view of the current health circumstances. Khajah added that the sector's development plan includes merging post offices, especially those with low mail traffic such as Dasman and inner post offices.

Sorting and parcel exchange manager Faisal Al-Qabandi said that in a bid to facilitate and accelerate the sorting process, incoming mail will not be sorted on



KUWAIT: Officials attend a press conference for Kuwait Livestock Company yesterday. — KUNA

reception from airlines. This will be done at another site with more staff members outside the airport.

More freedoms

Chairman of the parliament's educational affairs committee Oudah Al-Ruwaihi said that the committee met Information Minister Mohammad Al-Jabri and discussed amending the audiovisual and publication laws.

"Both sides agreed on the amendments," Ruwaihi stressed, expecting the final draft to be finalized by the end of the week before submitting it to parliament for voting. Ruwaihi added that the amendments included freedom of expression and the procedures followed in certain cases. "The amendments will achieve more freedoms and facilities concerning media institutions and newspaper licenses," he said.

Ministers visit Al-Joan quarantine

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel visited Al-Joan center quarantine to check on the wellbeing of citizens and services provided there. The two ministers closely observed the medical and security systems in the center, as well as means of preventing the spread of the coronavirus, the Ministry of Social Affairs said in a statement yesterday. They directed the working teams to provide sufficient amounts of medicine supplies and exert more efforts to meet the daily needs of citizens in the center, the ministry noted. They also hailed the tremendous efforts of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health's staff to fight the virus, it added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel pose for a group photo with medical staff at Al-Joan center. — KUNA photos



Ministers Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Mariam Al-Aqeel tour Al-Joan center.

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 64 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), all of which are Kuwaiti patients who returned to the country from Iran, except for an Egyptian national who returned to Kuwait from a visit to Azerbaijan. With the exception of two cases of Kuwaiti women in their 70s who have been admitted to the intensive care unit with pneumonia, all cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while dozens have been discharged after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, a 34-year-old Kuwaiti man has recovered completely after previously been infected with the virus, the ministry said. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of 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 the following countries:

- China
- Hong Kong
- Singapore
- Thailand
- South Korea
- Japan
- Italy
- Iraq
- 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. In the meantime, Iraq has suspended flights from Kuwait, whereas Saudi Arabia stopped issuing umrah visas for all nationalities as a precautionary measures. Furthermore, Kuwait suspended all flights for a week starting March 7 to and from the following countries:

- Lebanon
- Syria
- Bangladesh
- Philippines
- India
- Sri Lanka

This came two days after Kuwait suspended a decision which required travelers to conduct Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests at certified clinics before coming to Kuwait from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the health ministry announced that all persons who have arrived in Kuwait from Bangladesh, India, Lebanon, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Syria must follow preventive health procedures and guidelines, and are obliged to implement compulsory home quarantine for a period of two weeks from the date of departure. The suspension will end at midnight on March 13, 2020. Only Kuwaiti citizens and their first-degree relatives (parents, husbands, wives and children regardless of nationality) will be exempted from the entry ban provided they prove their relationship and undergo

the standard medical procedures to be followed. Domestic helpers will be allowed in only if they arrive with their sponsors on the same flights. Citizens of the abovementioned countries will only be allowed into Kuwait if they spend 14 days in a non-infected third country. It added that passengers wishing to travel to any of the seven countries can do so via third country airports.

The Civil Service Commission yesterday directed all government agencies to bar employees placed under any form of quarantine from resuming work. The ban is applicable on Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees. Salary payments will continue as usual to all Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees under all kinds of compulsory quarantine.

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.

- 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)

Local

Amir, Crown Prince receive state officials at Bayan Palace



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



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.

KUWAIT: 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 Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, as well as

Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His

Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chief Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Kuwait affirms support to Iraq against COVID-19

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday conducted a phone call with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammad Al-Hakim expressing distress for difficult conditions in Iraq due to spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement

that Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser notified the Iraqi counterpart that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had requested that the Iraqi leadership be informed about his keenness on supporting Iraq in facing the virus. Minister Hakim expressed gratitude for the humanitarian gesture. — KUNA

Kuwait issues decree to regulate pharmaceuticals

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah has ordered stricter regulation of pharmaceuticals and veterinary drugs, in line with international regulations and standards. The decision is an effort to protect public health and to ensure dietary supplements are put through strict safety and effectiveness requirements, said Dr Abdullah Al-Bader, the health ministry's undersecretary for

drug inspection. He highlighted the role of veterinary drugs in keeping animal disease under strict control, in addition to preventing a number of infectious diseases animals are capable of giving to humans. The regulatory requirements emphasize good practices for controlling quality and safety, from drug development to distribution, the official highlighted. —KUNA

Non-oil Kuwaiti exports drop

KUWAIT: The value of certificates of origin for non-oil Kuwait exports dropped 29 percent in February compared to the same month of 2019, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Industry and Commerce said yesterday. The ministry said in a statement that number of certificates of origin for products exported to Arab and foreign countries amounted to 1,136, valued at KD 12.6 million (\$41 million) in February against 1,116 certificates, worth KD 17.8 million (\$85 million) in same month of the past year.

The figure of Kuwaiti certificates for exports to Arab states, except for GCC countries, amounted to 261, valued at KD 3.8 million (\$12.4 million), against 65 for foreign countries, valued at KD 2.6 million (\$8.5 million). The number of the certificates for the Kuwaiti exports to the GCC countries reached 810, valued at KD 6.1 million (\$20 million) during the same month of the last year. The ministry also noted that Belgium topped other countries that received Kuwaiti exports. —KUNA

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Small swarms of locusts were seen in various parts of Kuwait including in southern areas Mangaf, Mahboulah and elsewhere. — Photo by a reader.

KRCS oversees surgeries on patients in Nepal



Kuwait Red Crescent Society's medical team volunteers.—KUNA photos

KUWAIT: A team of physicians affiliated with Kuwait's Red Crescent Society (KRCS) have conducted some 40 intricate surgical procedures on impoverished people in Nepal, part of an aid package delivered to the Himalayan nation. The Kuwaiti aid is meant to save lives given the soaring cost of living in Nepal, KRCS director general Abdulrahman Al-Oun said yesterday, adding that the Kuwaiti physicians are in Nepal to help

out of their volition. Such initiatives undertaken by KRCS are commonplace, added the official, thanking the Kuwaiti physicians for their praiseworthy efforts to assist those less fortunate. The surgeries are highly complex and diverse, according to Dr Abdullatif Al-Turki, the chief of Al-Amiri hospital's urology department, who described the gracious initiative as a hallmark of Kuwaiti philanthropy. — KUNA



Dr Abdullatif Al-Turki (left) and Abdulrahman Al-Oun.



KATHMANDU: Kuwaiti doctors perform an operation at a hospital in Nepal.



KRCS volunteers pose for a group picture with Nepalese officials.

60,000 to benefit from Kuwait Food Bank project

KUWAIT: Kuwait Food Bank (KFB) launched yesterday a food project for more than 60,000 beneficiaries from various regions in Kuwait, as their number increased compared to last year. Salem Al-Hamar, the general manager of the bank, said in a statement that the project aims to distribute aid, nutritional needs and necessary supplies for widows, divorced women, the elderly, the sick, people with special needs, orphans and poor people throughout the year with the fund of Awqaf Public Foundation. The provision

of aid is through the bank's database, which is constantly updated to add names of the needy and poor families, and be delivered by professional volunteer teams, he added. Supporting people in need for assistance is a pillar in Kuwait's statute as a 'Humanitarian Center,' thanks to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's humanitarian efforts around the world. The United Nations has recognized the State of Kuwait as a 'Humanitarian Center' and His Highness the Amir as a 'Humanitarian Leader,' in appreciation for the generous aid for the needy, locally and abroad. — KUNA



Salem Al-Hamar

Kuwait Airways honored at int'l innovation expo

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways sponsored the 12th International Innovation Exhibition in the Middle East held recently under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah represented His Highness the Amir at the event; which also

saw the attendance of Kuwait Science Club Chairman Talal Al-Kharafi. Kuwait Airways was honored as the official airline of the exhibition, as the closing ceremony featured the honoring of the winner of HH the Amir's prize of \$15,000, who won for inventing a drone-jamming device.



Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah poses for a group picture with the honorees.

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Zain collaborates with Ministry of Health to fight coronavirus

Company offers free calls to ministry's hotlines

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to spread medical awareness and contribute to the ministry's efforts in fighting coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This collaboration comes as part of Zain's commitment to reflect the Kuwaiti private sector's role in shouldering the public sector for the nation's wellbeing.

As part of this collaboration, Zain offers its customers free calls to any of MOH's three hotlines: 24970967, 96049698, and 99048619 in order to enable them to inquire about any health or medical information related to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) directly from the ministry's specialized team and ensure taking the correct information from the official and certified sources.

Zain also provided MOH with free bulk SMS messages to send medical and awareness content to the community during this period. In addition, the company sent a number of awareness messages in collaboration with the ministry's team through its official social media channels. Zain also broadcasted official MOH awareness videos on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in seven languages: Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Farsi, Filipino, Bengali, and Santhali. The company was also keen on hosting Family Medicine Specialist Dr Ahmad Abdulmalek in a live broadcast through its Instagram channel to receive questions from followers and present medical and precautionary advice related to the spread of coronavirus.

Zain affirmed its utmost commitment in all the

instructions and precautionary measures outlined by the Ministry of Health to contribute to fighting the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Zain supplied all its kiosks and self-service machines in all of Kuwait's areas with sanitizers, and the company's team continuously and periodically sanitizes all machines to ensure the safety of customers. Zain also notified all sales staff to wear medical gloves, stop the use of biometric devices, and more.

Zain also launched an internal awareness campaign for the safety of its employees, through which the company distributed precautionary items and sanitizers to all staff and sent periodic awareness content. The company also hosted Inaya Medical Center Manager Dr Samer Ashour in a live broadcast on Instagram to receive questions from staff and present medical and precautionary advice related to coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Zain spares no efforts to achieve its comprehensive Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy that closely focuses on supporting the public sector and shouldering public health initiatives. The company strongly believes that launching and supporting such initiatives helps infuse a sense of responsibility into members of the society, and help support those who are in need of help. Zain is proud of its long list of programs and contributions that serve noble causes through strategically partnering with all entities, including non-profit organizations, governmental institutions, and global entities.



Govt coordinates with charities, NGOs to combat COVID-19

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Social Affairs Minister, State Minister for Economic Affairs and acting State Minister for Services Mariam Al-Aqeel said meetings are being held to establish coordination between the social affairs ministry and the Kuwait Union of Charity Associations in order to study the possibility of achieving social partnership between all state establishments in both public and private sectors to combat COVID-19.

She said this step comes as part of consolidating the efforts of all establishments and benefiting from all available facilities available at NGOs to fight the coronavirus. The minister valued efforts of NGOs in supporting government establishments, adding that Kuwait's charity work is well known at all local, regional and international levels.

Supreme committee

Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem chaired yesterday the supreme planning committee's meeting with senior Kuwait Municipality officials. The meeting's agenda was dedicated to discussing municipality preparations to fight the coronavirus and measures followed in various municipality departments to ensure implementing all precautionary measures. The committee also discussed the preparations in the funerals department including providing enough guidelines, TV screens and the needed disinfectants all around cemeteries. Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manfouhi said that all concerned



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem chairs the supreme planning committee's meeting with senior Kuwait Municipality officials yesterday. — KUNA

inspection teams had been instructed to strictly implement Ministry of Health regulations in various barber-shops, lady salons and spas.

Bicycle lanes

Kuwait Municipality signed a contract yesterday to build pedestrian passes and bicycle lanes around Kuwait on par with international standards yesterday. Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi said it is important to develop the roads network with international specifications with roads for various transportation means, bicycle lanes, pedestrian bridges and safe passages for pedestrians. He was speaking during the signing of the pedestrian passes contract with TYPSA consultation and the local consultation office of Al-Sayesh Engineering Consultations. The project includes five stages, starting with collecting and analyzing data, preparing structural plan and specifications, developing detailed plans for model areas, preparing implementation plans and finally

preparing final reports and documents.

Awareness campaign

Kuwait Municipality's public relations department launched an awareness campaign through the distribution of a guidance leaflet of health ministry instructions on the prevention of COVID-19 at cafes, health clubs, barber-shops and beauty salons. Copies were sent to all municipality branches of governorates to be distributed by inspectors during their field tours. The leaflets must be placed in visible areas to make customers aware of the issue.

Crackdowns

The health and industry ministries have received 98 complaints over the hotline 135. Emergency teams closed 15 vending displays at the vegetable market and a branch at a cooperative store, in addition to inspecting 130 pharmacies and stores. Teams issued 38 citations to violating stores.

Increased social awareness in fight against virus

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: After the coronavirus outbreak reached Kuwait and caused a crisis in all fields, the community felt responsible to help the public authorities. Although the disease is under control in Kuwait, people have concerns it may get worse, especially with new cases registered in different countries every day. The ministry of health has canceled all leaves of its medical staff due to the situation. This encouraged many people to register as volunteers and help the medical staff in dealing with the hundreds of people who have returned to Kuwait and are in quarantine.

The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) opened registration for those who want to volunteer for helping the staff working at Khairan Resort, which serves as a quarantine site for passengers coming from Iran. According to the society, the number of volunteers who came to register was much larger than expected. These volunteers will stay at the resort and are not allowed to leave, and will be checked before leaving at the end of their mission.

After announcing the first cases of COVID-19, people started panicking and rushed to pharmacies to buy facemasks and hand sanitizers. This caused a great shortage of stocks in the market, and local suppliers were not able to provide enough masks to pharmacies. So as part of their social responsibility, some companies engaged in various commercial activities decided to import thousands of facemasks and donate them to people, starting with their employees and to the public.

Not only companies, but some individuals also made it their initiative to provide any kind of help they can. For instance, a popular Kuwaiti social media influencer imported 100,000 facemasks and started distributing it to people near mosques, at the entrance of co-ops and other places. Due to the huge numbers, he then decided to distribute the rest of the masks to customers of his restaurant.

The government also announced providing support to some affected countries such as China and Iran to help them defeat the virus. Volunteers can contact the Kuwait Red Crescent Society on 1814814 ext 266 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Man beats up wife's employer

KUWAIT: An Indian man entered the house of his wife's employer, beat her and escaped. Police source said a Kuwaiti man brought his domestic helper to the police station and told them her husband caused the injuries stated in a medical report she gave them.

Detectives were asked to arrest him. He faces two charges - entering a house to commit a crime and battery.

Botched kidnap

An expat failed in kidnapping a nine-year-old girl, and escaped when she

started screaming. Her father lodged a complaint at Abu Halifa police station. Police are investigating.

Manslaughter charge

A manslaughter charge was lodged at Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh police station after a

6-year-old Jordanian child died at his relative's house. The child was brought by his father from his country and left with relatives in Jleeb, but fell down the stairs while playing, leading to his death, according to investigations.

— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

Customs confiscates over two million banned cigarettes

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Custom inspectors at Shuwaikh Port yesterday foiled an attempt to smuggle in 2.16 million banned

cigarettes arriving from an East Asian country. Security sources explained that the cigarettes, already banned by the Ministry of Health (MOH), were hidden inside a 20-foot-long container behind some school bags and clothes. The shipment was confiscated and a case was filed pending further investigations.

Sponsor stabbed

A domestic helper stabbed her sponsor then jumped from the window of their first-floor apartment in Farwaniya yesterday. A dispute had erupted between the female sponsor and her housemaid, during which the latter grabbed a knife and stabbed her sponsor in

the abdomen, before jumping from the window in an apparent suicide attempt. The two were rushed to the hospital as a case was filed for investigations.

Carpentry fire

Four people suffered smoke inhalation in a fire that gutted a carpentry in Farwaniya yesterday. Firefighters rushed to an apartments building in the area in response to an emergency call made at 4:04 pm reporting a fire in the basement. The fire was extinguished after the building was evacuated, as the four victims were treated onsite. Further investigations are in progress.

Ministry following situation of Kuwaiti students abroad

KUWAIT: Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Fatima Al-Senan said on Saturday that the ministry keeps a close watch on the Kuwaiti students studying abroad amid the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Soon after the outbreak of the disease in Italy, the Ministry arranged and followed up the evacuation of the Kuwaiti students there in collaboration with the cultural office in Paris, said Senan, who is in charge of the Ministry's scholarship affairs and cultural relations. "The cultural office in Cairo has also adopted the necessary measures to educate the Kuwaiti students at the Egyptian colleges and visited a number of those students," she noted in statements. In coordination with Kuwait Embassy in Cairo, the Ministry set up a taskforce to take the necessary steps in case of any medical emergency and follow up the precautions adopted by the Egyptian universities against any potential outbreak of the disease. The Ministry has also made sure of the preventive measures, including the sterilization of its facilities, to protect the safety of its staff and students and their families, she went on, noting that coordination is underway with the Ministry of Health to screen all visitors of headquarters of her ministry. — KUNA





US coronavirus death toll hits 19, New York declares emergency

No country for young women? Myanmar's battle against rape

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NASIRIYAH: Iraqi women holding a placard and roses take part in an anti-government demonstration in Iraq's southern city of Nasiriyah in Dhi Qar province, during the international Women's Day yesterday. —AFP

Thousands rally for Women's Day

Coronavirus outbreak forces cancellation of events

BANGKOK: Thousands took to the streets across Asia for International Women's Day yesterday even as the coronavirus outbreak forced the cancellation of events in the region. In China—the epicenter of the epidemic that has killed more than 3,500 people and infected over 100,000 worldwide—state broadcaster CCTV highlighted the work of female medical workers on the frontlines in the fight against the virus.

Despite growing fears over the worsening epidemic, marches went ahead in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines while women rallied in ultra-conservative Pakistan demanding "freedom". A women's marathon planned in India was postponed over virus concerns as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said prominent women would run his social media accounts for the day. In South Korea, where more than 7,000 virus infections make it the hardest hit country outside China, several events were cancelled.

"Although we can't be physically together, our minds for realizing gender equality are stronger than ever," the country's gender equality minister Lee Jung-Ok said in a video message. Many feminist groups held online campaigns instead of street marches, using hashtags such as #FemaleStrike, #PowerUp and #38InternationalWomensDay to raise awareness of gender inequality. In Bangkok,

protesters called for improved labour protections amid the epidemic that has infected dozens in Thailand, and greater rights under a military-aligned government.

But turnout was lower than last year with organizers saying some had stayed away because of virus fears. Hundreds of women and men rallied in the Philippine capital Manila, burning a giant effigy of President Rodrigo Duterte—who they accuse of misogyny—to mark the day. "The violence and poverty among women are getting worse," Joms Salvador of women's group Gabriela said. "While we have 37 laws related to women's rights, on the ground what is happening is a widespread violence in the forms of domestic abuse, sexual harassment and rape," he said.

At a march in the Indonesian capital Jakarta hundreds of people, some wearing rainbow make-up, demanded the government revoke laws seen as gender discriminatory. They also called for laws against sexual violence and for the protection of domestic workers. A big crowd turned out in Melbourne to watch the women's Twenty20 World Cup final between India and Australia, with US singer Katy Perry-wearing an outfit emblazoned with the female symbol-performing her hit single "Roar" ahead of the game.—AFP



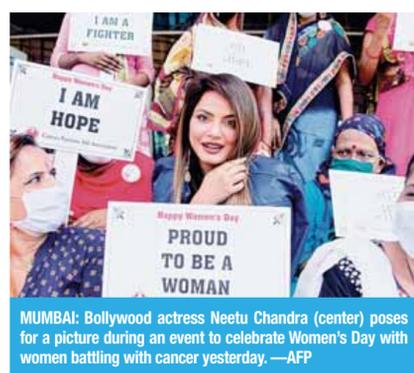
KHARTOUM: A woman chants slogans while holding a protest sign during a demonstration calling for the repeal of old family laws in Sudan, on the occasion of International Women's Day. Under ousted president Omar Al-Bashir's Islamist regime, a notorious 'public order' law was used to have women publicly flogged or imprisoned for 'indecent' dress or for drinking alcohol, seen as 'indecent and immoral acts'. —AFP

India's PM hands over social media accounts to mark Women's Day

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave prominent women control of his social media accounts yesterday to mark International Women's Day in a move critics dismissed as a publicity stunt. A disability activist and a water campaigner were among the women who tweeted from Modi's Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts where he has tens of millions of followers.

Their posts attracted thousands of likes and drew many positive responses across the platforms. But some rights activists said Modi's government should instead focus on reducing high levels of sexual violence and economic disadvantages faced by women in the largely conservative and patriarchal society. "It is an attention-seeking move because you can't answer what is happening in the country," Shabnam Hashmi told the Press Trust of India.

"Women have become much worse off than what they were six years ago (when Modi came to power)." Modi-one of the world's most-followed politicians on social media-said Monday he was thinking of going offline before revealing



MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Neetu Chandra (center) poses for a picture during an event to celebrate Women's Day with women battling with cancer yesterday. —AFP

his plan to "give away" his accounts to inspirational women. "This will help them ignite motivation in millions," he tweeted, calling for people to share stories with the hashtag #SheInspiresUs.

But young climate activist Licypriya Kangujam, who was tagged in a tweet from a government account, replied she did not want to be celebrated. "Dear @narendramodi Ji, Please don't celebrate me if you are not going to listen my voice," she said Friday. Violence against women in India has been in the spotlight since the brutal gang-rape and murder of a Delhi student on a bus in 2012. Nearly 34,000 rapes were reported in 2018, according to official data, with activists claiming the figure is just the tip of the iceberg.—AFP

Kyrgyz police detain dozens at Women's Day march

BISHKEK: Police in Kyrgyzstan yesterday detained dozens of protesters—most of them women—at a rally to mark International Women's Day after masked men attacked them and tore up their placards. An AFP correspondent saw dozens of women detained and placed in police vehicles in the centre of the capital Bishkek where women's groups had begun to rally against gender-based violence.

The detentions came after the men wearing face masks and pointed national hats attacked the crowd, tearing up their posters, popping balloons with toy pistols and throwing eggs at the women before fleeing the scene. Erlan Atantayev, deputy head of the Sverdlovskiy police department where the women were taken, told AFP the protesters had been detained for their own safety and because police had not been warned about the rally.

"Clashes began between the demonstrators and men wearing the face masks," said Atantayev. "We detained (the women) for violation of public order." Atantayev later said that all the demonstrators were released within hours of detention but added that some could face fines for resisting police. Police also detained three male assailants but did not chase after those who ran away. Journalist Nurjama Djanibekova said one of the attackers broke her telephone to prevent her filming the attack and that another journalist was knocked down.

Activist Zhanna Arayeva said among those detained were anti-corruption campaigner Dinara Oshurakhunova and singer Zere Asylbek whose feminist anthem "Kyz"



BISHKEK: Kyrgyz police arrest a woman protesting against gender-based violence to mark International Women's Day in Bishkek yesterday. —AFP

earned her death threats from conservatives. A British man was also briefly held, Arayeva said. A court in Kyrgyzstan this week banned rallies in the centre of Bishkek until July 1 in response to a request by the city administration. But authorities later withdrew the request that came at the beginning of the country's traditional protest season and the court lifted the ban.

Atantayev told AFP that he was unaware of the lifting of the ban, which officials had initially said was necessary to preserve public order and counter the threat of the novel coronavirus. Kyrgyzstan has so far had no confirmed cases of the coronavirus. Last year a March 8 demonstration angered conservative groups, who have grown in strength in recent years and complain the demonstrations promote gay rights. Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia's most politically volatile country, is notorious for the illegal practice of bride kidnapping.—AFP

International

No country for young women? Myanmar's battle against rape

Violence against women, girls - a 'silent emergency'

YANGON: Officially, rape hardly happens in Myanmar and domestic abuse is non-existent. The reality? Violence against women is so pervasive it is regarded as normal and as a result woefully underreported, says lawyer and activist Hla Hla Yee. "Domestic abuse in Myanmar is regarded as a family matter and even if it is reported, the police fail to take action," she explains, adding that many still view it as a normal part of marriage that women must endure.

The UN has warned violence against women and girls is a "silent emergency" in the country, with incidents spanning groping on public transport to trafficking, and has called for a zero-tolerance approach in communities, police, and the justice system. Analysis by the Demographic and Health Survey suggested at least one-fifth of women were abused by a partner in 2016. According to government statistics, there were 1,405 rape cases in 2017, up from 1,110 the year before-around two thirds committed against children.

But Hla Hla Yee says these figures are just the tip of the iceberg in the country of 54 million. Victims, who are required to prove there was no consent, are routinely blamed and ostracized in the rare cases when the perpetrator is found guilty. There is no specific law against domestic abuse and the penalty of marital rape is a maximum of two years in prison. "Women's rights are not prioritized and are not respected," the 38-year-old explains. While violence against women is a global problem-the UN estimates 1 in 3 will experience abuse in their lifetime-many in Myanmar feel there is no point speaking out due to police inaction, social stigma, and a male-dominated justice system.

'Justice for all'

Married women are often stuck with no financial or social means to escape. When rape happens outside of marriage, experts say a settlement between the perpetrator and families is often agreed without consulting the victim. Hla Hla Yee and her team hope to give these women a voice. Outraged by how hard it is for marginal-

ized groups to get justice, she and a group of lawyer friends used their own money to found and run the Legal Clinic Myanmar, which gives free consultations and legal aid to those least able to afford it. "Justice for all is unanimously accepted by all lawyers working here," she says. In the nine years since the venture first opened, it has grown from less than a dozen staff to more than 70, with ten branches across Myanmar and operates mainly with women in leadership positions. It offers legal aid, training, and advice via a 24-hour hotline, and a mobile team which can reach people in need faster.

Breastfeeding her infant daughter as she answers calls or gives presentations, Hla Hla Yee embodies the juggle of modern motherhood. But she is keenly aware that Myanmar-despite the rise to power of female civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi-is yet to catch up. It still has few women in decision-making positions and laws are often made by men, for men. "I was really worried about marriage because of the abuse cases reported to us. I even thought of not marrying as I know the law that does not protect women," she reveals.

Rising reports of rape

An updated draft of the National Prevention and Protection of Violence Against Women law came out in January after seven years of wrangling. Rights' campaigners had hoped it would finally force change, but Hla Hla Yee says it falls woefully short. "I expected it to be much better than this. Now I'm worried how it could protect my daughter and others," she warns. Currently, rape of a woman outside of marriage carries a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment while punishment for paedophilia-categorised as rape of a girl under the age of 12 - is life in jail.

But few offenders serve full sentences, Hla Hla Yee says. The number of incidents of sexual violence reported to authorities-particularly against children-has risen dramatically, she says. It is unclear if the jump is due to increased awareness, or more cases happening, but she

five years and recent cases have drawn outrage for their brutality.

Quintana will perform the song at Mexico City's massive public square on Saturday evening with 40 other women and Chilean singer Mon Laferte, then reprise the tune at yesterday's march for International Women's Day, handing out song lyrics to encourage other voices to join. At a recent rehearsal, Quintana strummed an acoustic guitar and belted in a deep voice: "At every minute of every week, they steal friends from us, they kill sisters. They destroy their bodies, they disappear them. Don't forget their names, please, Mister President."

The call is not only for Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, whom critics say is dismissive towards protests over gender violence, but for leaders across Latin America to prioritize the issue, Quintana said. The commonplace names that punctuate the lyrics - Claudia, Esther, Teresa, Ingrid, Fabiola and Valeria - represent how typical femicide is across Mexico, Quintana said.

She chose them by asking friends to suggest favorite female names and then searching for them online. They all showed up as women who disappeared or were murdered. A video of the song notched more than

In another Bavarian village, Wallerstein, resistance from local CSU members was so great against a Muslim candidate that the hopeful was forced to pull out of the race. "It was not about me, but about my faith. For example, an argument is that the C in CSU and I as a Muslim did not go together," Sener Sahin told Sueddeutsche Zeitung. Party top brass had sought to intervene in Sahin's favor, but the rank and file would not budge, even though Sahin is a successful entrepreneur who was both player and trainer in the village football club and whose wife is Catholic.

'No difference'

The CSU, sister party of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), has been the dominating force in Bavaria since the end of World War II. But the far-right and Islamophobic AfD, and the ecologist Greens, have in recent years chipped away at that support, which at the last state elections in 2018 hit its lowest level since 1954.

In recent years the CSU has swung between lurching right to save its conservative vote, and veering left to win back younger, ecologically minded voters. In Neufahrn, the CSU is counting on Iyibas'



NEUFAHRN BEI FREISING, Germany: Ozan Iyibas poses next to an election poster on March 5, 2020 in this small village near Munich. —AFP

unusual profile to rejuvenate the party and wrest the mayoral post from the Greens at the March 15 vote. The consultant for start-ups was born just a few kilometers away from the town where he grew up in the suburbs of Munich.

When he crosses paths with someone

Klobuchar and Michael Bloomberg, said he was best positioned to "unite this party," promising not to turn "this primary into a campaign of negative attacks." "That will only re-elect Donald Trump if we go that route," he said.

Bernie fires up his crowd

Sanders, speaking to an equally enthusiastic crowd in Chicago, underlined his differences with Biden, without directly attacking him. "Joe Biden is a friend," he said. "I have known him for many years. But we have records, we have a different vision. The American people will hear about it."

With the primary now "down to two people," the progressive Vermont senator said, "it is important for the American people to understand the differences between us-in terms of our record, in terms of our



CHIN: Photo shows a tattooed Chin ethnic woman sitting next to children in a village of Chin State, western Myanmar. —AFP

insists weak laws and ineffective policing mean there is little deterrent.

"The penal code is no longer in line with the modern age," she says, adding her team will write to MPs to demand revisions are made to the bill. Public anger has spiraled after police mishandling of the rape of a two-year-old, with calls for "Justice for Victoria" on social media, prompting President Win Myint to demand action against bungling officers.

The UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar reported how the military weaponised sexual violence, using it with impunity on civilians during operations in Rakhine, home to the Muslim Rohingya, as well as Kachin and Shan states. The military and government deny the allegations, but rights' groups say the evidence underlines the lack of accountability for violence against women in the nation's seats of power. —AFP

'Don't forget their names': Women in Mexico sing anthem protesting femicides

MEXICO CITY: The kidnapping and murder of Vivir Quintana's close friend by a man in northern Mexico was just one more femicide among thousands in the country over the past decade, but it forever transformed the songwriter's life. The 36-year-old from Coahuila state has written a song that is shaping into an anthem for Mexico's growing outcry over the killings of women, channeling anger along with hope for justice.

"Everything changed in my perception of the world, in seeing that we were possible victims," Quintana said, describing how the killing of her friend inspired "Song Without Fear." It demands an end to the murder of women, an issue that has spurred protests across Mexico, where femicides have risen 137% in the last



MEXICO CITY: Mexican singer Vivir Quintana performs during 'Tiempo de Mujeres' concert at Zocalo square in Mexico City. —AFP

12,000 views within hours of being posted online on Saturday, and Quintana hopes protesters will adopt it as their own. She also hopes its popularity will one day fade. "We want it to be a song that hopefully won't stick around, that won't become popular every March 8," she said. —Reuters

News in brief

Torrential rain kills 20

PESHAWAR: At least 20 people in Pakistan are dead and dozens more injured after torrential rainstorms collapsed several homes, officials said. Heavy rains have lashed stretches of the country near the Afghan border since Thursday. Fourteen children and three women were killed in "rain-related incidents" in northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, local relief official Taimur Ali said. The National Disaster Management Authority confirmed those deaths, adding that three more people had died in southwest Balochistan province. In the worst single incident, five children were killed when the roof of their home collapsed in northern Dargai town. Rain also damaged another 51 houses and snowfall blocked several roads in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, officials said. More harsh weather is expected in the coming days. —AFP

Syria road crash kills 32

DAMASCUS: At least 32 people died Saturday after a fuel tanker crashed into two buses and several other vehicles on a road connecting the Syrian capital to Homs province, state media reported. A break failure caused the tanker to crash into 15 vehicles and two large busses carrying several Iraqi passengers, said Interior Minister Mohammad Khaled Al-Rahmoun, while inspecting the site of the accident outside Damascus. Another 77 people were injured in the accident, he added, in comments carried by SANA. Footage aired on state media showed rescue teams deployed around the mangled remains of two cars. SANA released photos of a passenger bus with one end blown off. Victims of the crash are believed to include Shiite Iraqi pilgrims visiting holy shrines near the capital. —AFP

9 killed in Mexico shootout

GUADALAJARA: Nine people were killed in a bloody confrontation Friday in western Mexico between a criminal gang and agents investigating a suspected kidnapping, officials said. The dead included two officers and six people believed to have been held captive in a house in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco state, the state prosecutor's office said. Another man died on the street. Jalisco has been hard-hit by violence linked to organized crime, particularly the powerful Jalisco New Generation drug cartel. In the latest incident, the kidnappers opened fire on the officers and shot their captives when they were cornered, state prosecutor Gerardo Octavio Solis Gomez said. After the gang shot at them, the agents returned fire and requested backup. Dozens of police and elements of the army supported by two helicopters were deployed to begin a house to house search for the attackers. —AFP

Maldives' coronavirus cases

MALE: The Maldives has curbed movement on several resort islands, authorities said yesterday, after the country reported its first two cases of coronavirus. The two infected people, who are both staff at the Kuredu Island Resort, tested positive late on Saturday. They are believed to have caught the disease from an Italian tourist who has returned to Italy and tested positive there. There are more than 1,400 people on the island, split equally between guests and staff, according to the tourism ministry. "These two cases which tested positive are from a resort. They are employees of the resort and are now quarantined," said Ali Waheed, the tourism minister of the island nation, the economy of which is heavily dependent on foreign tourists. "The period for the temporary restrictions will be decided by the medical teams. —Reuters

The Muslim running for mayor in Bavaria

NEUFAHRN BEI FREISING: With his neatly trimmed beard, sharp suit and broad smile, Ozan Iyibas looks like a typical politician out to win votes ahead of a municipal election in southern Germany's Bavaria region. But he has unleashed a mini earthquake with his candidacy - as the first Muslim standing for the Christian Social Union (CSU) in a predominantly Catholic region.

"I don't see any contradiction in this choice," says the 37-year-old, sitting back in an armchair and clutching a mug of tea in the town of Neufahrn. "It's a question of values. The values of my religion are very close to those of Christians." While Iyibas won the local CSU's nomination unanimously, such support is not always a given in the region where party chief Markus Soeder in 2018 ordered crosses to be displayed at the entrances of all public buildings, as a way of honoring the region's "cultural heritage".

Biden and Sanders enter key phase in Democrats' race

FLINT: Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders on Saturday began what amounts to a fresh campaign for the Democratic nomination for president, as the septuagenarians prepare to go head-to-head at the polls for the first time since the field narrowed to two credible candidates. Biden, the 77-year-old former vice president, spoke to a large crowd of supporters in Missouri, one of six states that will hold Democratic primaries on Tuesday, one week after the "Super Tuesday" elections brought about a dramatic reversal of fortunes in his favor.

Standing on an outdoor stage on a sunny day in St Louis, at times wearing his signature aviator sunglasses, the politically moderate Biden savored his spectacular revival in the race for the White House. "What a difference a day makes," he exulted. "This time last week I was in South Carolina and the press and the pundits had declared Biden's campaign dead." "But South Carolina had something to say about that, and then came Super Tuesday. And today there are 11 victories behind us and we're leading both in delegates and national votes."

With the monumental Gateway Arch-a symbolic entryway to the American West-in the background, the former vice president mentioned Sanders only indirectly. Biden, having gained key backing from erstwhile rivals Pete Buttigieg, Amy

International

Alarmed Italy locks down north to prevent spread of coronavirus

Italy facing 'national emergency,' says prime minister

MILAN: Italy ordered a virtual lockdown across a swathe of its wealthy north yesterday, including the financial capital Milan, in a drastic new attempt to try to contain a rapidly growing outbreak of coronavirus. The unprecedented restrictions, which will impact some 16 million people and stay in force until April 3, were signed into law overnight by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

The new measures say people should not enter or leave Lombardy, Italy's richest region, as well as 14 provinces in four other regions, including the cities of Venice, Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Reggio Emilia and Rimini. Conte said nobody would be allowed to move in or out of these areas, or within them, unless they had proven, work-related reasons for doing so, or health issues.

"We are facing a national emergency. We chose from the beginning to take the line of truth and transparency and now we're moving with lucidity and courage, with firmness and determination," Conte told reporters in the middle of the night. "We have to limit the spread of the virus and prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed," he said.

Streets in northern cities including Milan were quieter than normal yesterday morning. However, it was not immediately clear how stringently the order would be policed, with people caught away from home when the measures came into force allowed to return. By yesterday the measures had still not appeared in the Official Gazette, where legislation must be published to formally take effect.

Milan airport authorities said services were so far operating normally, pending official notification of the new measures, while trains were running across the north. According to the decree, all museums, gyms, cultural centers, ski resorts and swimming pools will be shut in the targeted zones.

Leave was cancelled for health workers as Italy's hospitals sag under the pressure of the virus. Restaurants

and bars will be allowed to open from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm and only if they can guarantee that customers are at least one meter apart. Church services yesterday were also cancelled in the region, while the Vatican announced that Pope Francis would make his weekly Sunday blessing via a video linkup rather than directly from St Peter's Square to limit the risk of contagion.

'A step away from collapse'

The government enacted its draft order just hours after officials announced that the number of coronavirus cases had leapt by more than 1,200 in a 24-hour period - the biggest daily rise since the epidemic began in the country two weeks ago. Deaths from the virus had also risen, by 36 to 233, while the number of patients in intensive care climbed to 567, up 23% from the day before. Of the 5,883 Italians originally infected, 589 have fully recovered, but the hospital system has come under increasing strain.

"We're now being forced to set up intensive care treatment in corridors, in operating theatres, in recovery rooms. We've emptied entire hospital sections to make space for seriously sick people," Antonio Pesenti, head of the Lombardy regional crisis response unit, told the Corriere della Sera newspaper. "One of the best health systems in the world, in Lombardy is a step away from collapse," he said.

The northern regions of Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto represent 85% of all cases and 92% of recorded deaths. Yesterday, the head of Piedmont region said he had tested positive for the virus despite having no symptoms - the second regional chief to be infected in 24 hours. As the alarm spread, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said Italy should ban all its citizens from travelling to Europe.

On Saturday, health officials expressed alarm at the apparent lack of concern in the general public, as fine weekend weather attracted large crowds to the ski slopes



MILAN: A picture shows the deserted Via Manzoni in central Milan, after millions of people were placed under forced quarantine in northern Italy as the government approved drastic measures in an attempt to halt the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak. —AFP

outside Milan. But some local Italian politicians have pushed back against the measures, which leaked out before regional governors were consulted. The president of Lombardy, Attilio Fontana, said the proposals went "in the right direction", but added they were a "mess".

The head of neighboring Veneto, Luca Zaia, com-

plained he had not been properly consulted and was unhappy that three provinces in his region, including Venice, had been included. "We do not understand the rationale of a measure that appears scientifically disproportionate to the epidemiological trend," he wrote on Facebook. —Reuters

Online child abuse bill puts encryption in crosshairs

WASHINGTON: A bill aimed at curbing online child sex abuse is pitting the US government against the tech sector, in a battle about encryption and liability for illegal online content. The bipartisan measure unveiled by US senators Thursday ties together two separate issues - law enforcement's access to encrypted online content, and tech platforms' legal immunity for what users post.

In unveiling the measure, senators said they were aiming to curb images of child sex abuse by forcing tech platforms to cooperate with law enforcement on encryption or risk losing the legal immunity for what is posted on their websites. Digital rights activists have joined the tech sector in arguing this move is an indirect way to weaken online encryption in the name of better law enforcement access.

They say it erodes two cornerstones of the online ecosystem: strong encryption to keep data secure, and a liability shield which enables social media platforms to allow users to post content freely. The bill "would give government officials unprecedented powers to craft de facto regulations for online speech," said Emma Llanso of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a digital rights organization. "Online service providers would almost certainly err on the side of caution and take down anything - including a lot of lawful, constitutionally protected speech."

'Kneecapping' encryption

Encryption has been a point of contention between tech firms and law enforcement for decades. FBI officials have warned of "going dark" in investigating crimes as a result of new forms of end-to-end encryption, while civil rights advocates warn that any "backdoor" access could be exploited by hackers and authoritarian governments. The proposal "aims to kneecap encryption under the guise of protecting children online, while capitalizing on the techlash," said Riana Pfefferkorn of the Stanford University Center for Internet and Society, referring to the simmering discontent with Big Tech over data protection and other issues.

Lawmakers say the bill - Eliminating Abusive and Rampant Neglect of Interactive Technologies Act (EARN IT) - allows companies to "earn" their liability protection, by gaining certification of compliance by a commission of government, industry, legal and victim group representatives. A hearing is set for Wednesday on the measure, which is backed by victims' rights organizations. They, along with the Justice Department, have complained that existing laws protecting platforms such as social media companies from liability for user-posted content have allowed child pornography and images of exploitation to proliferate.

'Shouldn't need a pass'

Critics say the bill, if enacted, could lead to draconian internet regulation. "You shouldn't need to get a pass from a commission of law enforcement agencies just to set up a website," said Joe Mullin of the Electronic Frontier Foundation. "That's the type of system we might hear about under an authoritarian regime."

Gary Shapiro, president of the Consumer Technology Association, a trade group including hundreds of online firms, said the bill "sets up the false choice between child safety and internet safety." Shapiro said in a blog post that the proposed law would not stop the use of encryption but "penalize American companies by forcing those interested in secure communication to move their business to off-shore companies not governed by US law." —AFP

Macron put to test in French municipal elections

PARIS: Three years after President Emmanuel Macron swept to power promising a "revolution", have French voters definitively soured on him? The first round of municipal elections next weekend is expected to test backing for Macron's ambitious reform agenda following a second winter of discontent marked by mass protests.

Polls showing Macron's four-year-old Republic on the Move (LREM) party struggling in the March 15 vote, to be followed by a second round on March 22, which came amid a furor over the government's decision to force through unpopular pension reforms by decree. The elections also follow the "yellow vest" rebellion of 2018-2019, which lifted the lid on the widespread anger in rural France against a leader seen by critics as the president of the rich.

The coronavirus epidemic—which has killed a dozen and infected hundreds in France—looms large over the vote. The government has ruled out postponing the elec-

Hospitality gives way to hostility for migrants to Greece

ATHENS: Five years ago, Greece offered hospitality to a huge wave of migrants at the height of the Syrian civil war - but today, hostility greets those seeking a new life. Experts put the about-turn largely down to a declining trajectory of global growth as well as crisis fatigue, with the Greek people already having shouldered years of austerity after the financial crisis of a decade ago.

Nearly a million refugees made it to Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, just kilometers off the Turkish coastline, in the 2015 exodus, and the majority trekked on to mainland Europe. Poignant images of local mothers on the island of Lesbos feeding migrant babies went round the world. The following year, a group of local people from the same island found themselves proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize for their humanitarian efforts.

But after Turkey last week gave migrants the green

US coronavirus death toll hits 19, NY declares emergency

WASHINGTON: Two more people succumbed to the novel coronavirus in Washington state, officials said on Saturday, bringing the nationwide toll to 19, while the number of confirmed cases in New York rose to 89 and a cruise ship with infected passengers remained stranded outside San Francisco. More than half of all US states have reported cases of the coronavirus, which originated in China last year and causes the sometimes deadly respiratory illness COVID-19.

As the outbreak takes root, daily life has become increasingly disrupted, with concerts and conferences canceled and universities telling students to stay home and take classes online. Organizers of the Conservative Political Action Conference, a high-profile annual gathering that took place in Maryland last month, said on Saturday one of their attendees had tested positive for the virus after exposure prior to the event.

The person had no interactions with President Donald Trump or Vice President Mike Pence, who were in attendance,

but analysts have warned that fear of contamination could be a big turn-off for polling station volunteers and voters alike. Macron, who is set to seek a second mandate in 2022 polls, has attempted to downplay the significance of the vote for more than 500,000 councilors and nearly 35,000 mayors.

"I don't believe that people will vote for this or that candidate because they do or do not support the president," he told reporters in January. But a fresh electoral setback after the LREM in last year's European elections finished behind the far-right National Rally would nevertheless show that "Emmanuel Macron's magic powers are no longer that magic," Bruno Cautres, a researcher and lecturer at Sciences Po university in Paris said.

Winning hearts

The results will be closely watched for signs of whether Macron's party of entrepreneurial political startups has managed to put down roots in the provinces. "This election will be a precious indicator of the penetration of Macronism at the local level," Martial Foucault, director of the Cevipof research centre at Sciences Po university said.

The signs for the party are inauspicious, with its candidates struggling in cities such as Paris and Lyon where it cleaned up in the parliamentary elections held after

light to head for Europe, feelings have changed on an island that already hosts thousands of migrants from the last wave. Last time round, "people hoped that the leftist government of Alexis Tsipras, with his humane view on refugees, was going to halt austerity," Filippa Chatzistavrou, professor of political science at Athens University said.

Instead, Greece's economic woes continued. Today, Chatzistavrou says, many Greeks are still trying to find their feet in an increasingly extreme political environment. Kostas Filis, director of Greece's Institute for International Relations, said the migration wave was "spontaneous" as people fled Syria and the Islamic State. "Today, Turkey is behind a very much smaller migrant flux looking to come to Greece," he says. Athens sees Ankara's decision to open the exit gates as "a political weapon," whose result was to see some 13,000 people congregate inside 48 hours on the border post at Kastanies.

Warlike rhetoric

For Chatzistavrou, "Turkey, seeking western support (in Syria), is behaving more aggressively and the flux of migrants are collateral, a geopolitical means used to alter the balance of power." Conservative Greek Prime

Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has taken a hard line on migration since taking office last July, has ramped up the police and military presence along the Evros (Merichon) river which straddles the border to prevent an "invasion" and counter the "threat". —AFP

The American Conservative Union said in a statement. The two latest deaths were in Washington's King County, the hardest hit area in the United States after the virus spread among residents at a nursing facility in the Seattle suburb of Kirkland. The first deaths on the East Coast were announced late Friday, with two people succumbing in Florida.

In New York, the number of confirmed cases rose by 13 on Saturday to a statewide total of 89 people. Governor Andrew Cuomo said. He issued a declaration of emergency. "It allows expedited purchasing and expedited hiring, which is what we need right now," Cuomo told a news conference. Kansas, Missouri and Washington DC announced their first cases. In international waters off California, passengers on a cruise ship that was barred from docking in San Francisco after some aboard tested positive for the novel coronavirus did not know on Saturday when they might be able to step ashore.

Trump said on Friday he would prefer the Grand Princess's 2,400 passengers and 1,100 crew remain out at sea, but that he would let others decide where she should dock. After 19 crew and two passengers out of 46 tested on the Grand Princess were found to have the virus, Pence said the ocean liner will be taken to an unspecified non-commercial port where everyone on board will be tested again, and that those "who need to be quarantined will be quarantined" and those who need medical care will receive it.

US officials also began tracking another cruise ship that



PARIS: France's President Emmanuel Macron speaks as he eats with elderly people during a visit to an EHPAD (Housing Establishment for Dependant Elderly People) in the 13th arrondissement of Paris, amid fear of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus. —AFP

Macron came to power in 2017. "Municipal elections always bring failure for the ruling party... They have always been used to punish them," Jean Garrigues, a political historian and professor at the University of Orleans, told AFP. —AFP



KASTANIES: Greek army officers patrol at the railway station of Kastanies village, near the Greek-Turkish border yesterday. —AFP

Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has taken a hard line on migration since taking office last July, has ramped up the police and military presence along the Evros (Merichon) river which straddles the border to prevent an "invasion" and counter the "threat". —AFP



WASHINGTON: Several ambulances arrive at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Washington. Several residents have died from COVID-19 and six others have tested positive for the novel coronavirus symptoms. —AFP

may have shared crew with the Grand Princess or the Diamond Princess, another ship where the coronavirus spread onboard, Pence said. One Grand Princess passenger described a dull and sometimes queasy wait for news of when their limbo would end. "It bugs me that my relatives in the Bay Area know what's going to happen with us before I do," Elizabeth Aleatau of Colorado Springs said in an interview conducted via Facebook. —Reuters

International

Chaotic week after a US-Taleban deal leaves Afghans' fate unclear

Within days of the ink drying on the deal, blood flowing again

ISLAMABAD: A US-Taleban deal that was supposed to kickstart peace talks between the insurgents and the Kabul government is looking flimsier by the day, with fighting raging across Afghanistan and no one sure about what comes next. The loosely worded, four-page agreement signed February 29 in Doha was meant to set the conditions for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan within just 14 months—and end the longest war in US history.

But within days of the ink drying on the deal, blood again was flowing across Afghanistan, with the Taleban striking scores of Afghan military targets and jihadist gunmen killing dozens in a Kabul attack. US President Donald Trump on Friday even acknowledged that the Taleban could seize power after foreign forces leave—a far cry from the reassuring messaging American officials pushed in the months leading up to the accord. The biggest sticking point so far seems to be the deal itself, which is vaguely worded and open to different interpretations.

For instance, the agreement states the Afghan government “will” release up to 5,000 Taleban prisoners before Tuesday, when peace talks between Kabul and the insurgents are supposed to start in Oslo. Trouble is, the Afghan government is not a signatory to the deal, and a joint declaration between President Ashraf Ghani’s administration and the US calls only on Kabul to determine the “feasibility” of a mass prisoner release. Ghani said Saturday his government was willing to free the Taleban prisoners—but only if they do not return to violence.

He did not say if a release was possible before March 10, essentially throwing the talks into limbo. International Crisis Group analyst Andrew Watkins said the “ambiguous language and at some points outright contradictory language” between the US-Taleban deal and the US-Afghan joint statements has led to confusion. “The reason we see ambiguity is because it would have been very difficult if

not impossible to reach agreement up front,” Watkins said.

Political chaos

It is clear Washington’s patience with Ghani’s government is waning. The US did not congratulate him on securing a second term last month, amid widespread allegations of voter fraud. Ghani is due to be sworn in on Monday, but so too is his bitter rival Abdullah Abdullah who wants to form a rival government. And in a scenario that would have been unthinkable after the September 11, 2001 attacks that triggered the US invasion of Afghanistan, Washington seems determined to downplay acts of Taleban violence and lend credence to its longtime foe’s motives.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last week said the senior Taleban leadership was “working diligently to reduce violence”, while also appearing to take a veiled swipe at the Ghani government for representing only “narrow interests”. Trump even boasted about a “very good” phone call with top Taleban leader Mullah Baradar, while his daughter Ivanka took to social media to post a few lines by the Sufi poet Rumi about the serenity of reconciliation.

The US president also signaled that America’s commitment to Afghanistan’s security came with an expiry date. “Countries have to take care of themselves,” Trump said Friday. “You can only hold someone’s hand for so long.” Scott Smith, expert on Afghanistan at the US Institute of Peace, said the US is fully aware that Ghani believes it is legitimizing the Taleban. “The message is that (the US) priority is the deal, and we are willing to pay the cost of this difference in legitimacy in order to try to convince you that we’re serious about it,” Smith said.

Taleban violence

Since the deal signing, the Taleban have launched dozens of operations across Afghanistan. The

were treated really badly, they were not allowed to do businesses, they were not allowed to take financial independence, they were socially excluded from socioeconomic opportunities,” he said. “For me it was a triggering point that I started working for Afghan women, because I see Afghan women as a big human resource that should be... equipped with skills and knowledge so they can make an equal contribution in the economic development of Afghanistan.”

Like many, Mohammdi expressed concern about a possible return to power by the hardline Islamist Taliban, who banned women from education, work or leaving the house without a male relative during their 1996-2001 rule. The Taliban, with whom the United States signed a troop withdrawal agreement last week, say they have changed and will allow women to work.

“This job is essential to us...in my opinion, the Taleban should not interfere in the work of women because there is no difference between men and women, and everyone can work to advance life,” she said. Twenty-one-year-old Benazir Mosawi, who stopped to order a burger from Mohammdi, agreed with her sentiment. “When I first saw this lady working and selling burgers, I was so happy...Afghan women need to stand on their own and solve their problems independently.” —Reuters

Women sell burgers in solar-powered foodcarts in Kabul

KABUL: On a sunny weekend in Kabul, 30-year-old Maryam Mohammdi drives a solar-powered rickshaw around a city suburb, selling burgers to hungry customers as part of a business that is employing dozens of women in a traditionally male-dominated profession. Mohammdi, who wears a chador, or long flowing black robe with a head and face covering, said that she initially drew pointed remarks when she started her job.

“People were making fun of me and laughing, saying: ‘look at her, she is working on the street’, but now the situation is getting better and people are encouraging me on a lot,” she said. “Even men now cheer me on and say our food is delicious and healthy.” The business was started in 2018 by 27-year old Farhad Wajdi, who was born in a refugee camp in Pakistan, and now employs 50 women running 25 food carts in Kabul. He hopes to expand to 100 carts this year.

“When I returned to Afghanistan...I saw women

Quarantine hotel collapse kills 10

BEIJING: At least ten people were killed in the collapse of a hotel used as a coronavirus quarantine facility in eastern China, authorities said yesterday. Rescuers pulled 48 people from the rubble, of whom 38 are still alive, the Ministry of Emergency Management said on social media.

The building in the coastal city of Quanzhou had been repurposed to house people who recently had contact with patients confirmed with COVID-19, the state-run People’s Daily newspaper reported. The city has recorded 47 cases of the virus. Video posted online by the ministry’s firefighting department showed rescuers helping children don surgical masks before pulling them from the wreckage of the six-storey Xinjia hotel.

A 12-year-old boy told rescuers his mother was still buried in the rubble. “She was next to me just now,” he said in the video. His mother was rescued

alive hours later, according to the ministry. Another video released by the ministry showed rescuers squirting water from a bottle into the mouth of a trapped man. Rescuers were also seen spraying disinfectant on each other as part of “strict decontamination” measures between shifts.

Collapsed in seconds

Footage published by local media appears to show the hotel collapsing in seconds, with the building’s facade crumbling to the ground, exposing the structure’s steel frame. Nine people escaped on their own, the ministry said. The first floor had been undergoing renovation since before the Lunar New Year holiday, and construction workers called the hotel’s owner minutes before the collapse to report a deformed pillar, authorities said. The owner has been summoned by police while investigators work to determine whether the renovation or an original structural issue was at fault, according to the ministry.

Fifty-eight people who had recently been in regions hard hit by COVID-19 were being quarantined in the hotel but



ZAYTON: Rescuers search for survivors in the rubble of a collapsed hotel in Quanzhou, in China’s eastern Fujian province. —AFP

all had tested negative for the virus, local newspaper Quanzhou Evening News reported yesterday. More than 800 rescuers and 750 medical staff were deployed for the rescue effort along with

20 ambulances, the ministry said. China’s National Health Commission said it was sending to Quanzhou 18 medical experts from the nearby cities of Fuzhou and Xiamen. —AFP

beyond its “call of obligation” by meeting all lawmakers and the leaders of various political parties before the king arrived at his decision that Muhyiddin was the person likely to command a majority in parliament. “It was only after this rigorous and open process of consultation, fully in accordance with the Federal Constitution, that His Majesty exercised his discretion under the Federal Constitution to appoint a new Prime Minister,” the palace, Istana Negara, said in a statement. “Hence, by no means can this process be regarded as a ‘royal coup’ as questionably asserted by the Guardian...”

Muhyiddin is expected to unveil his cabinet early next week. He has postponed the start of parliamentary proceedings by two months amid opposition efforts, spearheaded by the 94-year-old Mahathir, to challenge his government with a confidence vote. Mahathir’s unexpected resignation as prime minister on Feb 24, after his coalition collapsed amid a power battle, had plunged the Southeast Asian country into political turmoil. —Reuters

Malaysia’s palace denies ‘royal coup’

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia’s palace yesterday denied allegations of a “royal coup” in appointing the country’s prime minister after veteran leader Mahathir Mohamad resigned, saying the king used his discretionary powers prescribed in the constitution. The palace was responding to an editorial in the UK daily Guardian this week that said Malaysia’s king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, had overturned a democratic election result by naming Muhyiddin Yassin as prime minister despite the opposite camp claiming a majority.

Muhyiddin was sworn in last Sunday as the head of a government formed with the support of a corruption-tarnished party that was defeated in the last general election in 2018 by a multi-ethnic group. The palace said it went



KABUL: Smoke rises from the site following a gun attack in Kabul. —AFP

Pentagon was quick to play down the widespread fighting, with General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, classifying the violence as “small, low level attacks, out on checkpoints”. Although Afghanistan enjoyed a partial truce in the week leading up to the deal, hopes it would continue as Kabul and the Taleban prepared for peace talks have been dashed.

And the agreement stipulates only that a ceasefire will be an “item” on the agenda of future talks, highlighting Washington’s failure to extract any promise from the Taleban to reduce violence during the interim. On Saturday, the Taleban released a statement saying their “armed jihad” could continue “until the occupation is completely severed from its roots and an Islamic government formed”. —AFP



KABUL: An Afghan clad-burqa woman holds a rose given away by civil society activists during International Women’s Day yesterday. —AFP

Tech lifestyles enable ‘safe escape’ from coronavirus

SAN FRANCISCO: For people hunkering down due to the coronavirus epidemic, the tech sector has become their new best friend with an array of lifestyle solutions making “social distancing” easier. Those wanting to avoid crowds can have meals delivered from restaurants, stream blockbuster films, socialize online with friends, and work remotely. The latest tech-inspired lifestyle solutions are gaining traction as more people are advised to work from home, and many conferences and gatherings are cancelled.

Anyone with an internet connection can use Amazon or e-commerce rivals to deliver provisions from groceries to toilet paper and over-the-counter medicine. “We can have anything and everything delivered to our homes including hard and soft goods, doctor visits, laundry services, and even pet services,” said Moor Insights and Strategy principal analyst Patrick Moorhead. “The irony is that many of the items criticized about technology have become a ‘safe’ place to escape to in the wake of coronavirus.”

Checking on mom

Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi has been checking in daily with her mother, who lives close to Milan in a part of Italy hit by coronavirus cases and has kept to her home. Video calling services like FaceTime have also helped with virtual doctor visits—or telemedicine—so patients can consult with physicians online and avoid visits to hospitals, she noted.

Milanesi told of a friend using online shopping tools to find coveted supplies such as sanitizing gel and wipes. She also shared a news video clip of someone in China using a remote-controlled toy truck mounted with a GoPro camera to fetch supplies. “When it comes to technology, there are different things that make isolation easier; from streaming video to digital books to gaming,” Milanesi said.

“We have also seen how social media has helped getting coverage from areas where press might have not been allowed.” In a note to investors, analyst firm Needham said it expected people to grow increasingly uncomfortable going to gyms to work out, in a trend that should benefit the connected cycling maker Peloton. Peloton has had a hit selling stationary exercise bicycles along with memberships to streaming online workout sessions that people can take part in from home.

In on nights out

Rivals in the increasingly competitive streaming television market also stand to benefit as people opt for home entertainment instead of risking contagion in public spaces, according to analysts. More people could also start getting restaurant meals delivered from services such as Uber Eats and DoorDash instead of going out to restaurants.

“None of this undermines the horror of the virus but for those who want to stay home and not venture outside it works,” Moorhead said. Software, services and the infrastructure needed to support them are in the best position ever to allow people to feel less deprived while distancing themselves socially, according to Consumer Technology Association research senior vice president Brian Markwalter. —AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: A protester holds a sign during a demonstration to protest the ejection of the democratically elected government in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

Analysis

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Climate crisis on backburner as pandemic looms

Economic shock waves from the coronavirus outbreak have curbed carbon pollution from China and beyond, but hopes for climate benefits from the slowdown are likely to be dashed quickly, experts say. As governments prepare to spend their way out of the crisis, including with large infrastructure projects, global warming concerns will be little more than an afterthought, dwarfed by a drive to prop up a stuttering world economy, they say.

Preparations for a make-or-break climate summit in November are already off track, with host Britain focused on its Brexit transition, and the challenge to its health system of the gathering epidemic. Like an unintended lab experiment, the global health emergency demonstrates the cause-and-effect relationship that drives global warming.

In the four weeks up to March 1, China's discharge of CO2 fell 200 million tons, or 25 percent, compared to the same period last year, according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) - equivalent to annual CO2 emissions from Argentina, Egypt or Vietnam. As the country's economy slowed to a crawl, coal consumption at power plants in China declined by 36 percent, and the use of oil at refineries by nearly as much.

Other major economies are bound to sputter too. The outbreak has already drained stock markets of \$9 trillion in value, and could end up costing the global economy up to \$2.7 trillion, according to Bloomberg Economics. "When you turn off the global fossil fuel economy, greenhouse gas emissions go down, air quality improves," said Jon Erickson, a professor of sustainability science and policy at the University of Vermont. But any climate silver lining will be short-lived, experts warn. "The emissions reductions we see now because of the epidemic are temporary, not structural," said Imperial College London's Joeri Rogelj, a lead scientist on the UN's climate science advisory panel, the IPCC.

Lock-step

"If anything, it makes mitigation efforts harder, because it reduces our resources to invest in the transformations needed for climate change protection." There are already signs that Beijing - impatient to reboot China's economy - will rain down cash on carbon-intensive infrastructure projects, as happened after the global recession in 2008, and again in 2015. "Initial announcements of stimulus have had no environmental emphasis whatsoever," noted Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at CREA.

Proposals to further loosen controls on new coal power plants show that concerns about debt and emissions are being brushed aside, he told AFP. "A round of cheap credits and a blind eye to inefficient polluting industries will lead to 'retaliatory emissions', setting China back on the goal of enhancing its climate targets," said Li Shuo, a climate policy analyst with Greenpeace East Asia.

A surge in state-directed capital spending a decade ago slowed China's clean-energy transition and amplified the horrendous pollution episodes in the winter of 2012/13. Globally, CO2 emissions in 2010 from fossil-fuel combustion grew nearly six percent, more than offsetting the modest decrease the year before, notes Glen Peters, a scientist at the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research.

The coronavirus fallout highlights how hard it will be to reach the Paris Agreement temperature targets of capping global warming at under two degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels, and 1.5C if feasible. Earth's surface has already warmed more than one degree. To turn a corner, the world needs a combination of growing GDP and falling CO2 emissions - but historically growth and emissions have moved in lock-step.

IMF head Kristalina Georgieva predicts the coronavirus will knock at least half a percentage point off projected global GDP growth in 2020, originally forecast at 3.3 percent. The UN, meanwhile, has said that CO2 emissions must drop eight percent annually over the next decade to meet the 1.5C Paris goal, and by about three percent per year to hold the line at 2C. Experts say only a sustained global economic meltdown - or an internationally coordinated, war-footing transition to a carbon neutral economy - could come close to slashing carbon pollution that quickly. One is as unpalatable as the other is unlikely.

'Fossil-fuel train'

But so far only the electricity sector has seen a - very modest - decoupling of emissions and economic growth. "I'm sure the global economy will get back on the fossil-fuel train as soon as it possibly can," said Erickson of the University of Vermont. As for the upcoming COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, the kind of non-stop shuttle diplomacy carried out by France for nearly two years ahead of the successful 2015 Paris talks is not happening, analysts say.

China - the world's largest carbon polluter with 29 percent of global emissions - also has a crucial role to play, but is likely to be distracted. "There is a risk that the main objective for Beijing will be the resolution of its health crisis," predicted Sebastian Treyer, director of the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations in Paris. Last week Preliminary UN climate meetings in Bonn and Kampala were cancelled or postponed. —AFP

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French street artist and painter Christian Guemy, known as C215, poses in Paris on Saturday in front of a fresco of Laurent Barthelemy Anri Guibaly, a 14-year-old Ivorian boy who was found dead in the landing gear of a passenger plane from Abidjan to Paris at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport in Roissy on Jan 8, 2020. —AFP

Improving 'brutal' Paris: Key issue in vote

Despite its famed culture, food and romance, Paris can be rough going for residents contending with daily traffic congestion, smog, petty crime, sky-high rents and even rats. When Parisians head to the ballot box to elect their mayor in the first round of France's local elections next weekend, it will be with such daily life concerns in mind - party politics a distant second consideration. "The city of Paris is brutal for its inhabitants, a city whose condition has deteriorated," mayoral candidate Agnes Buzyn of President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the Move (LREM) party said ahead of the March 15 vote.

That will be followed by a second round a week later. Buzyn is among a handful of leading candidates vying for the post of mayor, a prestigious post that helped propel former city chief Jacques Chirac to the presidency. The vote takes place amid a coronavirus outbreak that has already killed a dozen and infected hundreds more on French soil, moving the government to ban mass gatherings.

An OpinionWay poll found almost a third of registered voters were "concerned" about the risk of infection at

voting stations, but three-quarters said they were against postponing the election. The Paris election will deal with "the concrete aspects of everyday life - transport, pollution, security... housing, and these are becoming more and more important," political analyst Jean Garrigues told AFP.

Safer city

Politicians vying for control of the capital have served up a smorgasbord of proposals they say will deliver a cleaner, safer environment for the City of Light's nearly 2.2 million residents. There are visions to plant tens of thousands of trees, limit cars in favor of bikes, set up anti-pest brigades, and deploy armed police to deal with a rise in bag and cellphone-snatching in one of the world's most visited cities and 2024 Olympics host.

"In the last two years, petty crime has increased a lot in the city of Paris, and so the question of security has become a very important issue in the campaign," said Bruno Cautres, a political analyst at the Cevipof research center. Security is a focus of rightwing candidate Rachida Dati

of the Republicans party who is proposing a municipal police force of 3,400 armed agents.

For the incumbent mayor, Socialist Anne Hidalgo, sanitation is a priority that will require a yearly one-billion euro (\$1.13 billion) budget, while independent Cedric Villani wants to unleash an army of robots to do the dirty work. Clean air, too, is a major concern in the densely populated city that issues pollution warnings on about 17 days every year. On this score, Hidalgo proposes to transform 60,000 parking spaces into cycling lanes - a controversial plan in a city many complain is a perpetual building site.

As for housing, most candidates want to accommodate lower-income renters as the inner city leads residents to the suburbs - Paris's population fell 0.5 percent from 2011 to 2016. "It is a city with few property owners, contrary to the rest of France. The owner/tenant division is a determining factor: owners are more inclined to vote for the right or for the LREM, and tenants for the left or the Greens," said analyst Jerome Sainte-Marie of the PollingVox polling institute.

'Protest vote'

Elections take place per neighborhood, or arrondissement, where each mayoral contender presents a list of candidates to a municipal council which will in turn elect a mayor. Most polls show Hidalgo leading the race, but with Dati fast narrowing the gap and the outcome likely to rest on alliances that form before the second round. Macron's LREM party suffered a setback when his chosen candidate, Benjamin Griveaux, pulled out over a sex tape scandal, causing Buzyn to be parachuted in from the health ministry.

But party support is split, with LREM member Villani opting to stand as an independent candidate after Macron chose Griveaux over him. Garrigues expects voters will use the vote, at least in part, to castigate Macron, who won Paris with a resounding margin in 2017 presidential elections but has since lost popularity due to a perceived autocratic leadership style and lack of common touch. "There will be a degree of protest vote against Emmanuel Macron... but I do not have the impression it will dominate the municipal elections," said Cautres. —AFP

Lego's colorful plastic bricks to go green

There may be a global revolt against plastic, but Danish toymaker Lego, famous for its multi-colored plastic building bricks, remains a raging success, even if it, too, aims to go green. Once revolutionary, then a ubiquitous material, plastic is increasingly being shunned due to the lasting harm its chemical components do to the planet. As a result, Lego has vowed that its iconic bricks will be 100 percent sustainable by 2030.

With pieces that are virtually unbreakable and reusable for generations, Lego - whose name is a contraction in Danish for "Leg Godt" or "Play Well" - has always had sustainability as a leitmotiv. Tim Brooks, head of corporate responsibility, told AFP. Now, the company just has to adapt to environmental and consumer demands. A study by the NPD market research group showed that 47 percent of Christmas shoppers worldwide chose not to buy a toy due to sustainability concerns.

"Toy manufacturers are really embracing this topic... There's a lot of innovation in both packaging and material for toys," Frederique Tutt, a toy industry expert at NPD, told AFP. Lego, based in the western Danish town of Billund, has no plans to abandon plastic. Rather, it aims to improve on the materials it uses. Currently, most of its pieces are made of

acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene (ABS), a petroleum-based substance also used to make household appliances.

"We want to use plastic in a responsible way, and particularly where it is in a high quality, durable and reusable application. And that's what Lego bricks are," said Brooks. For now, two percent of its plastic pieces, or 80 of the around 3,600 construction pieces, are made of a bio-sourced material, a sugarcane-based polyethylene. These pieces are mostly trees, leaves and bushes in the kits, which do not have to meet the same durability requirements as bricks, which have to stick together tightly.

It is a technical challenge, as Lego wants to ensure that customers do not notice any difference between the old plastic and any new materials. "We don't want you to notice it," Brooks insisted. New pieces must have the same physical properties as the old ones: Strength, colorfastness and sticking power, in order to remain compatible with older pieces.

Passing the brick

Over the years, the Danish company has evolved from simple brick kits to complex designs, such as its Harry Potter or architecture themed kits, and has made a strong foray into video games, apps, movies, cartoons and amusement parks. That diversification has helped the group recover from its financial woes in the early 2000s. In 2019, it posted a six-percent rise in sales. Lego encourages customers to hand down their bricks to younger generations.

"The brick has been compatible since 1958. You can buy something from the shelves today that works with something from the late 1950s," Brooks said. The company estimates that

96 percent of consumers either hold on to their Lego kits or pass them on, stressing the distinction between Lego's bricks and single-use plastics.

Recycling and wind farms

In addition to developing bioplastics, Lego, which is leading a project in the US providing second-hand kits to disadvantaged children, is making cautious advances in the field of recycled plastic. "Recycled materials is a very interesting area but you need to understand where that material comes from," Brooks said. The company refuses to divulge its production secrets, but insists it reuses its own plastic waste products in its production.

In 2014, Lego vowed to reduce its carbon footprint, partnering with the environmental group WWF. It says it has relied solely on renewable energy sources since 2017. "They made climate savings and shifted to more windcraft, now they're looking into alternatives to their plastic," said the head of WWF Denmark, Bo Oksnebjerg, of the company's efforts.

Kirkby, Lego's parent company, has meanwhile invested almost \$1 billion in wind farms. Lego is also working to improve its packaging, reducing the amount of plastic bags separating pieces and slashing the size of its boxes to reduce transport volumes. It aims to use only recycled or renewable materials by 2025. Antidia Citores, spokeswoman of the environmental group Surfrider Europe, stressed meanwhile that Lego needed to also look at the production end, as replacing one plastic with another would not reduce emissions. "Changing one plastic for another is not a revolution, not in terms of pollution or carbon emissions," she said. —AFP

Ardern faces election struggle, despite praise

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern won global acclaim for her response to the Christchurch mosque shootings - but 12 months on, her political future hangs in the balance and there are signs "Jacinda-mania" has peaked. The center-left leader had been in office barely 18 months on March 15 last year when a self-avowed white supremacist opened fire at two mosques during Friday prayers, killing 51 and injuring another 40.

Faced with a crisis unprecedented in New Zealand's modern history, Ardern rose to the challenge with a mixture of compassion and decisive action. She offered support for New Zealand's Muslims, rejected the shooter's ideology, immediately moved to tighten gun laws and launched a global initiative to curb online extremism. Ardern's personal popularity rat-

ing peaked at 51 percent shortly after the shootings and her Labour Party briefly reached similar levels, setting her on a path to reelection in polls set for later this year.

But the Sept 19 vote is now looking uncomfortably tight for the 39-year-old, with the center-right National Party edging ahead five points in opinion polls to 46 percent. Labour's support has not fallen off a cliff but appears to have plateaued amid perceptions it has failed to deliver on issues such as affordable housing and reducing child poverty. It joined forces with two minor parties to form a government after the 2017 election, but one of its coalition partners, New Zealand First, is currently flailing in the polls.

Professor Stephen Levine, a political scientist at Wellington's Victoria University, said Ardern - like US leaders John F Kennedy and Barack Obama before her - was more popular overseas than with domestic audiences. "Internationally, people are looking at the big picture, not the day-to-day details," he told AFP, adding: "It is by no means inconceivable that Jacinda will be a one-term prime minister."

'Nailed it'

Massey University politics specialist and associate professor Grant Duncan said many international observers would be baffled that a charismatic, widely praised leader was facing such an uncertain future. "For an outsider looking at New Zealand, we have this amazing prime minister, she's ticking so many boxes but guess what, she might not be prime minister after the next election," he told AFP. Ardern won office on a wave of "Jacinda-mania" after being thrust into the Labour leadership just seven weeks before the 2017 election.

She made headlines again a year later when she became only the second prime minister in the world to give birth while in office - after Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto in 1990. But it was the way she handled the horrors of Christchurch that defined Ardern's image. "This is one of those crucial moments when a leader has to rise above politics to really represent the country symbolically - and she nailed it," Duncan said. "She focused on the victims, not the perpetrator. What she said was healing and the nation needed healing at that time."

'It's tribal'

The moment that most resonated globally was when Ardern donned a headscarf while comforting victims' families after the shooting, later saying it was a spontaneous gesture of respect to the Muslim community. She was among the bookies' favorites for last year's Nobel Peace Prize and just this month featured on the cover of Time magazine accompanied by a positive article. But Levine said Ardern remained a centre-left leader in a country which, despite its progressive reputation, has a large conservative base. He said this meant Ardern's appeal - which lifted Labour's polling by almost 15 points after she became leader - came with in-built limitations.

"For a lot of people in this country, it's part of their identity to be National or Labour - these are tribes really and that's just the way it is," he said. Duncan said many National supporters admired Ardern's handling of the Christchurch shootings but it would not sway them at the ballot box. "They're not being budged because we have this celebrity prime minister, even if they appreciate what she did with the mosque shootings," he said. "That doesn't cut it for them." —AFP

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Saudis to hike oil output above 10m bpd

Riyadh takes decision as OPEC+ deal collapses; oil prices plunge



DUBAI: A picture taken with a fisheye lens shows traders walking by beneath a stock display board at the Dubai Stock Exchange in the United Arab Emirates yesterday. Saudi's stock exchange fell 6.5 percent and other Gulf markets tumbled to multi-year lows at the start of trading after OPEC and its allies failed to clinch a deal over oil production cuts. — AFP

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, plans to raise its crude oil production significantly above 10 million barrels per day (bpd) in April, after the collapse of OPEC's supply cut agreement with Russia, two sources told Reuters yesterday. State oil giant Aramco will boost its crude output after the current deal to curb production between OPEC and Russia - together known as OPEC+ - expires at the end of March, the sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The collapse of talks to extend the deal

on Friday sent oil prices plunging on speculation Saudi Arabia is scrapping a strategy of supporting prices in favor of a grab for market share, reminiscent of a drive in 2014 that caused crude prices to slump around two thirds in value.

On Saturday, Aramco slashed its official selling price (OSP) for April for all its crude grades to all destinations. The sources said April's production would be significantly higher than 10 million bpd, possibly closer to 11 million bpd. In the past couple of

months, Saudi Arabia has been pumping 9.7 million bpd.

Aramco should maximize its output and sell more crude to protect its market share, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter. Saudi Arabia has an oil output capacity of 12 million bpd, giving it the ability to swiftly increase production. A three-year pact between OPEC and Russia ended in acrimony on Friday after Moscow refused to support deeper production cuts to support

prices hit by the coronavirus outbreak. OPEC responded by removing all limits on its own output.

OPEC+ has been effectively cutting production by 2.1 million bpd, as Saudi Arabia has been reducing its own output by more than agreed. Russia's poor compliance with the output cuts has been frustrating Riyadh, OPEC sources said. "The kingdom is not at war with anyone, but it is pursuing its own interest. Once the deal expires, everyone will raise production," said the second source.

After marathon talks at the OPEC headquarters in Vienna on Friday, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said that from April 1 neither OPEC nor non-OPEC countries had any restrictions on production. Other OPEC producers, such as Iraq, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, will likely follow Saudi Arabia's move on Saturday with steep cuts to their own oil prices for April. "You have to follow the OSPs cut otherwise you die in the market," one oil industry analyst said. — Reuters

As demand crunch deepens, how far can oil plummet?

NEW YORK: Oil prices have plummeted by more than 30 percent since the start of the year but for producers the worst may be yet to come, warn experts, as the coronavirus epidemic weighs heavily on demand. The OPEC cartel of oil-producing countries and its allies failed to reach a deal on production cuts Friday, after Moscow refused to tighten supply to counter the effects of the outbreak, sending oil prices tumbling.

OPEC nations-led by the world's third-largest oil producer Saudi Arabia had agreed the day before to recommend "a further adjustment of 1.5 million barrels per day until 30 June 2020."

The 10 allies that join the member nations in the grouping known as OPEC+ would have taken on 500,000 barrels of the cuts, with the 13 OPEC members themselves shouldering the rest.

But Russia "didn't take the bait," Andrew Lebow of Commodity Research Group told AFP. "They've got a different view of the market than the Saudis or OPEC," he said, adding that the Russian economy is more diversified than that of most OPEC nations, and less dependent on oil.

As a result of Russia's rejection of the deal, the US benchmark futures contract, West Texas Intermediate for delivery in April, ended at \$41.28 a barrel, down a huge 10.1 percent for the day.



In London, Brent oil futures for delivery in May finished down 9.4 percent at \$45.27 per barrel. Both WTI and Brent ended at their lowest levels since April 2016.

A priority for Russia, the world's second-largest oil producer, is to avoid ceding ground to the top producer, the United States, which extracts more than 13 million barrels a day and exports between three and four million. "The Russians have decided to employ a scorched-earth policy," said John Kilduff of Again Capital, adding that Moscow was "at a point where they're wondering why they are supporting US producers."

Under such conditions, the oil market could continue to suffer from oversupply in the coming months, especially since the current cuts expire at the end of March and their renewal appears more than a little uncertain. OPEC+ nations have been bound since the beginning of 2017 by a voluntary reduction agreement of 1.2 million barrels per day. At their last meeting in December, the producers agreed to cut production by a further 500,000 barrels per day, with Saudi Arabia offering 400,000 barrels of "voluntary" cuts.—AFP

Lebanon hopes to wrap up debt talks within 9 months

BEIRUT: Negotiations to restructure Lebanon's foreign currency debt should not last more than nine months if well-intentioned, the economy minister told a local broadcaster, as the country headed for its first sovereign default. Hit by a major financial crisis, Lebanon declared on Saturday it could not pay forthcoming maturities - the first of which is a \$1.2 billion bond due today. The prime minister called for fair restructuring negotiations.

The default will mark a new phase in a crisis that has hammered the economy since October, slicing around 40% off the value of the currency, denying savers free access to their deposits and fuelling unemployment and unrest. The financial crisis is seen as the biggest risk to Lebanon's stability since the end of the 1975-90 civil war. Face-to-face negotiations between Lebanon and bond holders are expected to begin in about two weeks, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters. Prime Minister Hassan Diab, in a televised address to the nation on Saturday, said foreign currency reserves had hit a "critical and dangerous" level and were needed for basic imports. Lebanon had therefore suspended the March payment.

The financial crisis came to a head last year as capital inflows slowed and protests erupted over decades of state corruption and bad governance. "The negotiation

process will last for months and if we have good intentions will not go on for more than nine months," Raoul Nehme, the economy minister, told broadcaster Al-Jadeed in comments published on its website overnight.

Reuters could not immediately reach him for comment. "The government is now waiting for the position of the Eurobond holders," Nehme said, adding that he expected them to adopt "positive" positions. Referring to the possibility of Lebanon being sued abroad, he said creditors may bring legal cases against the central bank but would not win.

Lebanon has some \$31 billion in dollar bonds that sources say the state wants to restructure. Lebanon's public debt has reached around 170 percent of gross domestic product, meaning the country is close to being the world's most heavily indebted state, Diab said. Lebanon's banks, big holders of the debt, are ready to talk with foreign creditors as the government seeks to restructure, a source familiar with the matter said on Saturday.

There was no timetable yet for any restructuring and the discussions with foreign creditors are likely to start slowly, the source said. The Lebanese banking association has appointed Houlihan Lokey as financial adviser to help with the process. There has been no sign of a bailout from foreign states that aided Lebanon in the past. Western governments insist Beirut first enact long-delayed reforms against waste and corruption. Many analysts believe the only way for Lebanon to secure financial support would be through an IMF program. But this is opposed by the powerful, Iran-backed group Hezbollah, which has said conditions the IMF would seek to impose would cause a "popular revolution". Lebanon has however sought IMF technical assistance. — Reuters

Business

NBK Money Markets Report

Coronavirus outbreak sends major central banks into loosening mode

Kuwait follows Fed, lowers discount rate by 0.25%

KUWAIT: The US Federal Reserve scheduled an emergency meeting last Tuesday in which it slashed interest rates by 0.5 percent to the 1 percent-1.25 percent range. The move comes amid mounting concerns that the coronavirus outbreak may threaten the record expansion currently seen in the United States. "My colleagues and I took this action to help the US economy keep strong in the face of new risks to the economic outlook," Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said during the preceding press conference in Washington on Tuesday.

"The spread of the coronavirus has brought new challenges and risks," Wall Street suffered while 10-year Treasury yields sunk to its lowest level in history showing a yield below 0.7 percent. The emergency cut had failed to deliver the hoped support to the US dollar, sinking against the euro for the pair to go above the 1.3000 level unseen since June of 2019; the Japanese yen is hovering around the 105.00 level against the dollar, and the sterling broke the 1.3000 level. Though the Fed may have aimed for the early and aggressive easing to reassure investors, it instead signified the bank's scale of concern.

Equities in seesaw motion

US stocks saw their weakest performance since the 2008 financial crisis as news of the coronavirus outbreak drained investor confidence. The Fed rate now sits just 1 percent above 0, while policy is near maxed out in Japan and Europe, leaving major global central banks with little room to act if needed. Markets reacted negatively to the sudden cut by the US Fed, though some recovery was seen after the US House of Representatives passed an \$8.3 billion emergency spending package last Wednesday. The package aimed at strengthening the country's virus response and developing treatments. Unfortunately, that recovery did not last and equities went back to a negative trajectory on Thursday.

Mixed PMIs

Manufacturing activity in the US grew at a slower than expected pace in February, falling to 50.1 from the 50.9 in January. The slow growth has coincided with the coronavirus spreading throughout China and the rest of the world, denting expectations over global economic growth and corporate profits. The services sector on the other hand showed a pickup, defying the economic fallout from the global spread of coronavirus. The non-manufacturing sector jumped to a reading of 57.3 in February, up from the 55.5 figure clocked in January and slashing economists' expectations of a slowdown to 54.9. The survey showed that



most respondents expressed concern about the coronavirus and its supply chain impact, but "they do remain positive about business conditions and the overall economy," said Anthony Nieves, chair of the ISM non-manufacturing business survey committee. Sub-indices for new orders, employment and new export orders grew quicker month to month, while inventories and order backlogs showed growth after contracting in January.

Positive jobs figures

The closely watched figures of nonfarm payrolls and unemployment showed some positive sentiment for the US economy. The figures showed that US employers maintained a robust pace of hiring in February, giving the economy a needed boost as it battles the coronavirus. The report showed nonfarm payrolls increase by 273,000 in February, smashing the expected 175,000. Unemployment also showed a resilient figure falling from 3.6 percent in January to 3.5 percent in February, while average hourly earnings rose by 0.3 percent.

A cut in the horizon

In the UK, investors are betting to see a rate cut from the Bank of England taking interest rates to record lows in response to the economic threat of coronavirus. Following the emergency half point cut by the Federal Reserve, markets moved to price in a quarter point cut to 0.5 percent by the BoE's next policy meeting on March 26th. BoE's governor Mark Carney has signaled that the regulator would be prepared to cut interest rates and allow banks to use "rainy day" funds to soften the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the UK economy. In addition, Andrew Bailey, who takes over from Mark Carney as governor on March 16th said that he would act swiftly to limit the economic fallout from the spread of the virus.

"Material negative shock"

Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz has resisted

Rates -8th March, 2020

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.1001	1.1001	1.1354	1.1285	1.1100	1.1390	1.1330
GBP	1.2799	1.2736	1.3056	1.3047	1.2900	1.3175	1.3064
JPY	107.38	104.98	108.57	105.30	104.00	106.50	104.93
CHF	0.9661	0.9316	0.9661	0.9372	0.9300	0.9400	0.9332

lowering borrowing costs for years, leaving the country with one of the highest policy rates among advanced economies. However as the virus drives economic activity down sharply and lowers commodity prices, the BOC opted to ease policy for the first time in over four years. The bank lowered its overnight rate to 1.25 percent from 1.75 percent, with officials adding they would be willing to act again to reduce rates if necessary. The bank said the economy has been "operating close to potential with inflation on target", but that the virus now presented "material negative shock to the Canadian dollar and global outlooks". In its statement, it added domestic growth for the first quarter would probably be weaker than initially expected. Though markets expected the move last week, it illustrates a sharp change from the prior week when odds of just a 25 bps cut sat at 30 percent. The bank's next meeting is scheduled on April 15.

China's economy struggles

With supply and demand sides both weakened and supply chains disrupted, China's economy suffered largely by the coronavirus epidemic. Manufacturing PMI came in at 35.7 while the non-manufacturing PMI registered 29.6. A reading below 50 indicates a contraction, illustrating how drastically the world's second largest economy has been hit by the outbreak. The disease has cities locked down for weeks as the government enforced wide-scale quarantines to contain the spread, driving the severe slump in economic activity. On Monday, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said the virus has placed the world economy in its "most precarious position" since the 2008 financial crisis. The organization now sees a slowdown in global growth to 2.4 percent from the 3 percent forecasted in November. If the virus spreads, the OECD believes global GDP may fall as low as 1.5 percent this year.

Australia CB cuts rate

The Reserve Bank of Australia cut its official cash rate by 25bps to a record low of 0.50 percent in its meeting as they contemplated coronavirus outbreak risks. This marks the fourth reduction by the RBA in less than a year, as the country's record run of 28 years without a recession may now be challenged. A third of Australia's exports go to China, and a bulk of its trade is done with countries in Asia, placing the country in a position uniquely vulnerable to any slowdown in China. Governor Philip Lowe said further action was likely, claiming "The global outbreak of the coronavirus is expected to delay progress in Australia towards full employment and the inflation target...The Board is prepared to ease monetary policy further to support the Australian economy."

Kuwait

Kuwait and Other Regional Central Banks Act Accordingly

In Kuwait, the Central Bank Board of Directors decided to follow the Fed's lead and cut the discount rate from 2.75 percent to 2.5 percent. In a statement, CBK Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel announced the move is part of the precautionary measures taken to contain the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. In his concluding remarks he said, "CBK is closely monitoring the developments in the global economy and its impact on local markets and the banking sector, and will not hesitate to take the necessary decisions to ensure monetary and financial stability". Saudi Arabia, the UAE have also reduced key interest rates.

Kuwaiti dinar

USD/KWD opened at 0.30510 yesterday morning.

US airlines step up measures to guard against coronavirus

CHICAGO: US airlines are stepping up measures to guard against the spread of coronavirus through person-to-person contamination on airplanes, from eliminating wine and water refills to keeping passengers from touching serving trays and food baskets.

Rather than bringing wine or water bottles into the aisles for refills, flight attendants on United Airlines will now provide a new cup or glass. Facing a sharp drop in travel demand due to rising coronavirus outbreaks across the world, airlines are offering travelers free rebooking options while trying to calm jitters about cabin cleanliness and air-circulation systems. —Reuters

Tour buses idle as Thai economy takes gut punch from coronavirus

BANGKOK: Ranks of tourist buses idle under a burning sun while once-bustling theme parks lie empty from above, striking images reveal the hollowing out of Thai tourism due to the effect of the new coronavirus. Chinese tourists — 10 million of whom were expected to visit this year—have abandoned Thailand, staying at home as a health crisis sweeps the globe, or under quarantine by their government.

The attractions around Pattaya, a Thai tourist resort close to Bangkok which for several years has made its money from mainland tour groups, are struggling for survival. Beaches are quiet and shopping malls

deserted as an economic malaise settles over a kingdom heavily dependent on tourist spending. "The situation is very bad, there are very few tourists left," said Songsak Srimuang, a 27-year-old tattoo shop manager.

"Maybe I'll go back to my hometown and go back to farming," Pattaya, like the capital Bangkok, is fuelled by migrant labor from poorer Thai provinces as well as neighboring countries.

Economic growth is forecast to shrink to as low as two percent this year. As tourism is eviscerated by the virus, Thais in spin-off industries fear the worst. "I make 1000 baht (\$30) a day, it's not enough to earn a living," Pattaya ice-cream seller Rasmea Thapa, 28, told AFP.

Hotels and shops are shutting down, while those that stay open rely on Western expats and Russian tourists who are still holidaying. "Usually there are many tour buses but now it's nothing," said waitress Kochawan Greenglang, 30.

"If this keeps... the bar will have to close down and I won't have anywhere else to work." Thailand has confirmed 50 cases of the virus, with one death. —AFP



BANGKOK: An aerial photo shows unused tourist buses parked on a lot near Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok yesterday. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.906
Indian Rupees	4.158
Pakistani Rupees	1.022
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.679
Nepali Rupees	2.590
Singapore Dollar	224.140
Hongkong Dollar	39.358
Bangladesh Taka	3.590
Philippine Peso	6.055
Thai Baht	9.779
Malaysian Ringgit	78.248

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.641
Qatari Riyal	84.087
ani Riyal	795.192
Bahraini Dinar	812.940
UAE Dirham	83.354

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.633
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.229
Tunisian Dinar	114.590
Jordanian Dinar	432.040
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.617

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	305.950

Euro	349.090
Sterling Pound	403.240
Canadian dollar	230.040
Turkish lira	51.420
Swiss Franc	331.110
US Dollar Buying	298.500

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	305.600
Canadian Dollar	228.355
Sterling Pound	400.155
Euro	346.560
Swiss Frank	289.100
Bahrain Dinar	812.705
UAE Dirhams	83.605
Qatari Riyals	84.850
Saudi Riyals	82.390
Jordanian Dinar	432.320
Egyptian Pound	19.597
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.682
Indian Rupees	4.143
Pakistani Rupees	1.979
Bangladesh Taka	3.593
Philippines Peso	6.029
Cyprus pound	18.175
Japanese Yen	3.900
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.636
Malaysian Ringgit	74.190
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.540
Thai Bhat	10.720

Turkish Lira

Turkish Lira	50.615
Singapore dollars	219.568

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.393247	0.407147
Czech Korune	0.005677	0.014977
Danish Krone	0.042448	0.047448
Euro	0.338673	0.352373
Georgian Lari	0.111091	0.111091
Hungarian	0.001155	0.001345
Norwegian Krone	0.028098	0.034298
Romanian Leu	0.065718	0.082568
Russian Ruble	0.004526	0.004526
Slovakia	0.009183	0.019183
Swedish Krona	0.028741	0.033741
Swiss Franc	0.320738	0.331738
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.195769	0.207769
New Zealand Dollar	0.188909	0.198409
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.222900	0.231900
US Dollars	0.302100	0.306650
US Dollars Mint	0.302600	0.306650
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002876	0.003677
Chinese Yuan	0.042647	0.046147

Hong Kong Dollar	0.037470	0.040220
Indian Rupee	0.003624	0.004396
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002830	0.003010
Korean Won	0.000247	0.000262
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069971	0.075971
Nepalese Rupee	0.002611	0.029251
Pakistan Rupee	0.001337	0.002107
Philippine Peso	0.005902	0.006202
Singapore Dollar	0.216940	0.226940
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001324	0.001904
Taiwan	0.010186	0.010366
Thai Baht	0.009414	0.009964
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.806030	0.814130
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	0.000104	0.000254
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021207	0.025207
Omani Riyal	0.790179	0.798121
Qatar Riyal	0.083448	0.084486
Saudi Riyal	0.080567	0.081867
Syrian Pound	0.001299	0.001519
Tunisian Dinar	0.104498	0.112498
Turkish Lira	0.043748	0.053593
UAE Dirhams	0.082731	0.083563
Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076

Business

UK to deliver post-Brexit budget under virus cloud

Johnson likely to press ahead with major spending on infrastructure

LONDON: Britain unveils its first post-Brexit budget on Wednesday and analysts expect Prime Minister Boris Johnson to press ahead with major spending on infrastructure, despite the economic fallout from the coronavirus. Finance minister Rishi Sunak, who will present the budget after his predecessor Sajid Javid resigned unexpectedly last month, is also scheduled to outline emergency funding measures in the battle against COVID-19.

Before the novel coronavirus hit the headlines, Chancellor of the Exchequer Sunak had said the budget "will deliver" on recent government promises of "unleashing the country's potential".

However, the government has now delayed publication of its National Infrastructure Strategy—a more long-term outlook on improving British transport connections while achieving net-zero emissions nationwide by 2050. In the immediate term, 39-year-old Sunak's task is to carry out Johnson's goal of boosting improved productivity in cities outside London via massive infrastructure projects, such as the new high-speed railway HS2.

Javid resigned, and was replaced by his deputy Sunak, after Johnson offered to keep on the former chancellor only if he sacked all of his political advisers.

The prime minister wants greater say over Treasury policy following the Conservatives' victory in the general election in December that finally unlocked Brexit and allowed Britain to quit the European Union on January 31. "Sunak won't sit on his hands in the budget, in the face of the meltdown in financial markets and growing concerns that the coronavirus is developing into a pandemic," said Ruth Gregory, economist at Capital Economics research group.

"The chancellor's first priority will be to unveil a package of targeted measures to help offset any damage inflicted by the virus."

Delivering on promises

The second "will be to deliver the government's 2019 manifesto promises and set the wheels in motion on raising investment spending," Gregory said. The government has said full construction work on the long-delayed HS2 would begin next month after Johnson backed the project despite soaring costs and damage to wildlife.

Analysts also expect the new budget to provide greater detail on the government's fiscal plans.

"There's the implication that there will be a lot of increased investment spending," said Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for

Fiscal Studies. "But for all the chanting about the number of additional police officers and hospitals and so on... there's very little in there, in terms of actual promises for changes to day-to-day spending or indeed promises for tax changes."

The government is promising 20,000 extra police officers and greater investment in the country's state-run hospitals—but details on National Health Service spending, in particular, have been sketchy.

Britain's departure from the European Union has cost taxpayers more than £4 billion (\$5.2 billion, 4.6 billion euros) in extra government costs, the National Audit Office said on Friday.

Viral fallout

The coronavirus is also expected to cloud the outlook for the British economy. On the eve of Brexit, the Bank of England cut its growth forecasts for this year and next, as the country faces tough negotiations with the EU on a new trade deal. Recent official data showed that growth slowed to zero in the final quarter of last year as manufacturing shrank.

The Bank of England is predicted to follow the lead of the US Federal Reserve and cut its own interest rates to support the British economy as the coronavirus hurts



LONDON: In this handout picture released by the BBC yesterday, Britain's Finance Minister (Chancellor of the Exchequer) Rishi Sunak (right) talks with host Andrew Marr during an appearance on the BBC political program The Andrew Marr Show in London. Britain unveils its first post-Brexit budget on Wednesday. — AFP

global growth.

Last week, the BoE's incoming chief Andrew Bailey said UK-based companies would need help in the face of disruptions to supplies triggered by the disease. Bailey,

who takes over from governor Mark Carney on March 16, singled out small and medium-sized firms for such aid, likely under a joint effort with British retail banks and the government. —AFP

China exports fall, imports drop as virus batters trade

BEIJING: China's exports contracted sharply in the first two months of the year, and imports declined, as the health crisis triggered by the coronavirus outbreak caused massive disruptions to business operations, global supply chains and economic activity. The gloomy trade report is likely to reinforce fears that China's economic growth halved in the first quarter to the weakest since 1990 as the epidemic and strict government containment measures crippled factory production and led to a sharp slump in demand. Overseas shipments fell 17.2 percent in January-February from the same period a year earlier, customs data showed on Saturday, marking the steepest fall since February 2019.

That compared with a 14 percent drop tipped by a Reuters poll of analysts and a 7.9 percent gain in December. Imports sank 4 percent from a year earlier, but were better than market expectations of a 15 percent drop. They had jumped 16.5 percent in December, buoyed in part by a preliminary Sino-US trade deal.

China ran a trade deficit of \$7.09 billion for the period, reversing an expected \$24.6 billion surplus in the poll. Factory activity contracted at the fastest

pace ever in February, even worse than during the global financial crisis, an official manufacturing gauge showed last weekend, with a sharp slump in new orders. A private survey highlighted similarly dire conditions.

The epidemic has killed over 3,000 and infected more than 80,000 in China. Though the number of new infections in China is falling, and local governments are slowly relaxing emergency measures, analysts say many businesses are taking longer to reopen than expected, and may not return to normal production till April.

Those delays threaten an even longer and costlier spillover into the economies of China's major trading partners, many of which rely heavily on Chinese-made parts and components. China's trade surplus with the United States for the first two months of the year stood at \$25.37 billion, Reuters calculation based on Chinese customs data showed, much narrower than a surplus of \$42.16 billion in the same period last year. Soybean imports in the first two months of 2020 rose by 14.2 percent year-on-year as cargoes from the US booked during a trade truce at the end of 2019 cleared customs. After months of tensions and tariff hikes that dragged on bilateral trade, the world's two biggest economies agreed an interim trade deal in January that cut some US tariffs on Chinese goods in exchange for Chinese pledges to massively increase purchases of US goods and services. The US expects China to honor these commitments despite the coronavirus outbreak, a senior US official said in February.

Virus threatens global recession
The supply and demand shocks in



COLOMBO: In this file photograph, a laborer works at a construction site on reclaimed land, part of a Chinese-funded project for Port City, in Colombo. — AFP

China are likely to reverberate through global supply chains for months, and the rising number of virus cases and business disruptions in other countries is raising fears of a prolonged global slowdown or even recession. In response, global policymakers have stepped up efforts to cushion the economic blow of the epidemic, with the US Federal Reserve delivering an emergency rate cut last week.

Shortages of vital parts and components from China last month cost other countries and their industries \$50 billion, a United Nations agency said on Wednesday. The virus outbreak escalated in late January just as many businesses were winding down operations or closing for the long Lunar New Year holidays, and as hundreds of millions of Chinese were returning to their

hometowns.

China customs said last month it would not release separate figures for January and would combine January and February instead, in line with how some of the country's other major indicators are released early in the year, which is intended to smooth distortions created by the holidays.

Tough public measures such as restrictions on travel and quarantines meant many of these people were unable to return to their jobs in offices, factories and ports until only recently. Some firms which have reopened have faced shortages of parts and other raw materials as well as labor, while others report inventories of finished goods such as steel are piling up as downstream customers like car plants slowly crank up production again. — Reuters

slowdown. "We're not looking at big, expensive, macro cash rebates," he told Fox Business Network on Friday.

Why the hesitation

There are some good reasons for trepidation by governments. Ramping up spending is potentially inflationary, and critics fear politics would prevent governments from unwinding spending quickly if inflation were to get out of hand. Europe is also a different proposition than the United States, due to euro-area rules and Germany's dogged refusal to boost deficits amid fears of its rapidly ageing demographics. In the UK, the head of an influential think-tank, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said the British government should not change budget rules to allow itself more borrowing. — Reuters

CBK announces Al-Najma account weekly winners

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the winners of the Al-Najma Account weekly draw and the winners of the 'Your Salary & More' draw in the presence of MOCI representative, Zainab Fadhel Al-Shirazi. The winner of Al-Najma Account weekly draw was Soud Abdullah Abdul Mohsen, who won KD 5,000 cash and the winner of the Your Salary & More campaign was Khatoon Adel Al-Enezi.

In addition, CBK explained that Al-Najma Account offers the largest daily award in Kuwait of KD 5000, a monthly KD 20,000 award and a biannual KD 500,000 award. The bank is also the winner of Guinness Book of World Record for offering the largest annual award of KD 1.5 million.

A CBK statement added that participants could open the account by depositing a minimum of KD 500 to enter all draws and that each KD 25 entitles an account holder to an entry in daily draws after a week as of deposit and in mega draws after 3 months of deposit. "The more sums deposited, the bigger the chances account holders will have to win one of the awards", the statement underlined.

Further, CBK statement explained that the 'Your Salary & More' campaign is open to Kuwaiti employees with minimum KD 500 salaries who would enjoy getting instant cash gifts of up to KD 500 or interest free loans up to KD 10,000 in addition to entering weekly draws to win amounts equal to holders monthly salaries. Participants will also get 5-year valid Visa Signature cards free of charge with up to 3 per cent cashback, E-government cards as well as they can enjoy CBK's creative payment and transfer solutions using T-Pay service.

Virus is a catalyst for a fiscal reboot worldwide

LONDON: Many investors are perplexed by the reluctance of governments to use near-zero borrowing costs to crank up investment spending to reboot growth, inflation and even fight climate change. The coronavirus shock may finally break the logjam.

The rapidly spreading virus threatens to bring global economic activity to a grinding halt. Central banks are reacting, but they do not have much room to support the economy. With inflation still dormant and falling, it is puzzling why governments don't embrace borrowing to both stimulate activity and invest in future infrastructure.

Mike Kelly, head of multi-asset investments at the \$100 billion Pinebridge Investments, likens this government reluctance to a kid who freezes beneath the basketball hoop, as parents of both teams shout: "Shoot the ball, Johnny!" For Kelly, the next move for governments is obvious, if not inevitable. He reckons Berlin, Washington and London will now have to use fiscal expansion in a way that goes far beyond remedial cash to fight the COVID-19 virus because targeted measures will not be enough.

"Whether you support it or not, it feels like a slow-moving dance

to MMT," said Kelly, referring to the Modern Monetary Theory, which argues that governments can borrow almost unlimited amounts of money without leading to inflation as long as it was in their own currency.

So far, fiscal policy responses are mostly specific to fighting the virus or offsetting the damage to worst-affected businesses. The United States has earmarked almost \$8 billion additional funds, for example, and Italy - Europe's worst affected country - is spending as much. White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said on Friday it was too early to determine the magnitude of any



NEW YORK: Traders work the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on Friday in New York City. Many investors are perplexed by the reluctance of governments to use near-zero borrowing costs to crank up investment spending to reboot growth, inflation and even fight climate change. — AFP

US fin regulators start contingency planning as virus hits Washington

WASHINGTON: US financial regulators are preparing contingency arrangements, including travel restrictions and home-working, to ensure they can effectively oversee the financial markets as the coronavirus closes in on the US capital. On Friday, US officials said the first three cases of the flu-like disease had been diagnosed in Montgomery County, Maryland, home to thousands of federal workers who travel in to offices in nearby Washington daily.

Agencies including the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and the banking regulators also have offices in New York, San Francisco and New Jersey where other cases have been reported. As New York banks start triggering their contingency plans, their watchdogs have also begun to take precautions, allowing more home-working, cancelling and limiting travel, calling off conferences, and restricting some external meetings.

"The safety and health of CFTC employees is our top priority," Michael Short, director of public affairs at the agency said on Friday. "The CFTC continues to make all necessary preparations to accommodate scenarios that might arise." The derivatives watchdog has canceled some foreign travel and is allowing essential overseas trips on a case-by-case basis, he said. Domestic travel is still permitted, but staff are free to reschedule trips unless it is mission-critical.

Likewise, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation said it had taken steps to limit non-essential international travel. The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) said it had reviewed its contingency plans, without elaborating. On Thursday, the OCC along with the Federal Reserve and the FDIC canceled a joint conference on fair lending scheduled for next week "out of an abundance of caution," they said.

Reuters also reported on Friday that the US Federal Reserve had taken the unusual step of quarantining US dollars it receives from Asia for up to 10 days. A spokeswoman for the SEC said the agency was following government advice that staff stay home when they are sick or when they have returned from coronavirus hotspots.

"The agency also is focused on ensuring telework readiness and adjusting travel arrangements where appropriate," she added.

Juggling

The coronavirus has spread to 85 countries, infecting more than 100,000 people, according to a Reuters tally based on statements from health ministries and government officials. US Treasury debt yields plunged to historic lows on Friday, while US stocks tanked and the Dow Jones shed more than 800 points before paring losses. The US Office of Personnel Management, which oversees federal workers, trains federal agency staff annually on contingency plans for disruptions like a lapse in funding or epidemic-type scenarios.

"The first level of planning is behind the scenes and to make sure that you've got a contingency plan for anything and everything that can happen," said Thomas Vartanian, a George Mason law professor and former senior OCC official. Still, the market turmoil is adding to the regulatory workload, requiring officials to ramp-up market monitoring, and communicate daily with one another and the industry. — Reuters

Ooredoo Group selects Huawei to provide 5G services in 5 countries

Strategic partnership to make Ooredoo Supernet fully 5G-enabled



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Sayed, Deputy Group CEO — Ooredoo and Saif Wang, President of Key Account Ooredoo at Huawei at the partnership signing ceremony



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Group and Huawei, two of the world's leading digital enablers, yesterday announced a strategic partnership to make the Ooredoo Supernet fully 5G-enabled with the goal of enhancing people's digital lives across five countries - Kuwait, Oman, Indonesia, Tunisia and Maldives - over the next five years.

Ooredoo will leverage Huawei's world-leading 5G SingleRAN radio solution with advanced Massive MIMO technology, and 5G Cloud Core solution with a convergent platform to achieve a full digital transformation and modernization of its existing mobile networks. The network upgrade will provide customers with the latest 5G technologies and services.

5G services and devices have been launched earlier by Ooredoo in Kuwait in collaboration with Huawei. Currently, Ooredoo is speeding up the delivery of more network stations to be 5G-ready in Kuwait and Oman, which will offer about 100 times faster download speed than 4G networks. In 2020, Ooredoo will launch 5G commercial services in additional countries across the Ooredoo footprint.

Waleed Al-Sayed, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer and CEO of Ooredoo Qatar, said: "With Huawei's leading 5G network solution, we will be able to improve our network's operation efficiency and provide limitless opportunities to our customers. Users will

enjoy a more streamlined and personalized experience and businesses will be empowered to develop the smart, connected cities of the future."

Using Huawei's high-speed and low-latency 5G advanced technology, Ooredoo can meet growing data traffic demands, and deliver high-quality mobile broadband and fixed wireless experiences. Huawei will share global best practices in its multi-standard and single-architecture, which provides high 5G performance with the big capacity and the low energy consumption.

Ryan Ding, Executive Director of the Board and President of Carrier BG, Huawei, said: "It is our pleasure to cooperate with Ooredoo, the world's leading

operator of 5G services. Through this strategic partnership, we will support Ooredoo to achieve high 5G performance services for consumers, households and vertical industries in line with our commitment to build a fully connected and intelligent world." Saif Wang, President of Key Account Ooredoo at Huawei, said: "Our partnership with Ooredoo aims to enrich people's digital life in these five countries through our latest 5G innovation. 5G promises rich innovative services for the customers and provides more business opportunities to accelerate the digitization of industries. Huawei will continue to support Ooredoo to build a world-class infrastructure."

Saint Petersburg to host 45th IAA World Congress in May

KUWAIT: The IAA World Congress, the most influential global platform to discuss a development strategy of the marketing communications industry amongst the world's leading, visionary founders as well as global, C-level suite executives, returns for its 45th edition in May 2020.

The host cities for the IAA World Congress have always been the largest world's business centers, including Beijing, London, Moscow, Washington, Dubai. But starting last year, the association decided to switch to selecting cities in terms of their cultural value or technology innovation. Kochi (India) became the first city to host the Congress in February 2019. 45th World Congress 2020 will be held between May 27-29, 2020 in St. Petersburg, Russia, known for its rich artistic heritage. The Congress will become the major activity in the communications industry in Russia and the must attend event for the rest of the world.

Leading experts and speakers with great experience in the industry, authorities' representatives, young specialists will gather in St. Petersburg to discuss

opportunities for emphasizing of strategic partnership between communications market participants and development of communications industry within 2030 perspective.

The MarCom industry is in the midst of revolution. It is common knowledge that technology is dramatically reshaping the way products and services are sold. In a mobile-first world, access to goods and services is infinite, and purchase is instantaneous.

On top of all this, something more fundamental is happening. The relationship between consumers and brands is evolving at warp speed. We are moving from a "tell and sell" world to the one in which consumers, fueled by new technologies, have more power in deciding what, where, when and how they buy. And how they interact.

"Power to people", theme of the 2020 World Congress, will dive deep into this sea change and the implications it has on brands, consumers and the society. A new era of consumer empowerment touches every angle of marketing - from privacy concerns and new forms of creativity to the importance of data protection in making per-



sonalized product/service offerings. At the same time, timeless fundamentals of creating high value brands remain as relevant as ever to high performance of any company.

Global leaders are set to open the 45th IAA World Congress in Saint Petersburg, Russia including Maher Nasser (Director Of DGC's Outreach Division, United Nations Organization), Shelly Lazarus (Chairman Emeritus, Ogilvy), Philip Thomas (CEO Cannes Lions), Steven Zhang (TikTok), Anna Lukanina (RBCA).

The World Congress business program will provide wide opportunities for the event participants to interact with leading professionals from all around the world during plenary sessions, business breakfasts, panel discussions, open talks and foresight sessions on key topics of

present and future of communications industry.

The Congress will also grant a great chance for young professionals & students within educational program, which will involve briefings, master classes and lectures of key congress speakers.

The cultural program will offer unforgettable moments for the congress delegates and accompanying persons as Saint Petersburg, being one of the leading world cultural centers, presents broadest range of cultural events, from famous ballet in Mariinsky theatre and unique art collection of Russian museums to fabulous parks and palaces around the city. After the business program of the Congress is over, the event participants are can visit Moscow, which thrills visitors with its history, culture and grandeur.

KFH customers benefit from KFH Pass service

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) customers benefit from KFH-Pass service that allows customers to postpone one of their installment payments. KFH designed this service to facilitate the needs of customers and their lifestyle. By applying for a personal finance, customers can choose a month in a year to postpone a payment.

Through KFH-Pass service, customer can schedule one monthly installment after completing the transaction via KFHonline or the mobile app. This service gives customers more flexibility in changing the month they wish to postpone their installments during the financing period according to their personal needs.

The goal of KFH Pass service is to provide more flexibility to customers to relieve them from the burden of their

other monthly expenses, such as school payments, summer travel season, etc. The service also helps customers to meet their other emergency financial obligations when needed, easily postponing the date of installments due without the need to visit the bank branches.

Customers can select the expected postponement months when applying for funding. In doing so, the total funding period should not exceed the maximum repayment periods set by the regulators, 60 months for the consumer financing or 180 months for the housing financing. Customers are entitled to choose the deferred month each year with a maximum of 5 months for consumer financing and 15 months for housing financing. KFH-Pass service is available to KFH customers who have a regular salary transfer at the bank, when requesting new consumer or housing financing, starting from the launch date of the service. KFH is keen to provide its customers flexible, secure and convenient banking and financing services in accordance with the highest standards of service quality.

Burgan Bank winners of Yawmi account

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Sami Mahmoud Hasan Al-Rabiah
2. Dalal Hasan Radhi Sabti
3. Salem Ahmad Ali Alibrahim
4. Fouhaid Kulaib Fouhaid Alajmi
5. Talal Jassem Mohammed Al-Khurafi

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan

Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

Trump: No promises on steel, aluminum tariffs for Brazil

PALM BEACH, Florida: President Donald Trump praised the United States' relationship with Brazil under Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Saturday, but declined to say whether he would impose steel and aluminum tariffs on the South American country. Ahead of a dinner between the two men at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, Trump was asked if he would continue to hold off placing new tariffs on Brazilian steel and aluminum. Trump responded that the United States had helped Brazil, but said

he would not make any promises regarding tariffs.

The Western Hemisphere's two largest economies had been embroiled in a trade spat over US metal tariffs. But Bolsonaro in December said Trump had told him there would be no new US tariffs on Brazilian steel and aluminum. "Brazil loves him, and the USA loves him," Trump said of Bolsonaro as the two men stood briefly in front of journalists. "The friendship is probably stronger now than it's ever been."

The two leaders, who share a similar brand of conservative, populist politics, last met roughly a year ago at the White House. A senior US administration official told reporters earlier on Saturday that the two leaders were expected to discuss the crisis in Venezuela, economic ties and the possibility of a US-Brazil trade agreement. Forest conservation was also on the topic list for the meeting, the official said. —Reuters

Women's bank helps Ivorian children

KOKOTI-KOUAMEKRO, Ivory Coast: In a poor farming village in Ivory Coast, women are celebrating a new development that is allowing them to send their children to school instead of working in the country's cocoa plantations. Until now, many families earning less than a dollar (a euro) a day had no choice but to send their offspring to work beside adults in the fields.

Crippling poverty is a major factor in the widespread use of child labor in Ivory Coast, which is the world's top cocoa producer. But now with the help of a Swiss-based foundation, women in plantations around Kokoti-Kouamekro are turning to a network of small savings banks with the goal of protecting children.

The International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) has been working since 2007 towards the goal of ending child labor in Ivory Coast and neighboring Ghana. The ICI identified 200 child workers out of 900 people on the plantations of Kokoti-Kouamekro, a village of some 2,000 people in the Taabo region, 200 kilometers (125 miles) from Abidjan.

The foundation decided to back about 30



Bakpa-elai president Patricia Kouadio Amami (left) holds a meeting with members of the Bakpa-elai association in Kokoti-Kouamekro on February 25, 2020. — AFP

women in an association called Bakpa-elai, which watches out for children's interests. It helped create a "feminine cell for economic reinforcement (Cefrec)", the formal term for the women's bank. Since 2018, the ICI has set up 14 Cefrec units in the cocoa-growing parts to specialize in savings and credit with the aim of promoting children. These local units opened the way for numerous money-making activities, including small shops and other business concerns, in Kokoti-Kouamekro and other villages.

Paying the workers

With seeds, boots and machetes supplied

by the ICI, the women of the village association chose to save almost one euro apiece, after harvesting and selling yams, cassava, corn and other food products. The collected money was placed in a box that requires three "key keepers" with joint access, to reduce any risk of embezzlement or temptation. People who are late for weekly financial meetings are fined. "In one year, we mobilized about 3.8 million CFA francs (about 5,800 euros / \$6,500), and spent two million, with a positive balance of 1.8 million," said Patricia Kouadio Amami, the president of the association, clad in a multi-colored dress and headscarf. —AFP

Health

More countries will have to adopt Italy-style virus steps: Austria's Kurz

Vulnerable Americans may need to avoid crowds, US health official warns

ZURICH: It is only a matter of time until more European countries adopt the kind of aggressive steps that Italy is taking to combat the spread of the coronavirus, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said yesterday. Italy, Austria's southern neighbour, imposed a virtual lockdown across a swathe of its wealthy north on Sunday including the financial capital Milan, in a drastic new attempt to try to contain a rapidly growing outbreak. Kurz told broadcaster ORF the situation in Austria — where health authorities have reported 104 confirmed coronavirus cases so far — was under control and the measures it has adopted were proper, although probably not the final steps required.

Austria said last week it would introduce "spot" health checks at its border with Italy for two weeks. Austria could "of course" close schools, kindergartens and universities or curb large events if needed, Kurz said, adding he was in contact with the leaders of other European countries.

"It will be important to decide which steps to take when. You can close schools for one or two weeks and this is urgently necessary in Italy. It will happen in other European countries. The decisive question is when to do it," Kurz said. The dilemma is how to head off a peak in infections that could paralyse public health systems without doing too much economic damage, he added. "You have to consider carefully when to adopt these measures because a national economy cannot handle this over too long a period," he added.

He said the virus outbreak would weigh on Austrian economic growth, originally projected at 1.2-1.7% this year, but did not elaborate. Kurz said the spot checks at the Italian border would not just detect individuals

infected with the coronavirus but also reduce cross-border flows of travellers, reducing the risk of infection.

Austria last week said it was temporarily banning flights to northern Italy as well as other virus hot spots Iran and South Korea. Austrian Airlines has halted flights to China until April 24.

Meanwhile, signs that coronavirus is spreading through US communities were "not encouraging" and a top health official warned on Sunday that Americans, especially those who are vulnerable, may need to stop attending large gatherings.

In the United States 19 people have died and more than half of all states have reported cases of the coronavirus, which originated in China last year and causes the sometimes deadly respiratory illness COVID-19. As the outbreak takes root, daily life has become increasingly disrupted, with concerts and conferences canceled and universities telling students to stay home and take classes online.

"I think we're getting a better sense (of the scope of the outbreak) as the days go by," Anthony Fauci, the head of the infectious diseases unit at the National Institutes of Health, said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

"Unfortunately, that better sense is not encouraging because we're seeing community spread," he said. He urged those most at risk from coronavirus to limit travel. "If you're a person with an underlying condition and you are particularly an elderly person with an underlying condition you need to think twice about getting on a plane, on a long trip, and not only think twice, just don't get on a cruise ship," Fauci said on "Meet the Press." Fauci said that in addition to efforts to try to contain the spread of the virus, it was important to start



JAKARTA: A visitor, wearing a facemask as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 browses for books during the 'Big Bad Wolf Books' book fair in Jakarta yesterday. — AFP

thinking about how to mitigate the impact as more and more Americans fall ill.

"They call it 'social distancing,' but it is common sense stuff," he said. "You don't want to go to a massive gathering, particularly if you are a vulnerable individual."

The hardest hit area has been a nursing home in a suburb of Seattle. The United States is also preparing to take some passengers off a cruise ship that was barred from docking in San Francisco after several people aboard tested positive for the virus. — Reuters

What you need to know about coronavirus now

LONDON: Here's what you need to know about the coronavirus:

The spread

There are now more than 107,000 coronavirus cases and more than 3,600 deaths across the world, according to a Reuters tally of government announcements. Italy ordered a virtual lockdown across a swathe of its wealthy north on Sunday, including the financial capital Milan, in a drastic attempt to try to contain the outbreak there.

The government enacted its draft order just hours after officials announced that the number of coronavirus cases had leapt by more than 1,200 in a 24-hour period - the biggest daily rise since the epidemic began in the country two weeks ago.

Iran, one of the other worst hit countries outside China, said 194 people had died from coronavirus and 6,566 were now infected.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Daegu, the city hardest hit by South Korea's outbreak expressed cautious hope on Sunday that the numbers of new cases may be dropping, after the rate of increase slowed to its lowest in 10 days. Argentina recorded Latin America's first death from the coronavirus. Bangladesh, Maldives, Bulgaria and Moldova reported their first cases.

Another sign of economic damage

The economic bad news continues: a trade report showed China's exports contracted sharply in the first two months of the year, and imports slowed, as the health crisis caused massive disruptions to business operations, global supply chains and economic activity.

Keep calm and work from home

The European Central Bank has told most of its over 3500 staff to work from home today to test how it could cope with a shutdown - one of a slew of institutions and companies urging staff to avoid the office and curb travel plans.

Cruise control

After being held at sea and barred from returning to San Francisco last week due to a coronavirus outbreak aboard, the cruise ship Grand Princess has been directed to the nearby port of Oakland, the cruise line said on Saturday. Passengers needing treatment will be transported to facilities in California. The crew will be quarantined and treated on board.

Sports without fans

The Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix will go ahead on March 22 but without fans cheering on the drivers, in a first for the sport. The Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai scheduled for April 19 has already been postponed. Britain has called a meeting with its sports authorities and broadcasters on Monday to discuss how other events could be staged without fans present if the outbreak escalates.

What about walking the dog?

Moscow's healthcare department said it was OK for residents in self-isolation to walk their dog, but only while wearing a face mask and at time when there are the fewest people in the streets. The advice was handed out after authorities threatened prison terms of up to five years for people failing to self-isolate for two weeks after visiting countries hit hard by the coronavirus outbreak. — Reuters

Empty streets and paranoia as northern Italy goes into lockdown

MILAN: The sun shone on deserted squares in Milan and empty gondolas in Venice yesterday as a quarter of Italy's population came to grips with being cut off from the rest of the country, under new rules strictly limiting movement in and out of the new red zone.

While some packed their bags and fled, most in northern Italy stayed to brave a lockdown imposed by the government on some 15 million people, as it ramps up the fight against the deadly coronavirus.

"The virus closes the heart of the north," the Stampa daily's headline read, while Il Messaggero went with "Half of Italy shuts". It was not clear, however, how strictly the order would be enforced, or how authorities could prevent people from leaving.

The decree said that only people with a "serious" reason that cannot be postponed, such as urgent work or family issues, would be allowed in or out of the quarantine zones, which cover Lombardy and 14 provinces in four other regions.

But it does allow for the return home of those who were in the affected areas but live elsewhere, including tourists. The outspoken head of Italy's opposition far-right League party, Matteo Salvini, demanded clarity from the government for the "millions of worried Italians".

"Who can do what? Where can they go? Who can work? Who can travel? And what about borders with other countries?" Flights appeared to be operating normally out of Milan and

Venice airports, while it was business as usual at train stations. The borders with Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia remain open.

'Spreading Paranoia'

Pina Antinucci, a psychoanalyst in her 60s who lives in Milan, told AFP she was suffering nightmares and felt the state was "bombarding us with anxieties, spreading paranoia".

"I'd like to know if I'm infected... it would be better to know if I have that unwanted guest who occupies our homes, minds and lives," she said. With more than 230 fatalities, Italy has recorded the most deaths from the COVID-19 disease of any country outside China, where the outbreak began in December.

The new rules came shortly after the news that the number of people infected had jumped by over 1,200 in a 24-hour period.

'Uncertainty, anxiety, confusion'

The plan was leaked to the media on Saturday, infuriating Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who slammed it as "unacceptable", saying it had created "uncertainty, anxiety, (and) confusion".

Italian virologist Roberto Burioni described the leak on Twitter as "pure madness".

"The draft of a very harsh decree is leaked, sparking panic and prompting people to try and flee the (then) theoretical red zone, carrying the virus with them," he said on social media.

"In the end, the only effect is to help the virus to spread. I'm lost for words".

Dozens of health screeners at LAX ordered to self-quarantine

WASHINGTON: Dozens of health care screeners and other employees at Los Angeles International Airport have been ordered to self-quarantine, after two colleagues tested positive for the coronavirus, a federal official told Reuters. The two screeners were tasked with checking passengers arriving at LAX on international flights into the United States. A government official who was briefed on the matter said it is not yet clear if the screeners were infected by passengers, others at the airport or in their own communities.

The airport workers who have been told to self-quarantine are believed to have come into contact with the two stricken screeners, the official said. They have been told to self-quarantine until March 17, the official said. The official said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Department of Homeland Security were making plans to reposition at least 25 people to replace the self-quarantined staff at LAX. Spokespeople for the CDC and DHS were not immediately available for comment.

At least one other health screener at LAX previously tested positive for the virus. The DHS said on Wednesday that a federal contractor may have been exposed while conducting medical screenings at the airport. — Reuters



HERAT: A health services staff wearing protective gear sprays disinfectant in a market as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 in Herat city yesterday. — AFP

Vincenzo Tosetti, a 34-year old actor and Venice resident, told AFP "many people I know have fled, mainly from Milan. My cousins, my friends, they packed bags and left last night". "This is going to test the Italians' ability to behave responsibly, and I have to say that up until now they've been failing. There's been an exodus".

Fellow Venetian Giancarlo, 49, who did not want to give his last name, said it was "a lovely sunny day, but you can feel the anxiety in the air". The floating city was also virtually empty of tourists, which was "a big blow". "First the city was hit by record floods, now this, Venice is very fragile right now," he said.

'Turn around'

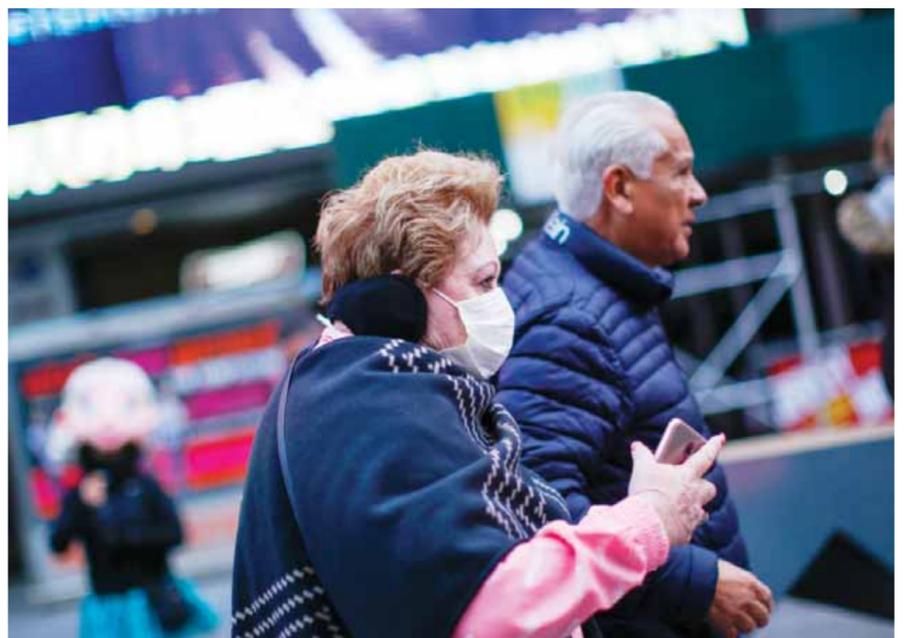
Italy has found itself at the forefront of the global fight against the virus, with more than 5,800 infections

recorded in the past seven weeks.

The virus has now spread to all 22 Italian regions and the first deaths are being recorded in Italy's less well medically equipped south. The head of the Puglia region in southern Italy pleaded with anyone thinking of returning from Lombardy and the other 11 provinces in lockdown — which include the cities of Parma and Rimini — to "stop and turn around".

"Get off (the train) at the first station, don't get on the flights to Bari and Brindisi, turn your cars around, get off the bus at the next stop. Don't bring the epidemic to Puglia," he said on Facebook.

"You are carrying to the lungs of your brothers and sisters, grandparents, uncles, cousins, and parents, the virus that has severely strained the health system in northern Italy," he added. — AFP



NEW YORK: A woman walks by Times Square as she wears a face mask yesterday in New York City. The governor of New York announced a state of emergency as the coronavirus continued to spread in the northeastern state, with 21 new cases. — AFP

Therapy dogs bring respite to Ukraine war veterans

KIEV: Ricky, a larger than life golden retriever, wags his tail as he nestles his head on Vasy's lap. But still the war veteran looks tense. Then the dog throws his front paws onto the shoulders of the 47-year-old suffering from post-war trauma, and a smile forms across his face.

"This is probably the most soothing thing," says Vasy in the corridor of a large medical center for veterans in Kiev. Vasy, who along with other interviewees declined to give his full name due to the stigma around mental health in the country, was wounded fighting Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Now, he is one of the participants in an initiative to help soldiers overcome post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with the help of therapy dogs. In its sixth year, Kiev's conflict with separatists in the breakaway areas of Donetsk and Lugansk regions has claimed more than 13,000 lives, including 4,000 Ukrainian troops. With some 10,000 soldiers injured in the conflict, one group of volunteers hopes dog therapy can be a resource for veterans whose injuries are hidden.

When war broke out in Ukraine in 2014, its military inherited from the Soviet Union was not prepared for an onslaught of veter-

ans suffering from stress. Although some 500,000 Ukrainians have served in the military since, discussing mental health and the psychological impact of the war remains taboo.

"There are positive steps from the state," says Rodion Grigoryan, a psychologist who volunteers with veterans. "But there is a lack of systematic effort," including little funding from the government to address the problem, he said. The Ukrainian authorities do not keep records on the numbers of soldiers battling PTSD, says Oksana Kolyada, minister for veteran's affairs who lost her post this week in a government reshuffle. She told AFP that generally over 10 percent of veterans worldwide experience post-war trauma, with symptoms including flashbacks, depression, aggressive behaviors and self-harm.

Moments of despair

There are no official statistics on suicide rates among veterans, but Oleksandr Tretyakov, then chairman of the parliamentary committee on veterans, said in 2018 that at least 1,000 Ukrainian veterans had taken their own lives. What's more, ex-soldiers report feeling misjudged in society over the perception that the military is an easy life,

free from the economic hardships experienced by many Ukrainians. As a result, half of veterans in a recent EU-sponsored poll said they felt discriminated against and more than a third reported feeling isolated.

Olga Smirnova, the coordinator of the dog therapy program, says more than one thousand soldiers have benefited since it launched with the help of Canadian instructors in 2015.

Its canine participants wear bright harnesses bearing the program's name "Hero's friend", and have been trained not to "react aggressively", says Natalia Chuprun, who has been volunteering with the program with her dog Ricky for four years. Chuprun says that interacting with the animals makes it easier for veterans to engage with "people who care about them", including those who want to help them professionally.

The dogs also intervene in moments of despair, Chuprun says, recounting how when one veteran was in the middle of a panic attack, "Ricky lay down next to him, so he calmed down." Victoria, a psychologist at the Kiev military hospital, says she has noticed a drop in anxiety and depression, and "better sleep" in more than half of her patients who take part in the dog therapy



KIEV: A Ukrainian soldier who returned from the war-torn separatist east and his "therapy dog" attend an open training session in Kiev on February 18, 2020 during a preparation for the Invictus Games the Hague 2020. — AFP

sessions. Oleksandr, a 38-year-old veteran who spent one year at the frontline in eastern Ukraine, says his "life has changed" since Deep Purple, a Labrador, was assigned to him in his flat on the outskirts of Kiev.

He says Deep Purple has brought calm to his life and stability to his sleep patterns. Once he was overwhelmed in the middle of the street by images from the conflict, he said. But the touch of his dog's wet snout on his hand helped ground him. "He acts before I even realise it, Oleksandr says. — AFP

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- Peptic Ulcer Disease (PUD)
- Helicobacter infection (diagnosis and treatment)
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- Acute and chronic Diarrhea

1808088 taibahospital.com
@taibahospital

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Consultant Gastroenterologist
& Endoscopist

Dr. Ahmad Al Fadhi
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Dr. Asmaa Al Kandari
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Dr. Abdelmoneim Alsawal
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& Gastroenterology

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Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
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Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

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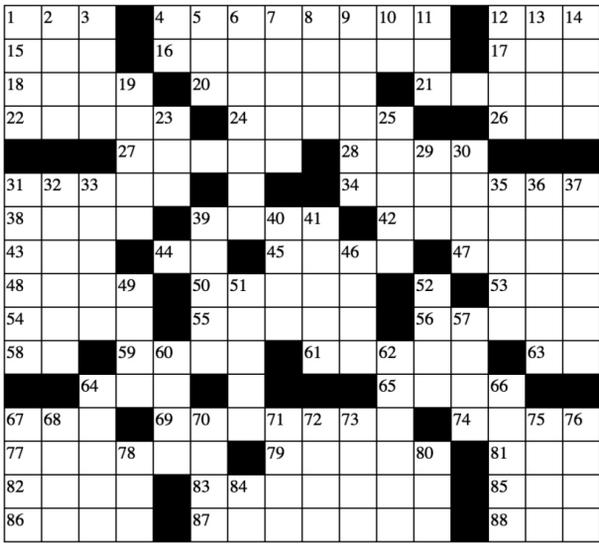
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2453



ACROSS

1. A state-chartered savings bank owned by its depositors and managed by a board of trustees.
4. A submerged bank of sand near a shore or in a river.
12. Kidney disease characterized by enlarged kidneys containing many cysts.
15. Aromatic bulb used as seasoning.
16. Beetles that prey on other insects.
17. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
18. A Kwa language spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast.
20. A grant made by a law court.
21. (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
22. Marked by excessive enthusiasm for and intense devotion to a cause or idea.
24. Alcoholic drink from fermented cider ('cider' and 'cyder' are European (especially British) usage for the fermented beverage).
26. A beverage made by steeping tea leaves in water.
27. A rule or especially body of rules or principles generally established as valid and fundamental in a field or art or philosophy.
28. A standard or model or pattern regarded as typical.
31. Strike with disgust or revulsion.
34. A river that rises in Russia near Smolensk and flowing south through Belarus and Ukraine to empty into the Black Sea.
38. Tall woody perennial grasses with hollow slender stems especially of the genera Arundo and Phragmites.
42. The quantity of an active agent (substance or radiation) taken in or absorbed at any one time.
43. A master's degree in library science.
44. Half the width of an em.
45. The dynasty that ruled much of Manchuria and northeastern China from 947 to 1125.
47. Affected manners intended to impress others.
48. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
50. Fear resulting from the awareness of danger.
53. The seat within a bishop's diocese where his cathedral is located adv.
54. Tropical woody herb with showy yellow flowers and flat pods.
55. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
56. Lower in esteem.
58. Before noon.
59. (Old Testament) In Judeo-Christian mythology.
61. A seat for one person, with a support for the back.
63. A state in north central United States.
65. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
67. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
69. Attack with teargas.
74. A short labored intake of breath with the mouth open.
77. In the Arabian Nights a hero who tells of the fantastic adventures he had in his voyages.
79. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
81. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
82. Burrowing marine mollusk living on sand or mud.
83. The acetylated derivative of salicylic acid.
85. A light touch or stroke.
86. Dense growth of hairs covering the body or parts of it (as on the human head).
87. A team game that resembles basketball.
88. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
2. Small deer of Japan with slightly forked antlers.
3. Divulge information or secrets.
4. A white trivalent metallic element.
5. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
6. United States astronomer (1835-1909).
7. Emptying accomplished by draining.
8. Warm-blooded egg-laying vertebrates characterized by feathers and forelimbs modified as wings.
9. A number that is added to another number (the augend).
10. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
11. Large brownish-green New Zealand parrot.
12. The noise made by a short puff of steam (as from an engine).
13. Hinge joint in the human leg connecting the tibia and fibula with the femur and protected in front by the patella.
14. An informal term for a father.
19. A rechargeable battery with a nickel cathode and a cadmium anode.
23. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
25. A musical form that is often the last movement of a sonata.
29. The former capital and 2nd largest city of Brazil.
30. Flat tableland with steep edges.
32. A bit with a bar mouthpiece that is designed to combine a curb and snaffle.
33. (Judaism) A Jewish festival (traditionally 8 days) celebrating the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.
35. A fractional monetary unit in Bangladesh and India and Nepal and Pakistan.
36. (astronomy) The reappearance of a celestial body after an eclipse.
37. Seed again or anew.
39. Squash bugs.
40. A feeling of strong eagerness (usually in favor of a person or cause).
41. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
46. A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
49. (Scottish) Bluish-black or gray-blue.
51. (folklore) A corpse that rises at night to drink the blood of the living.
52. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
57. (informal) Exceptionally good.
60. A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn.
62. Attack someone physically or emotionally.
64. An island of central Hawaii.
66. (Irish) Chief god of the Tuatha De Danann.
68. A river that rises in western New Mexico and flows westward through southern Arizona to become a tributary of the Colorado River.
70. Any place of complete bliss and delight and peace.
71. Deeply moved.
72. Marked by lack of intellectual depth.
73. A city in northern India.
75. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
76. A metabolic acid found in yeast and liver cells.
78. The rate at which heat is produced by an individual in a resting state.
80. An inflammatory complication of leprosy that results in painful skin lesions on the arms and legs and face.
84. A state in New England.

Yesterday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Take action to create a fanciful dream world today, Aries. Indeed, many of the activities of the day will be touched with an air of otherworldliness. Even though you generally like to keep your feet on the ground, realize that once in a while it's essential to let go and experience other realms of thought in order to gain new perspective. Let your hair down and go wild tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

A strong desire to bring more of the fantasy realm into your own reality spurs your actions today, Taurus. You could discover that there is an intense desire to bring a sense of the obscure to the normal, everyday realm. You want to show people that life really is just one big comedy act. Encourage others to not take life so seriously. Be creative in your approach to helping people lighten up.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

This is an intense day for you during which the disharmony in different realms of your life crops up and spurs you on to action, Gemini. Others may be ridiculously stubborn today, causing tension and frustration wherever you turn. Fun is the key to balancing out the equation. A jovial frame of mind and playful attitude will help remedy any situation that comes your way. Have a good time today.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may find it difficult to take action on any practical matter today, Cancer. If you find this is the case, don't bother pressuring yourself into making it happen. Today you're more concerned with the fanciful side of life. Daydreams can be a wonderful escape for you today. Do something that will take you out of your current frame of mind. Go see a movie or play this evening.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Take action on well-laid plans today, Leo. Stay levelheaded, and seek pleasure by taking things steadily one step at a time. Watch out for a forceful, willful, fanciful mindset that will somehow cause conflict with your plans unless you consciously make an effort to keep the daydreaming to a minimum. The lines of reality may be blurred. Make sure you find the lines of distinction before you proceed.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Action is the key word for you today, Virgo, so put on some comfortable shoes and have a good time. Infuse a bit of non sequitur playfulness in your dealings with others. Find ways to escape reality for a little while. Take the original scenario and add a twist of the bizarre. Opinions will be especially strong today and conflict may arise, but realize that playfulness and lightheartedness will help any situation.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Live your creative fantasies today, Libra, but watch out for the reality police at the border. You may experience a bit of conflict with a stubborn person or in a situation that isn't very well planned. Think things through before taking action or else you may be lost in a world of daydreams without any escape route. Set your mind on the positive aspects of the situation and you'll succeed.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Today is one of those days in which you might be kicking yourself for not telling the truth on an earlier occasion, Scorpio. The words that seemed so harmless then may come back to haunt you now. Today is a very action-oriented day. Conflict could arise because what was thought to be true then now turns out to be false and counter to the action being taken at this time.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Today is a very high-energy day in which you have the physical stamina to accomplish quite a bit, Sagittarius. Take care, however, that you have all the necessary facts before you venture out for your day's activities. It could be that there is a hidden force working, perhaps within your own mind, to blur the lines of reality about a certain issue. Check your sources and proceed with caution.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Plan your moves carefully today, Capricorn, and have patience with the people around you. If you're working with others, be sure they're on the same page with your goals and aims and that they aren't somehow working counter to your purposes. It could be that someone is acting, or reacting, on misinformation that is creating conflict with your thoughts and feelings. Do a reality check before walking out the door.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Your actions may be touched by a very fanciful frame of mind today, Aquarius. Be careful about indulging in recreational substances that take you out of reality for a while. Your tendency will be to escape into the cosmos, but sooner or later you'll have to come down. Deal with your issues now before your thinking becomes even more clouded than before. Take action with a clear and sober mind.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You're being called upon to take action in many areas today, Pisces. People may be tugging at you to be with them and participate in their world of fun and excitement. It could also be that there are many projects that catch your attention today, and you're conflicted about which ones to put your energy into. Friction may arise as you find yourself tearing away from one situation to participate in another.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Old West 2

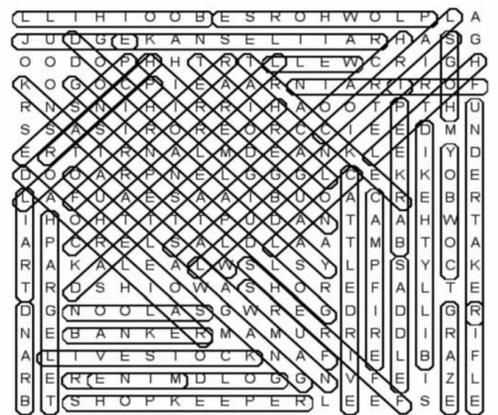
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 30 letters spell a Will Rogers quotation.



- | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| ASSAY OFFICE | DOCTOR | MINE SHAFT | SCOUTS |
| BANK ROBBER | DRESSMAKER | OUTLAWS | SHOOTOUT |
| BARN | FENCE | PELTS | SHOTGUN |
| BLACKSMITH | GENERAL STORE | PIGS | SPURS |
| BOOTS | GOLD NUGGET | PIONEERS | STIRRUP |
| BUCKBOARD | GUNSLINGER | POST OFFICE | TOWN HALL |
| BUNKHOUSE | HATS | RANCH HAND | TRADING POST |
| CALAMITY JANE | HIRED HAND | REVOLVER | TUMBLEWEED |
| CHAPS | HORSES | RUSTLER | WAGON |
| COAL OIL | ICE HOUSE | SADDLER | WANTED POSTER |
| COWPOKE | LIASSO | SALOON GIRL | WHISKEY |
| DAVY CROCKETT | MARSHALL | SCHOOLHOUSE | WILD BILL HICKOK |

Yesterday's Solution

Old West 1



- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| BANKER | FARRIER | LAWMAN | SALOON |
| BARKEEP | FORT | LIVESTOCK | SHERIFF |
| BILLY THE KID | FURS | MINER | SHOPKEEPER |
| BOOT HILL | GOLD MINE | OUTLAW GANG | SITTING BULL |
| BRAND | GOLD PANNING | PISTOL | STAGECOACH |
| CAMPFIRE | GRAZE | PLOW HORSE | TELEGRAPH |
| CATTLE DRIVE | HURED GUN | POSSE | TRACKER |
| CHAPARRAL | HOGS | RAILROAD | TRAIL |
| COAL | HOMESTEAD | RANCH | TRAIN |
| CORRAL | HOTEL | RATTLESNAKE | UNDERTAKER |
| COWBOY | JUDGE | RIFLE | WATER TANK |
| DOC HOLLIDAY | LARIAT | SADDLE | WELL |

The hidden message is: A GOOD HORSE MAKES SHORT MILES

Daily SuDoku

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

hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

very hard

Lifestyle

MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2020



People dressed as Smurfs, a Belgian comic franchise centered on a fictional colony of small, blue, human-like creatures who live in mushroom-shaped houses in the forest, attend a world record gathering of Smurfs on Saturday, in Landerneau, western France. — AFP photos

Bizarre news

Research reveals why dogs' noses are so cold

Researchers believe they have discovered why dogs' noses are cold. A study has revealed that the canines' noses serve as ultra-sensitive heat detectors - and it's not anything related to body temperature regulation. Teams in Sweden and Hungary studied three dogs and found that when the ambient temperature was 30C, the end point of the dog's nose, was 5C cooler. It showed that dogs can detect very faint heat sources - such as small animals - from 5ft away. The researchers said: "All three dogs could detect stimuli of weak thermal radiation in double-blind experiments. "In addition, we employed functional magnetic resonance imaging on 13 awake dogs, comparing the responses to heat stimuli of about the same temperatures as in the behavioral experiment. The warm stimulus elicited increased neural response."

Homes covered in icicles after high winds

Homes in New York have been left covered in icicles after days of gale-force winds. Residents in the town of Hamburg woke up to find their homes in three feet of

ice after temperatures dropped to -11C. Photographs show properties and trees encased in ice which has been described as "frightening" by local residents. The giant icicles were created when the strong winds blew the water from the lake towards the homes, which then froze. Bob Mis, who has lived in the town for eight years, is worried about how the ice would affect the structure of their homes once it starts melting. He said: "It looks fake, it looks unreal. It's dark on the inside of my house. It can be a little eerie, a little frightening. "We're worried about the integrity, of structure failure when it starts to melt, because of the weight on the roof. "It's a beautiful sight, but I don't want to live through it again."

Man buys lottery scratch card at random wins \$500K

A man who bought a lottery scratch card with his leftover lunch money won \$500,000 (£390). The man was grabbing a sandwich at the Speedway gas station in Muskegon, Michigan, when he picked up two Triple 7 instant win tickets. He was made up when he won \$10 (£7.80) on the first ticket, and was shocked when he realized the prize he'd won on the second that he thought he was "dreaming" and he still can't believe his luck. He told Michigan Lottery officials: "I went to get a

sandwich and had a few extra bucks left, so I bought two instant tickets. I won \$10 on the first ticket and thought that was pretty great. "When I scratched the second ticket, I couldn't believe my eyes." He added: "I called my girlfriend and asked her to come see me right away. "She told me to scan the ticket in the store, and that is when I realized I wasn't dreaming. "I jumped about 10 feet in the air on my way out the door. "Since then, about every 10 minutes I've thought to myself: 'Did this really happen to me?'"

Couple have two Leap Day babies

A couple have defied astronomical odds after having a second child born on Leap Day. Lindsay and Dane Demchak had daughter Scout on February 29. It comes four years to the day after Lindsay gave birth to their son, Omri, on February 29, 2016. Scout's due date was on March 4 and the family had been decorating for Omri's birthday when Lindsay began having contractions early in the morning. Dane said: "Deep down, I wanted it to happen and always joked with my wife that she will be born then too, but never really believed it (would) happen again. I think they said the odds were 1 in 2 million." The couple have figured out how to celebrate the two kids' birthdays. They will celebrate with Omri on February 28 and Scout's on March 1 as she is

younger. They will have a big celebration for the pair every Leap Day. Dane added: "Hopefully, it becomes a tradition that carries on with them as they grow old and something that keeps them close forever."

Man crashes car into river 10 minutes after passing driving test

A man crashed his car into a river - 10 minutes after passing his driving test. Mr. Zhang was distracted whilst reading celebratory messages for receiving his driving certificate when he ended up sending the car and himself flying down the narrow Laoping Bridge in the city of Zunyi, in the Chinese province of Guizhou, before he ended up taking a big splash. Fortunately no one was badly injured, with the newly-qualified motorist only dislocating his hand. Zhang told local media: "While I was driving, I tried to grab my phone and read some messages while two people were in front of me on the bridge. I became nervous and turned left suddenly. "Luckily, the car floated for a while. I couldn't open the driver's door so I had to kick open the door on the other side. "Otherwise, I may never have got out as my hand was dislocated in the chaos." It's not known if he will be banned from driving or prosecuted. —Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Gossip

Ciara cancels homecoming show

Ciara is "disappointed" to have postponed a concert in her home town. The 'Level Up' hitmaker - who is pregnant with her third child - had been due to perform at the grand opening of the new Fort Hood USO on 19 March but was "advised" to put the show on hold due to concerns about the coronavirus outbreak. She said in a statement: "With the continued spread of the coronavirus throughout the US, as a pregnant woman, my doctors have advised me to limit travel and large group gatherings. 'I am disappointed I won't be able to return this month to the place where I was born, Ft. Hood Texas, and put on the amazing show we had planned. 'I urge everyone to be diligent in taking steps to stay healthy and safe.' However, the 34-year-old star - who has five-year-old son Future Zahir with former partner Future - and two-year-old daughter Sienna with husband Russell Wilson - is hoping to be involved with the Fort Hood USO concert is rescheduled later this year. She added: "I look forward to being able to bring it to you at a later date in 2020." Meanwhile, it was recently announced Justin Bieber will scale down eight of the dates of his planned 45-stop stadium tour to arenas after the global epidemic affected ticket sales. Some of the venues announced the changes on social media, with Bridgestone Arena in Nashville sharing: "Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Justin Bieber concert at Nissan Stadium is being relocated to Bridgestone Arena. "If you have purchased tickets already, you will receive an email from Ticketmaster with your new tickets. @justinbieber #TheChangesTour." So far, dates in Glendale Arizona, Houston, Dallas,



Nashville, Columbus Ohio, Indianapolis, Washington DC and Detroit have all been affected. TMZ reports that ticket sales had been strong before news of the Coronavirus outbreak broke.

Humes won't return to music because of her family

The 30-year-old star was previously a member of both S Club Juniors and The Saturdays but has now forged a career as a presenter and doesn't think it would work if she returned to her pop career while her husband Marvin Humes - with whom she has daughters Alaia-Mai, six, and two-year-old Valentina - is busy with his own band JLS. Asked about the possibility of a pop return, she told Red magazine: "Absolutely not. I'm grown up enough to never say never, but no, I really can't. I don't know how people do it. I don't think that lifestyle would work for my family at all. We're realistic about that. "We know that if we want one of us to always be there as a constant for the kids, we can't both shine at the same time." When she first started out in the music industry, Rochelle was advised by former Eternal singer Louise Redknapp, because her then-husband Jamie Redknapp played football with her family friend Paul Ince. Rochelle said: "At the time [Paul] was playing football with Jamie Redknapp, who was married to Louise, then a massive pop star and he asked her to get in touch with me - she was brilliant. "She got someone to look over everything and gave me loads of advice." Rochelle and her husband host 'The Hit List' together but were initially reluctant to become a "brand" and turned down joint jobs. She said: "We did a brief stint hosting 'This Morning' together after we had Alaia but nothing since. "After 'This Morning', we were approached by lots of people but didn't want to be that couple who work together as a 'brand' - that's not us at all." The pair came up with the idea of music quiz 'This Hit List' themselves. Rochelle laughed: "The Hit List' is basically a game we play at home every Christmas."



SXSW cancellation not insured

South by Southwest festival organizers didn't have insurance to cover its cancellation. The annual music, film, and tech festival - which was due to take place from March 13-22 - was axed on Friday over concerns about the coronavirus and SXSW co-founder Nick Barbaro has confirmed their policy weren't covered for cancellations relating to a disease outbreak or the city of Austin, Texas, declaring a local state of disaster. Fellow co-founder Roland Swenson added to the Austin Chronicle newspaper: "We have a lot of insurance (terrorism, injury, property destruction, weather). However, bacterial infections, communicable diseases, viruses and pandemics are not covered." Insurers routinely exclude disease outbreaks from cancellation policies offered to promoters and artists, but it is typically available as an extra. However, since the outbreak of the disease around the world, many insurers have stopped offering the buy-back option. Austin mayor Steve Adler and Travis County judge Sarah Eckhardt announced the cancellation of the event in a press conference on Friday. The mayor said: "It's really unfortunate to be canceling South by Southwest. It's tied to who we are in this city, and I look forward to the next iteration of South by Southwest when it comes." Organizers have promised to do their best to reschedule the event or provide

content in a different form. They said in a statement published to Twitter: "We are exploring options to reschedule the event and are working to provide a virtual SXSW online experience as soon as possible for 2020 participants, starting with SXSW EDU. "For our registrants, clients, and participants we will be in touch as soon as possible and will publish an FAQ. "We understand the gravity of the situation for all the creatives who utilize SXSW to accelerate their careers; for the global businesses; and for Austin and the hundreds of small businesses - venues, theatres, vendors, production companies, service industry staff, and other partners that rely so heavily on the increased business that SXSW attracts." Shortly before the cancellation was announced, Ozzy Osbourne revealed he was no longer planning to attend the festival, which was staging the world premiere screening of 'Biography: The Nine Lives of Ozzy Osbourne'. A representative explained: "Following recent cancellations by major corporations, artists, record companies and studios because of the ongoing threat of the coronavirus, Ozzy Osbourne has likewise decided to cancel his upcoming appearance at SXSW." Prior to Ozzy's announcement, the likes of Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Netflix and Apple all withdrew from the event.



Cary Fukunaga's Bond 'honor'

Cary Fukunaga feels "honored" to have directed 'No Time to Die'. The 42-year-old filmmaker took over the helm of the upcoming James Bond movie following the departure of Danny Boyle and he's admitted it was an "incredible privilege" to tackle the spy franchise. He said: "I am honored to be carrying the franchise forward for those who have loved the films since 'Dr. No' and for those who are discovering the series for the first time. "It has been an incredible privilege to have worked with the most skilled actors and creative technicians in the world to bring this next installment to life, adding some new flavors and texture while retaining that swagger and grit that is unmistakably Daniel Craig's 007." And Cary hopes fans enjoy both the new characters and returning favorites featured in the film. He said: "I'm eager for audiences to meet our new characters such as Safin (Rami Malek), Nomi (Lashana Lynch), and Paloma (Ana de Armas) while we also see the return of some of our favorites, Q, M, Money Penny, Tanner Madeleine, Blofeld and Felix, to name a few." The director still remembers seeing a Bond movie for the first time and thinks the character has become a "cultural icon" for film fans everywhere. Writing the foreword for Empire magazine's Bond: The Ultimate Celebration supplement, he reminisced: "You never forget your first Bond movie. I first saw 007 in the guise of Roger Moore in 'A View to a Kill'. "I was eight years old and already captivated by the mesmerizing mixture of glamour, deftly judged humor and, of course, action. "The clincher was Duran Duran's enduring credits song, "James Bond is a hero that transcends childhood. 'GoldenEye' and its accompanying Nintendo game kept me and my friends up all night as adolescents, then as an adult, I watched and enjoyed all four Daniel Craig films in the cinema, as he has taken the character to previously unexplored emotional heights. "Bond is a cultural icon, a figure that impacts every successive generation of film fans who are introduced to him."



Kelly talked to Grande and Lovato about collaborating

Tori Kelly says Ariana Grande and Demi Lovato joked with her about doing a collaboration - but she really wants to make it happen. The trio recently went viral after doing karaoke together at a party at The Saddle Ranch Chop House on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood last month, to celebrate their manager Scooter Braun's South African wife, Yael, becoming a US citizen. And the 'Should've Been Us' singer has revealed that she'd jump at the chance to get in the studio with them both. Speaking exclusively to BANG Showbiz, Tori said: "I love both of those girls, we kind of joke about it a little bit. "But I am down to do it - that would be awesome, I'd love it." At the bash, Demi and Tori sang the National Anthem, 'Star Spangled-Banner', in what marked the first time the former has publicly performed the song since she wowed the crowds with her rendition before the Super Bowl earlier in February. Ariana filmed the pair, and later nailed Miley Cyrus' hit 'Party in the USA', which the 'Slide Away' hitmaker approved of. Miley simply posted on a video of the performance with three red heart emojis. Justin Bieber was also at his manager's party, and although there are no videos of him singing, he did have a go on one of the rodeo bull rides. Meanwhile, Tori has said she'd also love to get back into the studio with Ed Sheeran - who co-wrote and featured on her 2015 track 'I Was Made For Loving You' - as she praised him for being "the most real guy in the music industry". She said: "Yeah, I would love to work to him again. "He is one of the coolest and most real people that I've met in the music industry. "Whenever I am with him, I forget that he's about to walk out on stage and perform in front of millions of people. "He makes you forget. "It's really refreshing to see the fame and everything that comes with it hasn't changed him. "I would be down to work with him again." Tori brings the 'Inspired By True Events Tour' to the UK this month.

Barbara Broccoli 'not interested' in female Bond

Barbara Broccoli is "not interested" in a female James Bond. The 59-year-old producer insisted the person who will be cast as the suave spy when Daniel Craig leaves the role "can be of any colour" but has ruled out speculation the iconic part could be played by a woman in the future. She said: "Bond can be of any colour, but he is male. I'm not interested in taking a male character and having a woman play it." Daniel will walk away from the role after 14 years following his turn in 'No Time to Die' and he's "excited" to see who takes over. Asked if he'll have any say in his successor, he told the Sunday Times magazine: "No. But I'll be excited when it happens, as I'm a 'Bond' fan. Was before. Still am." Meanwhile, Lashana Lynch - who portrays MI6 agent Nomi in the new film - hopes Bond can lead the way and "reshape the expectations of casting" when it comes to the prestigious role. Asked about speculation Nomi is the new 007 - Bond's code name - she said: "I'm really glad that conversation's happening. "Because black women have very rarely in cinema been given an opportunity to be in power, where they're able to be the example. Here, now, is somebody who can be that, and it feels exciting that a franchise is leading the way. "It's not an indie film that tried to create this forward-moving idea that hopefully catches on. It's a massive studio, which is now going to be an example for other studios and reshape the expectations of casting. Which is where we should be fricking right now. It's exhausting."



My Spy release pushed back

The release of 'My Spy' has been pushed back by a month. The Dave Bautista-starring comedy was due to be released in the US on 13 March but it will now launch on 17 April, taking the slot vacated by 'Trolls World Tour', which has moved to the week before. 'Trolls World Tour' changed its release date after upcoming James Bond movie 'No Time to Die' was pushed back until November amid concerns the coronavirus outbreak would affect box office takings. 'My Spy' - which also stars Chloe Coleman, Kristen Schaal and Ken Jeong and is directed by Peter Segal - has opened well in Australia and New Zealand and STXfilms are said to hope moving the release date will give more time to alert people to the film without having to spend much more on promotions. The movie was originally due to be released in August 2019 before being pushed back. The reshuffling of release schedules was triggered earlier this week when Bond bosses announced 'No Time to Die' - Daniel Craig's final outing as the suave spy - had been pushed back by seven months. A statement posted on Twitter read: "MGM, Universal and Bond producers, Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli, announced today that after careful consideration and thorough evaluation of the global theatrical marketplace, the release of NO TIME TO DIE will be postponed until November 2020. "The film will be released in the U.K. on November 12, 2020 with worldwide release dates to follow, including the US launch on November 25, 2020. (sic) The decision comes following the coronavirus outbreak around the world. When the virus first began to spread, publicity tours for the film - which had been due to have its world premiere in London on 31 March - were scrapped in China, South Korea and Japan, and the Hong Kong release was delayed until 30 April. — BangShowbiz



Lifestyle | Music and Movies

Ahead of show with Pop, Birkin talks Serge, #MeToo

Nearly three decades after Serge Gainsbourg's death, his former romantic and artistic partner Jane Birkin is still bringing his storied music catalogue to life. On Friday, the 73-year-old performer will bring her signature breathy vocals to New York, where she will stage her traveling symphonic tribute to Gainsbourg's work set to orchestral arrangements. This version of the show—born in 2016 as a one-off performance in Montreal, but which has since continued to tour—includes appearances by Charlotte Gainsbourg, Birkin's daughter with the late French superstar, and Iggy Pop.

"He would have been so delighted to be here in New York, and for people to be listening to his songs," Birkin told AFP prior to the performance, one of the cult Hermes handbags named after her perched on a coffee table in her Manhattan hotel room. "He didn't get to sing in New York," the British-born actress, model and singer said of Gainsbourg, who died in 1991 at age 62 after a heart attack. "It's fun to take him everywhere." "I don't think I could do better for Serge, I really don't. Or for me, for that matter."

'Eternal adolescent'

The celebrity pair—a cool-kid it couple on the scale of Sonny and Cher—met on the set of the 1969 film "Slogan" and were a hot-ticket item until their split in 1980. After she left him, Birkin said Gainsbourg became "the friend he'd never been to me." "It was the very best of relationships: he knew he could always count on me—it was a privilege—and I know I could always count on him." Birkin owes her enduring fascination with Gainsbourg, who was 18 years her senior, to his singular talent, child-like spirit and humor.

"If you're with a very brilliant man—a great composer and a writer and everything—I think there are quite a lot



Jane Birkin poses for a portrait in New York City. — AFP

of people like that, men or women, that can be fastidious and perhaps even rather boring." "Whereas Serge is a hoot," she said, crediting Gainsbourg's look, featuring stubble and naked ankles, as proto-hipster. "All the girls came back with him because he was fun to be with. And that perhaps was the most touching of his secrets—that and being an eternal adolescent."

'Outrageous'

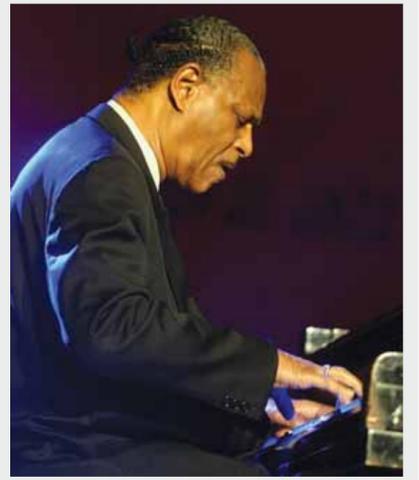
Despite the rosy memories, France's pop poet had a reputation as something of a cad—and no shortage of questionable behavior to his name. Gainsbourg performed a duet with Charlotte, then 12, entitled "Lemon Incest," told Whitney Houston in crass terms on prime-time television he wanted to sleep with her, and saw the Vatican condemn his racy song "Je t'aime ... moi non plus"—which means, awkwardly, "I love you ... neither do I." The artist penned that track, which includes explicit means of erotic pleasure, for his former lover Brigitte Bardot, but recorded it with Birkin in 1969.

"You could hardly do better than being banned by the Pope and the BBC. 'Lemon Incest' was a bit dodgy too," she recalls. "People tuned in just to see what would happen," Birkin said. "When taxi drivers say with a tear in their eye, 'Oh, we do miss him because no one's like him today'—it's true." "Everything is so politically correct today—I know he'd be just as outrageous because it was half the fun."

Shades of #MeToo

Yet Birkin praised the #MeToo movement that has condemned misconduct by powerful men: "I'm glad that it's happened for girls and they can stick out against their boss that's been plaguing them." But asked about the recent uproar over Roman Polanski's best director win at the Cesars film awards, Birkin said since he was allowed to be among award hopefuls, it's not wrong for him to have won. Wins by Polanski—wanted in the United States for the statutory rape of a child in 1977 — at the recent ceremony prompted high-profile walkouts and protest.

"Given that he was up there, then each to his own. People have a vote—if they don't want to vote then don't vote," Birkin said. "I don't like lynching." The performer again praised the changes afoot, however, saying that "I have to feel the girls these days do feel that they can say no." "And other people will stick with them. And I think that the boys are being educated really well," she said. "One knows it will never be the same again. And that's a good thing." — AFP



In this file photo US pianist McCoy Tyner performs during Skopje's Jazz Festival held in the Macedonian capital of Skopje, late 23 October 2004. — AFP

Revered jazz pianist McCoy Tyner dead at 81

The influential jazz pianist McCoy Tyner, known for his work with the John Coltrane quartet, has died, his family announced Friday. He was 81 years old. One of the most revered jazz pianists in history in an elite class with the likes of Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans and Chick Corea, Tyner's work is considered to have shaped the trajectory of modern jazz piano and made him a top bandleader for decades. "McCoy was an inspired musician who devoted his life to his art, his family and his spirituality," the family of the musician wrote on Instagram, without precisng the cause of death.

"McCoy Tyner's music and legacy will continue to inspire fans and future talent for generations to come." The artist born Alfred McCoy Tyner in 1938 in Philadelphia began taking piano lessons at age 13. He kicked off his career in his early 20s with the Jazztet, led by Benny Golson and Art Farmer. By 1960 the inventive composer and pianist joined saxophonist John Coltrane's famed quartet, playing on now iconic records including "A Love Supreme" and "My Favorite Things."

Tyner was the last living member of the classic quartet, who along with Coltrane included Jim Garrison on bass and Elvin Jones on drums. "We've lost a titan with the passing of jazz legend #McCoyTyner," tweeted the iconic Blue Note Records label, for which he produced a number of albums in the late 1960s. "Words fail when trying to express how important McCoy was & always will be to our music. The amount of beauty he gave the world is simply staggering. RIP to one of the greatest of all-time," the label said.

Tyner went on to have a flourishing solo career and taught in his later years. Asked in 2008 his secret to longevity, Tyner told NPR "I like carrot juice." "Carrot juice is real good for you. Carrot and celery. Don't forget celery." "To me living and music are all the same thing," he was quoted on his Facebook page as saying. "I play what I live." "Therefore, just as I can't predict what kinds of experiences I'm going to have, I can't predict the directions in which my music will go. I just want to write and play my instrument as I feel." — AFP

Major US electronic dance fest postponed over coronavirus

Miami's annual electronic dance music festival Ultra, which brings more than 160,000 revelers to the beachfront city, has been canceled over the coronavirus crisis. "We completely understand how extremely frustrating this is because so many of you are looking forward to coming to Ultra, having already made travel arrangements," the festival said in a statement. "This is, however, an unprecedented issue which is not being taken lightly, and we must continue to defer to the authorities for guidance."

The March 20 to 22 event was to feature sets from major DJs including Gesaffelstein and Sofi Tukker. Ultra has also canceled its edition of the festival in Abu Dhabi, which was scheduled for March 5-6. There have been more than 100,000 confirmed coronavirus infections across 92 territories, according to AFP's latest toll, and almost 3,500 deaths. Florida has recorded nine cases.

The pressure to cancel events poses a challenge for Miami, which relies on tourism especially in March and April, when thousands of young people fly south for spring break. The epidemic has seen world markets tumble but few major US music events have been canceled. In late January the Boston Symphony Orchestra announced it would cancel a four-city Asia tour from February 6-16.

New York's Metropolitan Opera issued a 14-day quarantine for performers, artists and other employees returning from China, Iran, South Korea, Japan, Italy and Hong Kong, but all programming was to go on as planned.

Coachella, set to kick off the weekend of April 10 in the California desert, did not respond to a request for confir-



File photo shows Miami's annual electronic dance music festival Ultra.

mation on whether the festival will go ahead. South by Southwest, the music, tech and film festival based in Austin, Texas, is on for March 13-22, although Netflix, Apple, Amazon, Facebook and Twitter have reportedly pulled out. Warner Music Group also said they would

ditch the event, according to Rolling Stone, while Universal Music and Sony Music are reportedly urging employees to stay home. Organizers also postponed the Korea Times Music Festival, scheduled for April 25 at Los Angeles' Hollywood Bowl. — AFP

Lights, camera... no action? Hollywood rocked by coronavirus

The new James Bond movie delayed. Studios scrapping film festivals. Blockbuster productions shut down. Hollywood is being rocked by the unprecedented challenge of the new coronavirus, insiders told AFP this week. "I have never seen anything where this many films are going to be affected all at once," said Jeff Bock, senior analyst at Exhibitor Relations. "There's isolated incidents or tragedies that happen, that might affect a certain film. But this really does infect all the industry from top to bottom."

Industry estimates put the financial loss from Asian theaters already shuttered this year around \$2 billion. Major Hollywood titles including "Mulan"—Disney's China-set live-action blockbuster—have been placed on hold in China. The last-minute global delay of 007 adventure "No Time To Die," including its US and European releases, highlights the borderless impact of the virus.

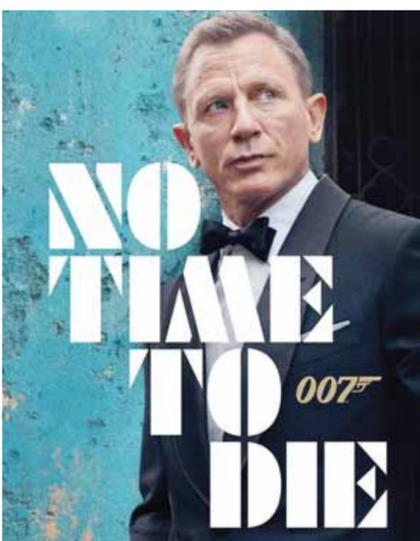
For now, US theater attendances are holding steady despite fears of spreading infection, and "Mulan" remains penned in for launch this month in North America. But new coronavirus outbreaks in California and New York, and multiple deaths in Washington state, could impact receipts. "We'll see a little bit of downturn this week-by-the time 'Mulan' comes out, if this breaks as big as it did in China, it's going to change the entire landscape," said Bock. Meanwhile, massive buyers including Netflix, Amazon and Apple have pulled out of the SXSW festival in Texas—an important marketplace for movies.

The impact will not be restricted to major studios. Stephen Nemeth, who produced "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" (1998) starring Johnny Depp, has another Hunter S. Thompson-themed film set to make its world premiere at the Austin festival. "We are forging ahead," he told AFP. "We have a 1,100 seat theater... that's a lot of seats to fill if there's only 25 percent capacity at the festival."

'Caution'

More than 50,000 people have signed an online petition calling for SXSW to be canceled and was canceled. "I'm not anticipating a buyer because I think the buyers will be few and far between," said Nemeth, who thinks his movie "Freak Power" is now more likely to sell via private screenings back in Hollywood. Other movie gatherings including CinemaCon in Las Vegas, and the Cannes film festival, are under scrutiny. Production of movies has also been hit.

A scheduled three-week shoot for the new Tom



James Bond movie poster

Cruise-starring "Mission Impossible" in Italy—one of the worst-affected countries—was stopped last month. Paramount moved the filming out of "an abundance of caution for the safety and well-being of our cast and crew." Netflix is looking for alternative locations to shoot a part of new Dwayne Johnson movie "Red Notice" that had been due to film in Italy. "What it's doing is testing location managers on being super nimble problem solvers," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior Comscore analyst, pointing out that production workers "are a tenacious and inventive bunch."

'Cripple'

But the logistics of filming anywhere—especially productions that require hundreds of actors and extras—make it appear a risky proposition right now, said Nemeth. "I do not begrudge actors for not wanting to continue with a movie," he said. "Every film is its own little village." "Those are people all dining together, waiting in the same line at the same lunch truck. "You have many, many, many people in a confined area." Any blockage in the relentless pipeline of movie production could leave a dearth of movies further ahead. "The longer that goes on, the fewer films that we get in the pipeline for 2021, 2022," said Bock. "This has the potential to really cripple the theatrical industry the longer it goes on." — AFP

Metal fans warned of possible virus exposure in NZ moshpit

Metal fans who attended a packed concert in New Zealand were warned Friday they may have been exposed to coronavirus. A man who watched the American band Tool from the standing area in Christchurch on February 28, was confirmed as the nation's fourth case of the virus, local health officials said. "We encourage all people who were in the general admission standing area to be aware of the symptoms of COVID-19," New Zealand Ministry of Health director-general Dr Ashley Bloomfield said. He stressed all those in the standing zone—often referred to as a moshpit—only needed to monitor for

symptoms at this stage and the risk of transmission was very low for all others outside the area.

Over 12,000 fans of the progressive metal group packed Spark Arena to hear the Los Angeles band's latest album "Fear Inoculum". The man in his 30s had recently returned from the virus hotspot of Northern Italy with his partner, who has also tested positive for the virus. The man has been isolated since Wednesday. Meanwhile, eight passengers from a cruise ship now quarantined off the coast of California have also returned to New Zealand, and three currently under testing for the virus. — AFP



American band Tool

Gruffudd doesn't want lead role

Ioan Gruffudd isn't looking for a "lead role". The 46-year-old actor is currently working in Brisbane, Australia, on the new series of "Harrow" but for his next job, he wants to find something that means he's at home with wife Alice Evans and their children Ella, 10, and Elsie, six, in Los Angeles. He said: "It's funny how we change. As actors, my wife and I had this beautiful nomadic lifestyle before kids came along, and now it's almost a crushing feeling, getting on a plane to go anywhere and leaving a family behind. Whereas in the past,

it was always an exciting endeavor.

"I'm going to have to recalibrate everything so I can go home on the weekends or not take a lead role, so I can have time off. It's all these new considerations." The "Liar" star—who married Alice in 2007—thinks the key to their long-lasting relationship is always being "present", no matter where in the world he is. He told Red magazine: "You just have to be there and be present at all times. If you're away from home, then use phone or text or FaceTime." "Just try to be present, even in those captured moments and make those moments count." Ioan thinks being married to an actress is beneficial for their relationship because they understand one another. He said: "We understand the process of film-making. If you can't get hold of your partner because they're physically on set, or on a boat, or in a forest with no signal, or out to dinner with the cast, there's an understanding of how difficult it can be to be at someone's beck and call." — Bang Showbiz



Exhibition catalogs are displayed for the exhibition "Raffaello", dedicated to Renaissance master Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, known as Raphael, at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome. — AFP photos



Visitor looks at a tapestry by Renaissance master Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino.



A visitor looks at the painting "Self Portrait".



Visitors look at the painting "Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de Medici and Luigi de Rossi".



Visitors look at the painting "The Ecstasy of St Cecilia".



Visitors look at the paintings (from left) "Young Man with an Apple", "Young Woman with Unicorn" and "Portrait of a Man" by Renaissance master Raphael.

Blockbuster Rome show marks 500 years since Raphael's death

Italy is marking 500 years since the death of Renaissance master Raphael with a blockbuster exhibition whose preparations were marred by a row over a treasured portrait some feared was too fragile to move. The show at Rome's imposing Scuderie del Quirinale presidential palace includes 200 works by the prolific painter, designer and architect, a child prodigy who died aged only 37 in 1520.

Experts are deeply divided over a portrait of Pope Leo X with two cardinals belonging to the Uffizi Gallery of Florence, the Renaissance capital which lent a quarter of the works went on display in Rome from last Thursday through June 2. Painted in burgundy reds and blood orange between 1518 and 1519, the stunning work caused a sensation at the time for its revolutionary group portraiture concept. The Uffizi's scientific committee decided that the 154 by 119 centimeter (61 by 47 inch) painting was too fragile to make the trip to Rome.

All four members of the committee resigned last week over a decision by the gallery's German director Eike Schmidt to override their ruling and add the painting to the Rome show. In a letter published in the daily La Repubblica, the committee noted that the portrait was on a list of 24 "immovable" works the Uffizi had drawn up in December. "Leo X's painting was very important when he was in Rome," Schmidt told reporters on Wednesday.

"He was the Pope of peace. (This is) an identity work that had to be in the city of the popes-in Rome." The quarrel followed three years of grueling work aimed at putting together a retrospective befitting a master who was part of a trinity of Renaissance greats along with Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. The show will feature works from a hit parade of world-class museums: the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery in London, the Prado in Madrid and Washington's National Gallery. Some of its most famous paintings include the Madonna of the Rose, painted in Raphael's trademark pastel colours: the striking green and red Portrait of Pope Julius II; and the Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione, a pyramidal composition in elegant earth tones.

Red rose

Raphael was sent off with high honors at a grand funeral at the Vatican, and his remains rest in the Rome Pantheon. A red rose graces his grave year-round. In addition to the Rome exhibit, the anniversary is also being marked with shows in Urbino, the walled city in central Italy where the master was born, and Milan. His famous tapestries woven in Bruges and depicting events from the lives of saints Peter and Paul have been hung in the Sistine Chapel, their intended home from the start.

Despite his premature death, Raphael produced a vast amount of seminal work, much of it at the Vatican, whose museums include several rooms filled with his frescoes. They are mesmerizing but unfinished, just hinting at his true genius.

Completed by Raphael's students after his death and depicting the great philosophers in Athens—including a cheeky cameo of himself—they remain some of the Vatican's most popular rooms. Raphael left behind a "heritage of invaluable beauty", Pope Francis said in January. "As the artist's genius knows how to harmoniously compose the materials, colors and sounds to be a part of a single work of art, so diplomacy calls on the state to build a world of justice and peace, which is the most beautiful



A visitor looks at the painting "La Velata".

picture we can admire," the Argentine-born pontiff said. The retrospective, proclaimed by the Uffizi director as the largest and most important ever dedicated to Raphael, is already breaking records. Devotees from around the world have pre-ordered 70,000 tickets, despite Italy bearing the brunt of the new coronavirus scare in Europe. It is fitting, "at a time like this, because Raphael died of an infection," said Schmidt, citing the most widely-held theory about the painter's sudden end. A more romantic version says that he died of overwork and the stress of a tumultuous love affair. The Italian government is now mulling a series of new crowd control measures to stem the spread of the COVID-19 disease, which has killed 107 people in Italy in two weeks. — AFP



A visitor looks at the painting "Self-Portrait with a Friend".

'katte samu': A rural traditional self-defense martial art



Women practice 'katte samu', a rural traditional self-defense martial art during a workshop organized by the, 'The Department of Language, Art and Culture of Telangana state' for the International Women's Day, in Hyderabad. — AFP photos

Classifieds

Monday, March 9, 2020

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

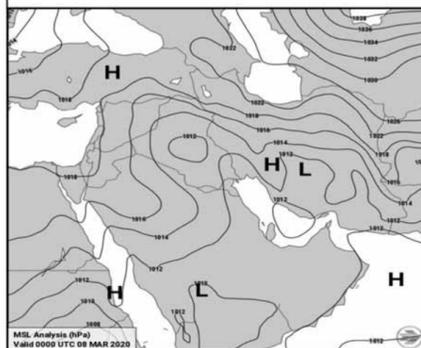
BY DAY: Warm with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h

WEATHER WARNING No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	27 °C	19 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	27 °C	15 °C
ABDALY	25 °C	15 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	27 °C	16 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	26 °C	17 °C
SALMIYAH	24 °C	19 °C
AHMADI	25 °C	19 °C
NUWASIB	28 °C	16 °C
WAFRA	28 °C	16 °C
SALMY	25 °C	14 °C

SFC. CHART 08/03/2020 0000 UTC



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	03/09	Relatively hot	31 °C	15 °C	NW	08 - 30 km/h
Tuesday	03/10	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy	30 °C	16 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 30 km/h
Wednesday	03/11	Relatively hot and some scattered clouds will appear	31 °C	16 °C	VRB-SW	06 - 26 km/h
Thursday	03/12	Relatively hot and some scattered clouds will appear	31 °C	16 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:47
Sunrise	06:05
Zuhr	11:59
Asr	15:21
Sunset	17:52
Isha	19:09

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	28 °C
MIN. Temp.	17 °C
MAX. RH	79 %
MIN. RH	16 %
MAX. Wind	SW 43 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **SAIFUDDIN** with Indian Passport No. Z2814221 issued at Kuwait Dt: 17.04.2014. Hereby declare that my name change to Given name: SAIFUDDIN Surname: AMJAWALA. Permanent address 42, Laheri Building, 3rd Floor, No. 30, S.V.P. Rd Null Bazar, Mumbai-400003, India. (C 5703)

I, **KHERUNNISAH** with Indian Passport No. Z2814395 issued at Kuwait Dt: 28.04.2014. Hereby declare that my name change to Given name: KHERUNNISAH SAIFUDDIN Surname: AMJAWALA. Permanent address 42, Laheri Building, 3rd Floor, No. 30, S.V.P. Rd Null Bazar, Mumbai-400003, India. (C 5703) 9-3-2020

I **Prashanth** Karivellur holder of Indian Passport No. R2310839 issued at Kuwait on 16.10.2016, permanent address of Flat No 103 Providence Abode 1 Bejai new Road Mangalore Karnataka and presently residing in Kuwait do hereby change my name as follows: Given Name: Prashanth and Surname: Karivellur. Objections if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India Diplomatic Enclave Safat Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015 (C 5702)

I **Prashanth** Karivellur, father of Aditya Prashanth holder of Indian Passport No. R2310839 issued at Kuwait on 05.03.2017, permanent address of Flat No. 103 Providence Abode 1 Bejai new Road Mangalore Karnataka and presently residing in Kuwait do hereby change my son's name as follows: Given Name: Aditya and Surname: Prashanth. Objections if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015 (C 5702)

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
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Monday 9/3/2020				Departure Flights on Monday 9/3/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
PIA	239	Sialkot	00:05	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	PIA	240	Sialkot	01:05
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
KAC	102	London	00:55	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
RJA	642	Amman	01:40	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	DHX	173	Bahrain	06:40
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	RJA	643	Amman	06:55
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
JZR	654	OSS	05:25	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
JZR	502	Lahore	05:35	KAC	1101	Cairo	08:50
BAW	157	London	07:05	BAW	156	London	09:10
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	101	London	09:45
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	117	New York	10:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
SGL	9001	AQJ	10:00	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
KAC	672	Dubai	14:25	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
				SGL	4134	IQA	12:00
				QTR	1083	Doha	23:25

Quarter of Italians on lockdown as coronavirus sweeps globe

ROME: A quarter of Italy's population was in lockdown yesterday as the government announced a spike in deaths and took drastic steps to stop the spread of the deadly coronavirus sweeping the globe, while Iran recorded another 49 deaths and the national airline suspended flights to Europe. Italy's COVID-19 death count rose 133 inside 24 hours to 366, more than any other country outside China.

The outbreak has now killed some 3,700 people and infected more than 105,000 in more than 100 countries and territories, with France notably announcing it has topped 1,000 cases with 19 deaths. Italy's measures, in place until April 3, bar people from entering or leaving vast areas of the north, according to a decree published online. Yesterday saw Rome forced to close its blockbuster exhibition marking 500 years since the death of Renaissance master Raphael at its Scuderie del Quirinale presidential palace.

Neighbors Austria and Switzerland said they were monitoring the situation closely with both announcing the suspension of some transport links - including direct flights from Vienna to Milan and Bologna from Monday, though Italy's borders with Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia remain open. Italy's quarantine zones are home to more than 15 million people and include the regions around Venice and financial capital Milan. Cinemas, theatres and museums will close nationwide.

'Bold, courageous'

The World Health Organization praised Italy for its "bold, courageous steps", according to a tweet by its boss Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. But Czech populist Prime Minister Andrej Babis urged Italy to ban its citizens from travelling abroad. The lockdown does allow for the return home of those who were in the affected areas but live elsewhere, including tourists. Pope Francis expressed solidarity with the virus victims in his first livestreamed prayer and message from the Vatican. "I join my brother bishops in encouraging the faithful to live this difficult moment with the strength of faith, the certainty of hope and the fervour of charity," he said.

Somalia: The Pentagon's new 'endless war'?

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon has been issuing nearly daily announcements of new strikes against Al-Shabab militants in Somalia, seemingly without affecting the Al-Qaeda affiliate's ability to destabilize the country, in what is looking like a new "endless war" for the United States. The Trump administration's plans to reduce its military presence in Africa while re-centering its efforts toward two key strategic competitors - China and Russia - are coming at the expense of French-led operations against

Iran reported 49 new deaths earlier yesterday, its highest toll for a single 24-hour period, taking the number of fatalities there to 194, one of the highest tolls outside of China. The virus has spread to all of Iran's 31 provinces with 6,566 confirmed cases. Iran Air announced the suspension of all its flights to Europe until further notice, possibly in retaliation against Sweden's decision to block Iran flights from landing for fear of importing the disease.

Egypt reported a first confirmed death - also Africa's first - with the health ministry saying a German citizen had died in a tourist resort. In the US, the contagion has spread to 30 states, killing at least 19 people, with New York announcing a state of emergency. Passengers on the US cruise ship Grand Princess, on which 21 of the 3,533 on board tested positive for the disease, will remain confined to their cabins in waters off San Francisco until today, when the vessel has been allowed to dock in Oakland. Another cruise ship, the Costa Fortuna, was turned away by Malaysia and Thailand due to virus fears, an official said yesterday. The boat is carrying around 2,000 people, including dozens of Italians.

'Somber moment'

The World Health Organization described worldwide virus cases passing the 100,000-mark as a "somber moment" while a report from the UN Conference on Trade, Investment and Development (UNCTAD) warned that the virus spread could hit foreign direct investments worldwide by as much as 15 percent as international business reels. Also Sunday, Bulgaria reported its first case, following Colombia, Costa Rica, Malta and the Maldives earlier in the weekend.

In Russia, where 17 cases have been reported to date, authorities warned Moscow residents that anyone not respecting quarantine measures risked five years jail if such a violation resulted in a death, as well as an 80,000 ruble (\$1,100) fine. The Moscow city hall on Friday had issued a decree requiring all citizens and non-citizens alike arriving there from China, South Korea, Iran, Italy, France, Germany and Spain to auto-isolate at home for 14 days.

In South Korea, infections have passed

7,000 - the highest in the world outside China. But in China itself, the number of new cases reported yesterday was the lowest in weeks, with nearly all 44 of them in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province and epicenter of the outbreak. The government has hinted it may soon lift the quarantine imposed on Hubei, where some 56 million people have been effectively housebound since late January.

The only infections in China beyond Hubei were imported from abroad, including arrivals from Italy and Spain in Beijing. At least 10 people died yesterday, however, in the collapse of a hotel used as a coronavirus quarantine facility in Quanzhou, in eastern China. The WHO said the efforts of



ROME: A man wearing a protective mask passes by the Colosseum on Saturday amid fears of the COVID-19 epidemic. — AFP

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China and other countries were "demonstrating that the spread of the virus can be slowed". Saudi Arabia said yesterday it was cordoning off eastern Qatif region, a stronghold of the kingdom's Shiite minority. Stock markets in the energy-dependent Gulf region plunged to multi-year lows Sunday after OPEC's failure to agree oil output cuts with its allies, especially Russia.

Sport struck

Top sports events have increasingly been affected and will be still more so after Germany's health minister called for events of more than 1,000 people to be cancelled with more than 850 virus cases announced in Europe's biggest economy. Italy in mid-

week had ordered Serie A football matches to be played behind closed doors but the country's sports minister called for the league to be immediately suspended. Greece yesterday decreed sports events will be held without fans for today.

The Asian Champions League was put on temporary hold yesterday, while Italy's sports minister called for an immediate suspension of the Serie A season. Organizers of Bahrain's Formula 1 Grand Prix scheduled for March 22 said the race would go ahead without spectators. The Shanghai Grand Prix, slated for April 19, has already been postponed although the season-opening race in Australia on March 15 is set to go ahead as planned. — AFP

the ministries of education and defense to repatriate students and military personnel from Egypt.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday defended the decision to call off this week's Assembly session and holding the next meeting on March 24, saying this is for the benefit of all and a precautionary measure against the coronavirus. Ghanem said the decision was taken after consultation with a number of MPs and with members of the Assembly bureau, adding that it was necessary to cancel the session because it requires more than 200 people to hold the session.

The cancellation was criticized by opposition MPs Mohammad Al-Mutair and Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, who said this was not necessary. Mutair claimed the decision was taken to protect ministers and not others, while Muwaizri said if there was any risk from the Assembly meeting, then all government offices should be shut temporarily to protect employees.

Meanwhile, shares in energy-dependent Kuwait and the Gulf plunged to multi-year lows yesterday after OPEC's failure to agree on a coronavirus action plan prompted fears of an all-out oil price war. Bourse Kuwait stopped trading after the Premier Index slumped 10 percent, while the All-Shares index dived 8.3 percent.

Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Mohammad Al-Hashel yesterday announced setting up a KD 10 million (\$33 million) fund - to be financed by Kuwaiti banks - to back the government's efforts in fighting the novel coronavirus. Hashel said in a statement that establishing the special fund came in line with social and national responsibilities to cope with the emergency health situation, and also as a backup to government departments that have been fighting COVID-19.

It is also in line with the keenness of the banking sector in Kuwait to shoulder the national responsibility in this respect, boosting role of the private sector regarding such a social responsibility and as follow-up on previous efforts masterminded by CBK to take all necessary precautions against the virus, he added. The fund has been placed at disposal of the Cabinet for disbursement for urgent and necessary needs, as warranted by multiple government precautions in facing the virus.

OPEC and its allies failed to clinch a deal on production cuts that would have offered support to energy markets, sending prices tumbling to four-year lows on Friday. The OPEC+ meeting was expected to agree to deeper cuts of 1.5 million barrels per day to counter the effects of the novel coronavirus, but Moscow refused to tighten supply. Fears of a price war were stoked as

Saudi Arabia - the world's top exporter - quickly responded by making significant cuts to its oil price.

All the seven bourses in the Gulf were in the red amid a panic sell-off over fears that energy prices, the mainstay of public revenues in the region, could collapse. The Saudi stock market, the largest in the region, dived by 8.3 percent at close yesterday, the first day of the trading week. It was the lowest closing since Nov 2017. Shares in oil giant Saudi Aramco dropped below their IPO price of 32 riyals (\$8.5) for the first time, losing some 9.1 percent to 30.00 riyals.

The world's biggest company launched on the bourse to much fanfare in December in a record-breaking initial public offering, but since then its market value has slipped from the IPO value of \$1.71 trillion to \$1.6 trillion. The Dubai Financial Market shed 7.9 percent to its worst closing in six years, while its sister market in Abu Dhabi fell 5.4 percent and Qatar Stock Exchange dropped 2.9 percent, the lowest since mid-2018. Dubai's Market leader Emaar Properties, the largest real estate company in the Middle East, fell 9.7 percent to a price of 2.97 dirhams (81 cents), its lowest in eight years. The tiny markets of Bahrain and Oman dropped by 3.4 percent and 2.8 percent, respectively.

A German tourist died yesterday of the novel coronavirus in a Sinai resort of eastern Egypt, the health ministry announced, the first death from the epidemic recorded in Africa. "The 60-year-old German citizen showed symptoms of a fever (and) checked into Hurgada hospital on 6 March," before testing positive for COVID-19, it said in a statement.

The tourist, who arrived from Germany a week ago, died after having refused to be transferred to an isolation ward until 7 March once his breathing had been affected by "acute pneumonia". On Saturday, the health ministry announced 45 suspected cases of Egyptians and foreigners contracting the virus aboard a Nile cruise ship. The boat was carrying 171 people - 101 foreigners and 70 Egyptian crew - Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli told reporters.

Saudi authorities yesterday cordoned off the eastern region of Qatif, a center of the kingdom's Shiite minority, in a bid to contain the fast-spreading coronavirus as the total number of cases rose to 11. The lockdown on Qatif, home to around 500,000 people, is the first action of its kind across the Gulf region that has confirmed more than 230 coronavirus cases - most of them people returning from religious pilgrimages to Shiite-majority Iran.

"Given that all 11 recorded positive cases of the new

Africom's stated mission is to ensure that by 2021, Shabab, the Islamic State in Somalia and other terrorist groups have been sufficiently "degraded such that they cannot cause significant harm to US interests". But, Fine wrote, "despite continued US airstrikes in Somalia and US assistance to African partner forces, Al-Shabab appears to be a growing threat that aspires to strike the US homeland."

The inspector general's office operates independently within the Pentagon. In fact, on Jan 5, Shabab militants attacked a US-Kenyan military base in Lamu in southeastern Kenya near the border with Somalia, killing three Americans. Earlier, on Dec 28, Shabab fighters led one of the deadliest attacks of the decade in Somalia when a booby-trapped vehicle exploded at a busy checkpoint in the capital Mogadishu, killing 81 people. — AFP

Compulsory home quarantine for...

Continued from Page 1

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) yesterday directed all government agencies to bar employees placed under any form of quarantine from resuming work. CSC said in a statement posted on Twitter that the ban is applicable on Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees, noting that the decision is in compliance with the mandatory quarantine declared by the health ministry. Salary payments will continue as usual to all Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti employees under all kinds of compulsory quarantine, and their absence from work will not affect their employment status, it added.

The health ministry yesterday announced three new cases of coronavirus, raising the total to 64, and announced for the first time the case of an Egyptian expat who had visited Azerbaijan via Dubai. All coronavirus cases discovered so far have been of people returning from Iran, except the Egyptian man. It noted the man had not traveled to Egypt in the past six months.

Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said three of the 64 cases are receiving care at the intensive care unit and one of them is in critical condition. He revealed the ministry has tested more than 5,123 people, with 146 quarantined at Al-Kout Hotel, 580 at Khairan Resort, and 105 at Jon Center. He said all citizens who arrived from Iraq on Saturday underwent an immediate examination after they got off the plane at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Airport to make sure they were not infected with the virus.

Sanad said 10 people who had been in quarantine have been released after completing 14 days there and testing negative for COVID-19. He added that the ministry is constantly monitoring those who have been subjected to home quarantine and following up with those who have been released.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari called on the Cabinet to decide this week on a number of issues including extending the school holidays and barring expatriates from more countries from entering the country. MP Humoud Al-Khudhair said yesterday that the government will start today repatriating some 350 citizens from Egypt and called for repatriating all Kuwaitis from Egypt to protect them from the coronavirus. He also

Sports

Watson sparks England Triple Crown as Tuilagi sees red against Wales

England keep alive their Six Nations title hopes

TWICKENHAM: Anthony Watson marked his return to Test rugby with a try inside four minutes as England beat Wales 33-30 at Twickenham on Saturday to win the Triple Crown and keep alive their Six Nations title hopes despite a red card for Manu Tuilagi.

England were cruising at 33-16 ahead on the hour mark thanks to tries from Watson, Elliot Daly and Tuilagi. But five minutes from time, powerhouse centre Tuilagi was shown a red card by referee Ben O'Keefe for a shoulder charge on George North as he prevented the Wales wing going in at the corner after replacement England forward Ellis Genge had been sin-binned.

Dan Biggar and Justin Tipuric, with his second try, crossed England's line in the closing stages but it was all too late for the visitors, although they did secure a losing bonus point.

"I thought we stayed calm in key moments," England captain Owen Farrell told ITV Sport. "We were composed. Wales are a great team, they're always going to throw everything at us and have their moments, which they did," he added after what is likely to be World Cup finalists England's last match for several months, with their scheduled Championship finale against Italy in Rome next week postponed due to the deadly coronavirus.

'TOO LITTLE TOO LATE'

Defeat meant reigning Grand Slam champions Wales, under new coach Wayne Pivac, had suffered a third successive Six Nations defeat for the first time since 2007.

"It shows what we can do with those two tries," said Wales captain Alun Wyn Jones. "It was too little too late in the end. However you want to play, ultimately if you don't win it doesn't matter. That is where we find ourselves today."

Victory saw England, beaten by France in their tournament opener, keep the pressure on the Grand

Slam-chasers ahead of Les Bleus' match away to Scotland on Sunday.

England led 20-9 at half-time thanks to tries from Watson and full-back Daly. Both scores were converted by Farrell, who landed all six of his goal-kicks in a 15-point haul. Wales' first-half points came courtesy of two penalties from full-back Leigh Halfpenny and one from fly-half Biggar. England had been 10-3 up at the break in last year's corresponding fixture in Cardiff, only to lose 21-13.

CAUGHT COLD

And they were caught cold from the kick-off at the start of the second half thanks to a brilliant Wales breakaway try finished by flanker Tipuric before pulling clear again, with Tuilagi's score leaving them in command.

England have a habit of making fast starts under coach Eddie Jones — coming into this game they had scored a try in the first 10 minutes in 16 of their past 30 Tests, winning 75 percent of those matches.

And it took Watson, making his first England appearance since November's World Cup final defeat by South Africa in Japan, fewer than four minutes to cross Wales' line.

North's knock-on allowed England lock Maro Itoje to charge through as he set up a line-out deep in Welsh territory. England won the set-piece and, with Wales braced for a driving maul, scrum-half Ben Youngs released Watson with a clever inside pass that saw the Bath flyer dance his way through the cover.

Farrell converted to take the centre past 900 points for England. But Farrell was at fault when conceding a penalty with a late challenge as England lost Jonny May to a head injury.

Farrell and Halfpenny exchanged penalties before England scored their second try eight minutes before the break. Itoje again won line-out possession, with fly-



TWICKENHAM: Wales' flanker Justin Tipuric (L) receives the ball to score a try during the Six Nations international rugby union match between England and Wales at the Twickenham, west London. —AFP

half George Ford sending Daly in at the left corner.

Farrell converted and his second penalty then extended England's lead before Biggar's goal-kick reduced the arrears. Wales started the second half with a brilliant score.

From the kick-off, England-born centre Nick Tompkins exchanged passes with returning No 8 Josh Navidi before finding Tomos Williams, who sent in the

charging Tipuric for a try between the posts.

Biggar converted and England's lead was down to 20-16. But two Wales infringements allowed Farrell and Ford to calm home nerves with a pair of penalties that left England two scores ahead at 26-16.

England had their third try when Tuilagi strolled in against a tiring defence only for their indiscipline to set up a frantic finale. —AFP

Hatton grabs lead but McIlroy lurks at brutal Bay Hill

MIAMI: Britain's Tyrrell Hatton fired a one-over par 73 in a brutal third round at windy Bay Hill to seize a two-stroke lead Saturday at the US PGA Arnold Palmer Invitational. The 28-year-old Englishman, playing only his second tournament since right wrist surgery in November, closed with a dramatic 31-foot birdie putt — only the day's third birdie at 18 — to stand on six-under 210.

"It was extremely tough out there," Hatton said. "You could be made to look pretty silly at times without hitting too bad a golf shot. It was just amazing how much firmer the greens got throughout the day."

Top-ranked Rory McIlroy was hot on his heels after a difficult day in Orlando where the scoring average soared to 76. "It felt like a US Open out there, so yeah, it was a good test," McIlroy said. "I'm trying to enjoy it as much as I can."

Four-time major winner McIlroy, seeking a sixth consecutive top-five finish, shot 73 to share second on 212 with Australian Marc Leishman. Another stroke back were South African Christiaan Bezuidenhou, South Korean Im Sung-jae, New Zealand's Danny Lee and American Harris English. None cracked par.

"I don't think anyone enjoyed that today," Hatton said. "It was just so hard." Hatton opened with a bogey but answered with a birdie at the third on a 22-foot hole-out from the fringe. Hatton stumbled with a three-putt double bogey six at the ninth after finding a greenside bunker, sank a 28-foot birdie putt at the par-4 13th then fell back again with bogeys at 14 and 15.

"Most of the holes were crosswinds, so it was just so hard to get close," Hatton said. "When the greens are as firm as they are, you've got no chance getting anywhere near some of the pins." A tap-in birdie after a 33-foot eagle putt miss at the par-5 16th and the dramatic closing putt lifted Hatton into the lead, which matched the highest score to lead entering the final round in 42 years at Bay Hill.

"I was very happy that dropped," said Hatton of 18.



ORLANDO: Tyrrell Hatton of England plays his second shot on the first hole during the third round of the Arnold Palmer Invitational Presented by MasterCard at the Bay Hill Club and Lodge in Orlando, Florida. —AFP

"Even though I tapped that putt it was probably going about eight feet past. It was scary how quick that thing was." Hatton chases his first US PGA title but owns four European Tour victories, the most recent at last November's Turkish Airlines Open.

"There's doubles and triples just around the corner, so that two-shot lead can go extremely quickly," Hatton said. "So for me there's nothing to get excited about."

Leishman climbs

McIlroy, who defends his Players Championship title next week, found a bunker at the par-3 second and missed a five-foot par putt. But the 30-year-old Northern Ireland star rescued par from 18 feet at the third after blasting out of a greenside bunker and salvaged another par from the sand with an eight-foot putt at 11.

McIlroy, seeking his second Bay Hill title in three seasons, was just short on a 30-foot eagle bid at the par-5

16th. He tapped in for birdie to share the lead only to stumble at 18, finding left rough and rocks right of the green en route to a bogey.

"I feel good with my game," McIlroy said. "Tomorrow it's all about keeping the big numbers off your card and trying to play as conservative as possible and pick up some birdies on the par-5s if you can."

Leishman, who won his fifth US PGA title in January at Torrey Pines, birdied the par-5 sixth and 12th holes while making bogeys at the par-4 10th and 15th. "Today's is probably as hard as I've seen this place play, which I enjoy," Leishman said. "It felt like I shot 65 not 72."

Lee made an astonishing birdie at 12 after finding a bush left of the green with his second shot. He took a penalty drop on the 13th tee then holed out from 208 feet, lofting a shot over a tree onto the green and into the cup. —AFP

shaking hands and wearing surgical masks, while a ceremonial visit to a local shrine was cancelled.

The viral outbreak across Japan and dozens of other countries has fuelled concerns about the Summer Olympics, which open on July 24.

On Wednesday, Tokyo 2020 organisers said they may have to scale back the torch relay and limit spectators because of concerns over spreading the virus.

TEMPERATURE CHECKS

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, however, insisted that the nightmare scenario of either cancelling or postponing the Tokyo Olympics was not discussed at a key meeting last week.

The no-spectator sumo tournament comes after the government's request to operators of sports and entertainment venues to consider cancelling or postponing mass gatherings to help prevent the spread of the virus.

All wrestlers will have their temperature checked twice a day, sumo association board member Koichi Oguruma said. Before the tournament, yokozuna grand champion Kakuryu said: "I can't imagine what it's like" to perform without spectators.

"I'll do my best, thinking many people are cheering in front of TV," he added. Takakeisho, a lower-ranked wrestler added: "A sumo wrestler's performance is made (in part) of cheers by spectators. But I have to win in this environment," he said before clinching his first bout. —AFP

Sumo tourney begins in empty arena amid virus fears

TOKYO: Sumo's spring tournament began behind closed doors yesterday, the latest big event in Japan to be hit by the coronavirus less than five months before the Tokyo Olympics. The Japan Sumo Association said last week spectators would be barred the tournament in Osaka from yesterday until March 22, as the virus has infected at least 454 people across Japan and been linked to seven deaths.

On Sunday, public broadcaster NHK carried two hours of live programming from the tournament. "This tournament without spectators would be an extremely hard one for sumo wrestlers as they struggle to focus their minds," Sumo Association chairman Hakkaku said in his welcoming address.

"Even so, all wrestlers I'm sure will perform their best," he added. Viewers could hear sounds usually drowned out by spectators, including that of the wrestlers slapping their bellies and wiping their feet in the ring.

Some sumo rituals were also amended, including the traditional ladle of water that a winning wrestler offers to the next in the ring. Sumo stars have already been taking precautions at fan events, refraining from

Bahrain F1 race to be held without fans

DUBAI: The Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix will go ahead on March 22 without fans due to the coronavirus crisis, a blow to the Gulf Arab state's important tourism sector. Bahrain, which is hosting the second round of the Formula One season at the Sakhir circuit outside Manama, has reported 83 cases of the virus, mostly linked to people who travelled to Iran.

"Bahrain has made the decision to hold this year's (race) as a participants-only event," organisers said yesterday. "Convening a major sporting event, which is open to the public and allows thousands of international travellers and local fans to interact in close proximity would not be the right thing to do at the present time," they added.

"To ensure that neither the sport, nor its global supporter base, is unduly impacted, the race weekend itself will still go ahead as a televised event." Bahrain is the second F1 race casualty of the virus. The Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai scheduled for April 19 has already been postponed. Racing without fans will be a first for the sport, although former commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone once mooted the idea of a 'VIP grand prix' at France's Le Castellet circuit with only invited guests.

A Bahrain International Circuit spokesman said accredited media would attend as usual. Concerts featuring DJ's Afrojack and Don Diablo over the race weekend have been cancelled. "We know how disappointed many will be by this news...but safety has to remain our utmost priority," the circuit said.

Bahrain has suspended flights to some destinations over concerns of the rapidly spreading virus. It has also asked people entering the country who have recently visited Italy, South Korea, Egypt and Lebanon to isolate themselves for two weeks.

ITALIAN TEAMS

Italy has ordered a virtual lockdown across a swathe of its wealthy north, including financial capital Milan, in a drastic attempt to try to contain a rapidly growing outbreak of coronavirus. The Maranello base of Formula One's oldest and most successful team Ferrari is within the affected area.

Ferrari and Red Bull-owned AlphaTauri, who are based in Faenza, will still race in Bahrain because they will be coming from Australia which hosts the opening race in Melbourne next weekend. "Depending on where they flew through on the way from Melbourne, there is a process that you go through," the circuit spokesman said of the Italian teams.

Formula One has discussed arranging a special charter for Italians working in Formula One to avoid transit through airports in countries affected by the virus. Organisers will refund fans who had bought tickets, whose sales were suspended last week.

Bahrain's biggest global sporting event reported a three-day crowd of 97,000 in 2019, a record for the event, with 34,000 yesterday. That attendance is small compared to other races, with 202,146 the average Formula One three-day crowd in 2019. Tourism is an important contributor to Bahrain's economy, which in recent years has been in deficit and sought bailouts from its wealthier Gulf Arab neighbours, and the race brings global exposure with millions of viewers. —Reuters

Simsby clinches Malaysia golf win

KUALA LUMPUR: Trevor Simsby of the United States won a thrilling playoff yesterday against Australia's Andrew Dodt and fellow American Jarin Todd to clinch victory in the weather-shortened Malaysia Open.

All three golfers ended their final round with a total of 13-under-par 203, leading to a sudden-death playoff at the Kota Permai Golf and Country Club. Todd was out of contention after the first playoff hole, which saw Simsby and Dodt both make birdies.

Simsby then stormed to victory on the second hole by sinking a four-foot birdie putt, spelling defeat for Dodt who had looked dominant at the start of the tournament. The American said he was "ecstatic" at the biggest win of his career and his first Asian Tour title. "The turning point came when I was walking off the 15th hole," said Simsby. "My caddie was saying we were still in it, and I really didn't think so. And then I birdied the 16th, and I knew we had a chance."

Dodt said it was "disappointing to finish like that, but all in all a solid week and well done to Simsby". A competitive field saw a trio of golfers including Thailand's Kosuke Hamamoto, Japan's Rikuya Hoshino and South Korean Charlie Wi finish one shot behind the leaders after 18 holes. The event was reduced to 54 holes from the usual 72 after stormy weather led to play being abandoned on Saturday. The \$1 million competition has made a return following a four-year absence, even as many sporting events are cancelled worldwide due to the coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

Sports

Dominant Australia crush India to win fifth T20 World Cup

'It's been massive, 86,000 people at the MCG'

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard from the women's Twenty20 World Cup final between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday:

Australia	
B. Mooney not out	78
A. Healy c Krishnamurthy b R. Yafav	75
M. Lanning c Pandey b Sharma	16
A. Gardner st Bhatia b Sharma	2
R. Haynes b P. Radav	4
N. Carey not out	5
Extras (b1, nb1, w2)	4
Total (four wickets, 20 overs)	184
Did not bat: Jess Jonassen, Sophie Molineux, Delissa Kimmince, Georgia Wareham, Megan Schutt	
Fall of wickets: 1-115 (Healy), 2-154 (Lanning), 3-156 (Gardner), 4-176 (Haynes)	
Bowling: Sharma 4-0-38-2, Pandey 4-0-52-0, Gayakwad 4-0-29-9, P. Yadav 4-0-30-1, R. Yadav 4-0-34-1	

India	
S. Verma c Healy b Schutt	2
S. Mandhana c Carey b Molineux	11
T. Bhatiya retired hurt	2
J. Rodrigues c Carey b Jonassen	0
H. Kaur c Gardner b Jonassen	4
D. Sharma c Mooney b Carey	33
V. Krishnamurthy c Jonassen b Kimmince	19
*R. Ghosh c Carey b Schutt	18
S. Pandey c Mooney b Schutt	2
R. Yadav c Mooney b Jonassen	1
P. Yadav c Gardner b Schutt	1
R. Gayakwad not out	1
*concession substitute	
Extras (w5)	5
Total (all out, 19.1 overs)	99
Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Verma), 2-8 (Rodrigues), 3-18 (Mandhana), 4-30 (Kaur), 5-58 (Krishnamurthy), 6-88 (Sharma), 7-92 (Pandey), 8-96 (Ghosh), 9-97 (R. Yadav), 10-99 (P. Yadav)	
Bowling: Schutt 3.1-0-18-4, Jonassen 4-0-20-3, Molineux 4-0-21-1, Kimmince 4-0-17-1, Carey 4-0-23-1	
Result: Australia won by 85 runs.	

MELBOURNE: A rampant Australia emphatically swept to their fifth women's Twenty20 World Cup title yesterday, crushing India by 85 runs in front of more than 86,000 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Alyssa Healy smashed a quick-fire 75 and Beth Mooney an unbeaten 78 as the defending champions plundered an ominous 184 for four — the highest score ever in a women's T20 final.

India could only manage 99 all out in reply to end a 17-day tournament that reinforced Australia's dominance, having now won five of the seven World Cups held.

"I'm just really proud of this group of players," said Australian skipper Meg Lanning. "There was a lot of expectation on us, inside and out. Definitely some tough times in there, but we stuck with each other, had each other's backs.

"It's been massive, 86,000 people at the MCG, I've never seen it before and didn't think I'd be part of it in the middle," she added.

The blockbuster showdown between the world's top-ranked team and fast-improving India was billed as the biggest in women's cricket history.

A #FilltheMCG campaign was launched to help bring the sport to a new generation and fans responded with 86,174 attending, despite fears about the deadly coronavirus that has seen other global sporting events cancelled or played behind closed doors.

They were targeting the official world record for a women's sporting fixture — set at the 1999 football World Cup final when 90,185 watched the United States beat China in California — but fell just short.

It was nevertheless a record crowd for a women's cricket game helped by the lure of pop superstar Katy Perry, who performed before and after the game.

Australia came into their sixth successive final as heavy favourites, in contrast to India who were playing their first decider.

India had upset Lanning's team in the opening game of the tournament, but they never got a look in yesterday.

"I still have a lot of faith in my team," said disappointed Indian skipper Harmanpreet Kaur.

"We need to focus, especially in fielding. But I trust this team. It's part of the game, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. You have to keep learning."



MELBOURNE: Australia's captain Meg Lanning (C) with teammates celebrate with the winning trophy of Twenty20 women's cricket World Cup after beating India in the final in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

After Australia won the toss, Healy showed her intent with a boundary off Deepti Sharma's first ball. She smacked two more in an eventful opening over which also saw her dropped by Shafali Verma.

Opening partner Mooney also had an early let-off, with Rajeshwari Gayakwad putting down a caught and bowled chance when she was on eight.

India was jittery and an aggressive Healy smashed two big sixes in succession off Gayakwad before bringing up her 12th T20 half-century.

They reached 91 without loss at the halfway mark, with Healy then hitting three consecutive sixes off Shikha Pandey.

Her luck finally ran out going for another big one, caught for 75 from just 39 balls.

At the other end, player-of-the-tournament Mooney quietly went about her business to bring up her ninth T20 half-century before three late wickets fell.

HORROR START FOR INDIA

India got off to a horror start with explosive 16-year-old opener Verma, who has used the tournament to announce herself, out for two.

Taniya Bhatia retired hurt after being hit on the helmet before Jemimah Rodrigues fell without scoring. India were in big trouble at 32 for four after Smriti Mandhana and Kaur both went cheaply. Sharma hit a battling 33 but it was never going to be enough as Megan Schutt took 4-18.

It capped an engrossing final that Cricket Australia chief Kevin Roberts said reflected the sport's growing popularity, while a boost in prize money strengthened a push for gender equality.

The International Cricket Council bumped up the tournament prize pool by 320 percent from the 2018 event, but it still fell short of what the men receive.

To counter that, CA pledged a further \$US600,000 to ensure parity if Australia won. —AFP

Healy claims family bragging rights after stunning knock

MELBOURNE: Australia's pugnacious wicketkeeper-batswoman Alyssa Healy has another claim for bragging rights in her famous cricketing family after starring in her team's fifth Women's Twenty20 World Cup triumph yesterday.

Opener Healy led from the front with a brilliant 39-ball 75 as Meg Lanning's Australia roared to an 85-run win in front of a crowd of 86,000 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on International Women's Day.

Her husband Mitchell Starc, fast bowler for the Australian men's team, was among the thrilled fans, having come home early from the tour of South Africa to watch his wife hammer the Indian bowlers.

Five years before at the same venue, Starc bowled New Zealand's hard-hitting captain Brendon McCullum for a duck in the final of the one-day World Cup to set Australia on the path to a dominant win in front of 93,000 fans.

Her uncle Ian Healy, who kept wicket for Australia and is third on the all-time list for total dismissals in test cricket, would have beamed in pride when his niece snaffled an edge to remove India's 16-year-old prodigy Shafali Verma for two.

Asked who had the upper hand now in the family, Alyssa Healy wasted no time in responding: "One hundred percent me," she told reporters, beaming. "I've been a part of a lot of successful World Cup campaigns now but to do it here on home soil was always going to be incredibly difficult to do."

"I guess Mitch and I are 1-1 on that stage," Healy was dropped on nine by fellow opener Verma at cover and made sure India would pay. She scored consecutive sixes off spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad and later, three sixes in succession off the hapless medium pacer Shikha Pandey to send the terraces into delirium.

By the time she was dismissed slogging spinner Radha Yadav, Healy and opening partner Beth Mooney had put 115 on the board by the 12th over. Mooney went on with the job and went off unbeaten on 78, having driven Australia to an imposing 184 for four.

Mooney was named player of the tournament after finishing top of the runs list with 259 at an average of 64, the highest total in the tournament's seven editions. Although Australia have won plenty of global trophies, seeing 86,000 fans at the MCG was a first for a team that have claimed almost all of their major silverware overseas.

With the attendance easily the biggest for a women's sporting event in the country, it felt like a watershed moment for the game and for women's sport in general. The Australian players, for all their brilliance, have long been overshadowed by the men's team and their achievements only belatedly recognised.

"I don't think that anything's ever going to top that," said 29-year-old Healy, who danced with her team mates on stage with American pop singer Katy Perry at the post-final concert. —Reuters

Lightning top Bruins in penalty filled game

BOSTON: Andrei Vasilevskiy held on with 35 saves throughout a tumultuous night as the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the host Boston Bruins, 5-3, on Saturday. Anthony Cirelli and Mikhail Sergachev scored short-handed, and Cedric Paquette and Alex Killorn also tallied as the Lightning won for just the third time in their last eight games. Nikita Kucherov added an empty-netter. Charlie McAvoy, Sean Kuraly and David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins, who had a four-game winning streak snapped. Tuukka Rask made 20 saves. The teams combined for 94 penalty minutes after playing four days earlier in a 2-1 Bruins win at Tampa Bay. Barclay Goodrow got it started on an elbow to the head of Ondrej Kase at 5:01 of the first period, and the Bruins went on the power play. But it was the Lightning who scored, not once but twice during the same penalty kill, 62 seconds apart. Tampa Bay eventually led 3-0, a lead it would not relinquish.

PANTHERS 4, CANADIENS 1

Chris Driedger made 33 saves in his first start since being injured Jan. 17 to help host Florida beat Montreal. The game was scoreless midway through the second period before Lucas Wallmark struck. Mackenzie Weegar, Jonathan Huberdeau and Mike Hoffman later scored for the Panthers to seal the win. Driedger, 25, improved to 6-2-1 in just his 10th career start. Jake Evans spoiled Driedger's shutout hopes with a goal in the third period. Backup netminder Charlie Lindgren had 28 saves for Montreal.

FLYERS 3, SABRES 1

Claude Giroux scored two goals, Joel Farabee added one and red-hot Philadelphia extended its winning streak to nine with a win over visiting Buffalo. Jakub Voracek and Travis Sanheim each assisted on both of Giroux's goals as the Flyers improved to 25-5-4 at home. Goaltender Carter Hart made 38 saves. The Flyers scored at least three goals for the 14th consecutive game and won nine

Archer likely to miss IPL

LONDON: England's Jofra Archer is likely to miss the Indian Premier League (IPL) as national team coach Chris Silverwood wants the fast bowler to play cricket with Sussex to get up to speed before the home Test series against West Indies in June.

Archer, who has a contract with the Rajasthan Royals franchise in the IPL, has been out of action since January with an elbow injury. The 24-year-old said earlier this week he had his "fingers crossed" on playing at some stage in the IPL, which begins on March 29, but Silverwood wants him to rebuild his fitness under the watchful eye of the staff at Sussex.

"My priority is getting him right for England and our international summer," Silverwood told

straight for the first time since 2016. Dominik Kahun scored the lone goal for the skidding Sabres, who dropped their sixth in a row. Goaltender Carter Hutton stopped 21 shots.

HURRICANES 3, ISLANDERS 2 (OT)

Vincent Trocheck scored a power-play goal 96 seconds into overtime, and Carolina picked up a crucial victory over New York at Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, NY. The Hurricanes snapped a four-game losing streak with the win. The first 55 seconds of overtime were played 3-0-3 due to penalties on Carolina's Brady Skjet and New York's Mathew Barzal in the final minute of regulation. Barzal's penalty was a four-minute high sticking for drawing blood on Jordan Staal, and the Hurricanes had 2:27 of power-play time in overtime.

CAPITALS 5, PENGUINS 2

Nic Dowd produced his first career multiple-goal game with two goals and an assist as Washington won a Metropolitan Division showdown against host Pittsburgh. Nicklas Backstrom, T.J. Oshie and Richard Panik each had a goal and an assist for the Capitals (41-20-7), who built a 4-0 lead en route to ending a two-game losing streak and maintaining a grip on a share of first place in the Metropolitan despite Philadelphia's victory later Saturday. Goaltender Braden Holtby stopped 26 Penguins shots.

PREDATORS 1, STARS 0

Juuse Saros shut out Dallas for the second time in three days as visiting Nashville recorded the win. Saros stopped all 37 shots for his fourth shutout of the season, earned in quick fashion after his third shutout. On Thursday night, Saros made 33 saves in the Predators' 2-0 win over the Stars in Nashville. The goalie is now 6-0-1 with a .939 save percentage in seven career games against Dallas. The victory temporarily moves the Predators (34-26-8, 76 points) into a wild-card position in the Western Conference, though five teams are within two points of the two wild-card spots. Nashville also moved within six points of Dallas (37-23-8, 82 points) for third place in the Central Division.

OILERS 4, BLUE JACKETS 1

Mikko Koskinen faced 46 shots and

reporters during England's warm-up match ahead of a two-test series in Sri Lanka.

"Sussex will play a big part in that and we will work very closely with them to make sure he gets the best preparation possible. The only things we have been talking about are what's best for England and what's best to get him right for that."

"We just want him to be fit, full stop. We want him to be 100% ready, 100% fresh and 100% fit for the international season." England's cricket board (ECB) had put out a statement earlier this week saying Archer's "focus will be on playing for England" and playing for Sussex in May, working with ECB Young Lions coach Jon Lewis and Sussex bowling coach James Kirtley. Archer, England's highest wicket taker at last year's one-day international World Cup, was signed by the Royals in 2018 for 800,000 pounds (\$1.04 million) and the Rajasthan side retained him in 2019 and this season. —Reuters



SUNRISE: Xavier Ouellet #61 of the Montreal Canadiens defends against Dominic Toninato #14 of the Florida Panthers in front of Goaltender Charlie Lindgren #39 at the BB&T Center in Sunrise, Florida. The Panthers defeated the Canadiens 4-1. —AFP

allowed only a single goal as host Edmonton frustrated and ultimately pulled away from Columbus. Alex Chiasson, Caleb Jones, Connor McDavid and Riley Sheahan each scored once for the Oilers, who are 6-0 in their last six Saturday games. Chiasson added an assist for a two-point night. Gustav Nyquist got the lone goal for the Blue Jackets, who peppered Edmonton through three periods, outshooting the Oilers 46-24, including 21-7 in the first period alone. Columbus has lost seven straight road games (0-3-4).

KINGS 7, WILD 3

Dustin Brown had three goals and an assist, and Los Angeles stretched its winning streak to five games with a win against visiting Minnesota. The Kings hadn't won five in a row since an eight-game winning streak from Nov. 25-Dec. 9, 2017. Anze Kopitar had a goal and two assists, and Cal Petersen made 25 saves for Los Angeles, which is 8-2-1 since Feb. 12.

SENATORS 2, SHARKS 1 (OT)

Chris Tierney scored 35 seconds into

overtime as visiting Ottawa skated to a victory over San Jose. Anthony Duclair breezed up the right wing before feeding Tierney, who beat Aaron Dell under the crossbar for his 11th goal of the season. Tierney's game-winning goal allowed him to make amends for losing control of the puck on a penalty shot in the second period. Nick Paul also scored, Duclair notched two assists and Craig Anderson finished with 31 saves for the Senators, who improved to 4-1-0 in their last five contests. Ottawa also snapped a six-game road winless skid (0-4-2) by winning the opener of a five-game trek.

DEVILS 6, RANGERS 4

Kyle Palmieri and Travis Zajac scored two goals apiece as visiting New Jersey got four goals in the second period to beat New York. Palmieri scored New Jersey's first goal and the first of two Devils goals in a span of 52 seconds early in the second. Fredrik Claesson scored after Palmieri's second, while Zajac and John Hayden scored in a span of 25 seconds late in the second period. Zajac added an empty-netter in the final minute of the game. —Reuters

Pandya back, India rest Rohit for SA series

NEW DELHI: Fit-again all-rounder Hardik Pandya returned to India's one-day squad yesterday but opener Rohit Sharma, who is recovering from a calf injury, was left out of the three-match series against South Africa beginning next week.

Pandya underwent back surgery in October last year and was in fine form on his return to action in an invitational Twenty20 tournament earlier this month. Opener Shikhar Dhawan also returned after a shoulder injury kept him out of the team's recent tour of New Zealand. Fellow opener Rohit,

however, continues to be sidelined by the injury which cut short his tour of New Zealand. Swing bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who was sidelined with a hernia last year, was also back in the Virat Kohli-led side. India dropped opener Mayank Agarwal, middle order batsman Kedar Jadhav, all-rounder Shivam Dube and quicks Shardul Thakur and Mohammed Shami from the squad which lost 3-0 in New Zealand.

India begin their series against South Africa in Dharamsala on Thursday, followed by matches in Lucknow (March 15) and Kolkata (March 18).

India's ODI squad: Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw, Virat Kohli (Captain), KL Rahul, Manish Pandey, Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Jasprit Bumrah, Navdeep Saini, Kuldeep Yadav, Shubman Gill. —Reuters

Sports

Cavaliers top Nuggets again, complete season series sweep

Valanciunas, Grizzlies start fast, defeat Hawks

CLEVELAND: Kevin Love scored 27 points, Collin Sexton had 25 and the host Cleveland Cavaliers stunned the Denver Nuggets 104-102 on Saturday night. Cedi Osman added 20 points, Tristan Thompson had nine points and 13 rebounds, and Matthew Dellavedova had seven points and 14 assists for Cleveland, which swept the season series against the Nuggets and ended a four-game skid. Will Barton scored 22 points, Gary Harris had 18 and Jamal Murray added 17 for Denver. Nikola Jokic had just eight points but added eight rebounds and eight assists. The Cavaliers led by five early in the fourth but went cold for nearly five minutes, allowing Denver to go up 93-90. Sexton ended the drought with a pair of free throws with 5:50 left, and that started a 10-0 run that put Cleveland ahead for good.

CHARLOTTE HORNETS 108 - HOUSTON ROCKETS 99

The Hornets scored the game's first 20 points, Terry Rozier scored all 24 of his points in the first three quarters, and Charlotte topped host Houston. Devonte' Graham added 23 points, PJ Washington contributed 22 points, Cody Zeller had 13 points and Miles Bridges was good for 10 points for Charlotte, which closed a four-game homestand with its only victory during that stretch. James Harden scored 30 points for the Rockets, but he was charged with 10 of the team's 20 turnovers. Harden also had 10 rebounds and 14 assists. Houston played without guard Russell Westbrook (rest).

SACRAMENTO KINGS 123 - PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 111

Bogdan Bogdanovic matched his career high of seven 3-pointers and recorded 27 points and eight assists, as Sacramento halted a 12-game losing streak in Portland with a dominant victory. Buddy Hield scored 22 points, and Harrison Barnes added 20 as the Kings won in Portland for the first time since Dec. 8, 2012.

They also equaled the franchise record of 21 3-pointers (in 39 attempts), with Hield knocking down six and Barnes making five.

De'Aaron Fox recorded 14 points and 11 assists for the Kings, who have won seven of their last nine games. Sacramento stands 3 1/2 games behind the eighth-place Memphis Grizzlies for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

UTAH JAZZ 111 - DETROIT PISTONS 105

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 32 points and Utah stretched its winning streak to five games with a win in Detroit. The Jazz, who were closing out a four-game road trip, have won the last eight meetings between the clubs. They were playing the second end of a back-to-back after winning in Boston on Friday. Donovan Mitchell supplied 25 points, Jordan Clarkson contributed 14 points off the bench, and Mike Conley added 12. Christian Wood led the Pistons with a career-high 30 points and 11 rebounds. Langston Galloway and Jordan McRae had 14 points apiece off the bench.

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 118 - ATLANTA HAWKS 101

Jonas Valanciunas scored 12 of his 27 points in the first quarter to help Memphis get off to a quick start and allow them to cruise past the visiting Atlanta Hawks. Valanciunas had 17 rebounds for his 32nd double-double of the season. It was the second time in a week that the Grizzlies have thumped the Hawks. Memphis won 127-88 in Atlanta today. Atlanta got leading scorer Trae Young back in the lineup after he missed Friday's game with flu-like symptoms. Young, however, wasn't at full strength, played only 29 minutes, and was limited to 16 points — 13 fewer than his season average — and four assists.

GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 118 - PHILADELPHIA WARRIORS 114

Villanova product Eric Paschall capped a 23-



CLEVELAND: Tristan Thompson #13 of the Cleveland Cavaliers handles the ball against the Denver Nuggets at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

point performance with a pair of go-ahead free throws with 51.7 seconds remaining as Golden State edged Philadelphia in San Francisco, in a nationally televised game that featured more star power on the sidelines than on the court. The Warriors learned during the day that Stephen Curry would be joining fellow former All-Star teammates Klay

Thompson and Draymond Green out of action because of an illness. Curry had returned from a 58-game absence because of a broken left hand on Thursday. Tobias Harris scored a team-high 24 points for the 76ers, who likewise were without three injured starters — Joel Embiid, Ben Simmons and Josh Richardson. — Reuters

Barcelona confidence unaffected by fan frustration: Setien

BARCELONA: Quique Setien insisted Barcelona have not lost their confidence, despite needing a dubious late penalty, converted by Lionel Messi, to scrape past Real Sociedad 1-0 on Saturday inside a frustrated Camp Nou.

Messi's 24th goal of the season, and fifth in four games, was enough to save Barca, despite a drab display that threatened to bring more disappointment following last weekend's loss against Real Madrid.

As tension grew inside Camp Nou, some of the home fans whistled to express their dissatisfaction, which Jordi Alba then seemed to confront when celebrating a late goal, ruled out for offside, by putting his fingers in his ears.

"We have not lost confidence in what we are doing," said Setien. "The fans sometimes don't expect the opposition to restrict you but you have to take into account that Real Sociedad are a great team." On his own reaction, Alba said: "I respect the fans but the fans have to respect me. Nobody likes to be whistled, and even less after 15 minutes at 0-0." Madrid drop to second in the table but can restore their one-point advantage at the top by win-

ning away at struggling Real Betis last night. Their Clasico victory at the Santiago Bernabeu put the pressure back on Barcelona, whose response was hardly resounding, with Setien's side ultimately reliant on VAR to spot a handball in the 81st minute from Robin Le Normand.

The lack of appeal and the chunk of play that passed before VAR intervened made the decision all the more surprising and la Real's players were still shaking their heads at the final whistle.

Yet the win was all-important for the Catalans at the end of another week dominated by headlines surrounding problems off the pitch. Setien said he had apologised to the squad after his assistant Eder Sarabia was recorded launching into a number of foul-mouthed rants against his own players during the game against Madrid, even if there were chants in support of Sarabia before kick-off.

"When the club is in a moment of weakness, these kinds of things come out," said Gerard Pique. "It's normal for an assistant coach, with the adrenaline high, to express himself. We see it as normal."

Barcelona created a handful of openings during the first half and Martin Braithwaite, making his first start, was at the heart of most of them, with his willingness to run in behind offering a good alternative in attack.

Twice Messi sent Braithwaite free early on but his lung-busting runs ended in tame shots. When he did hit one into the net, he was pulled back for offside. Messi created a chance of his own by hunting the ball down in the corner before retrieving a chipped Sergio Busquets pass, only to

scuff the finish. The chances came more frequently in the second half as Barca turned the screw. Messi slid one past the post and then sliced another over from Antoine Griezmann's cushioned header.

Ivan Rakitic's drive was parried, Pique's header too straight and Alba's ball across the face of goal just too far ahead of the diving Rakitic. As chances went begging, la Real sensed an opportunity. Nacho Monreal flashed wide and Alexander Isak hammered over.

But just as the tension was growing, Barcelona were leant a helping hand, with VAR reviewing a handball from Le Normand and referee Juan Martinez Munuera persuaded to point to the spot. Messi made no mistake.

Atletico Madrid will hope for a tighter contest against Liverpool in the Champions League on Wednesday than their frantic 2-2 draw earlier on Saturday against Sevilla. Joao Felix looked as sharp at the Wanda Metropolitano as he has done all season and completed a four-minute comeback for Atletico after Alvaro Morata's penalty cancelled out Luuk de Jong's opener for Sevilla.

But Lucas Ocampos levelled with another penalty at the end of a pulsating first half, again with the help of VAR after a foul by Kieran Trippier. The draw will be more gratefully received by Sevilla, who sit third in La Liga and two points ahead of Atletico, who stay fifth after missing an opportunity to close the gap.

Fourth-placed Getafe had Mauro Arambarri sent off late on as they drew 0-0 at home to relegation battlers Celta Vigo. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Leicester City v Aston Villa	23:00
beIN Sports	
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
US Sassuolo Calcio v Brescia	20:30
beIN Sports	

Italy sports minister calls for 'immediate' halt to Serie A

ROME: Italy's Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora called yesterday for an immediate suspension of the Serie A season due to the coronavirus outbreak that has killed 233 people in the Mediterranean country.

"The FIGC (Italian Football Federation) should consider immediately STOPPING Serie A," Spadafora wrote in a statement on his Facebook page. "It makes no sense right now, as we ask citizens to make enormous sacrifices to prevent the spread of the virus, to endanger the lives of players, referees, coaching staff and fans who will surely gather to watch the matches, by not temporarily suspending football."

Italy has borne the brunt in Europe of an epidemic that first emerged in China at the end of last year and has spread to almost 100 countries. On Wednesday, the league was ordered to play matches behind closed doors until April 3 as part of broader measures imposed nationwide to limit crowds and fight the spread of the COVID-19 disease.

Italian Footballers' Association president Damiano Tommasi tweeted on Sunday that "stopping football is the most useful thing for our country right now". "The teams to cheer are playing in our hospitals, in emergency rooms," Tommasi wrote.

Spadafora's comments are the reported reason for yesterday's first match Parma v SPAL — one of six previously postponed games being played this weekend — being pushed back over an hour to 1245 GMT.

The clash was supposed to kick off at 1130 GMT but Sky Sport reports that the players were led back into the dressing rooms from the tunnel as they lined up to take the field. The confusion comes after Italian media obtained copies of draft legislation that ordered the quarantining of the entire Lombardy region in northern Italy, the worst affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

Lombardy capital Milan is Italy's economic heart, and the region is home to some 10 million people. The government decree also covers parts of the Veneto region around Venice as well as Emilia-Romagna's Parma and Rimini.

The decree advised people in the quarantine zones to stay at home as much as possible, and it shuts down all night clubs as well as gyms and swimming pools. Bars and restaurants will remain open but must ensure that everyone is seated at least a metre (three feet) apart.

It stresses that entry into and out of the new quarantine zones would only be allowed for "serious reasons". More 5,800 people have been diagnosed with the virus in Italy in the past two weeks. — AFP

Champions League football in West Asia postponed

HONG KONG: The AFC Champions League was put on temporary hold in West Asia yesterday while football officials work out ways to get the remaining group matches played despite the new coronavirus outbreak.

With the competition's East Asian zone already severely disrupted by COVID-19, delegates from West Asia suspended group play to evaluate a "series of proposals" to complete the pool stage.

"All matches in AFC Champions League match day three were postponed in the West zone," the Asian Football Confederation said after emergency talks in Doha and Dubai. "The AFC has now asked for the cooperation of the member associations in producing a plan by which the remaining matches can be played before the round of 16."

Hard-hit Iran has four teams in Asia's premier club competition, while Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Uzbekistan and Qatar, the 2022 World Cup hosts, are also involved. The tournament's East zone, kept separate from the West until the final, last week moved back the start of its knock-out rounds to August. China, South Korea and Japan, whose domestic leagues are on hold over the virus, all have teams in the competition.

The West zone's quarter-finals will be moved to September to accommodate the extended group phase, and the two-legged semi-finals will be on October 14, 15, 28 and 29. The final remains on November 22 and 28. "As with the East Zone, the MAs (member associations) provided some proposals which will now be considered by the AFC and the various stakeholders, including commercial partners," the AFC statement said.

This month's Asian qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup could also be postponed. FIFA warned last week after talks with the AFC, as the deadly outbreak wreaks havoc with the sporting calendar. — AFP

Paes's 30-year Davis Cup dream ends

PARIS: India's Leander Paes went down fighting as his dream of crowning his 30-year Davis Cup career with a place at the finals ended Saturday while Ecuador and Italy reached the November showpiece, triumphing in empty arenas locked down because of the coronavirus crisis.

Paes, 46, has played for India in every Davis Cup season bar one since his debut in 1990 but went to the qualifier tie in Zagreb against two-time champions Croatia having already announced that 2020 would be his last year on tour. With India trailing 2-0 overnight, Paes rolled back the years, linking up with 40-year-old Rohan Bopanna to defeat Mate Pavic and Franko Skugor 6-3, 6-7 (9/11), 7-5 to keep their country's faint hopes of making the finals alive.

However, former US Open champion Marin Cilic then ruthlessly crushed that ambition with a quickfire 6-0, 6-1 demolition of Sumit Nagal. "This was going to be my last match but the captain (Rohit Rajpal) said something to me after the match," Paes told daviscup.com, hinting that he could still play in the September play-offs.

"I will leave it to the captain because whoever plays, the best thing needs to be done and the best decision needs to be made." It was a sweet Davis Cup farewell for US doubles duo Bob and Mike Bryan in Hawaii.

The twin brothers, playing what they said would be their last Davis Cup tie, defeated Sanjar Fayziev and Denis Istomin 6-3, 6-4 in just 67 minutes to give the United States an unassailable 3-0 lead over Uzbekistan.

Reilly Opelka had beaten Istomin 6-2, 7-5 and Taylor Fritz beat Fayziev 6-1, 6-2 on Friday to put 32-time winners United States on the road to victory. US captain Marty Fish, aiming to rekindle US fortunes in a competition they last won 13 years ago, asked the 41-year-old Bryans to return for the first time since they played in a US quarter-final loss to Croatia in 2016.

The Bryans agreed, but said they won't be on hand when the 12 qualifiers join champions Spain, Canada, Britain, Russia, France and Serbia in November's finals in Madrid. Although they plan to hang up their racquets for good after the US Open in September, Bob Bryan said they were pleased to have a chance to end a Davis Cup career that began in 2003 on a high note.

"We've played some of the most important matches of our lives (in Davis Cup)," he told daviscup.com. "These are the matches we'll remember. Today was a great way to end



Leander Paes

this part of our career." John Millman was Australia's star in Adelaide, wearing down Thiago Monteiro 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/3) to give the 28-time champions victory over Brazil. Ecuador swept past Japan in Miki in a tie played behind closed doors due to fears over the spread of the coronavirus.

The hosts were without injury-hit Kei Nishikori and Yoshihito Nishioka, who decided not to join his team to avoid a possible virus quarantine on his return to the United States. Gonzalo Escobar and Diego Hidalgo outplayed Ben McLachlan and Yasutaka Uchiyama 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 to give Ecuador, without a singles player in the world top 150, a shock victory. "The situation with no fans helped us," Hidalgo told daviscup.com. "I think that evened up the tie."

Uchiyama said it was hard to concentrate while playing in a nearly empty arena, "but I don't want to use it as an excuse". A limited number of journalists and backroom staff were permitted to enter the arena once they had their body temperature checked.

Italy shrugged off the absence of fans in Cagliari to defeat South Korea with Fabio Fognini and Simone Bolelli easily beating Nam Ji-sung and Song Min-kyu 6-3, 6-1 in the doubles to seal their place in the Madrid finals.

Italian tennis federation match director Sergio Palmieri suggested that the often combustible Fognini was better suited to playing in an empty stadium. "Fabio was very calm, very collected. We joked that maybe he should play behind closed doors all the time," said Palmieri. — AFP

25 Watson sparks England Triple Crown as Tuilagi sees red against Wales



26 Dominant Australia crush India to win fifth T20 World Cup



27 Paes's 30-year Davis Cup dream ends



United complete double over City with 2-0 win

MANCHESTER: Manchester United completed their first home and away Premier League double over Manchester City since the Alex Ferguson era with a 2-0 victory at Old Trafford yesterday. The win moves United up to fifth and leaves Pep Guardiola's second-placed City trailing leaders Liverpool by 25 points. United's opening goal was straight off the training ground with Bruno Fernandes surprising City's defence with a sharply-taken chipped free-kick over the top to Anthony Martial whose volley sneaked under the arm of the diving Ederson.

City had a Sergio Aguero effort ruled out for offside after the break but without the injured Kevin De Bruyne, the champions lacked their trademark midfield dominance.

United substitute Scott McTominay made sure of the points in stoppage time after a dreadful throw-out from Ederson straight to the Scotland midfielder who superbly drove the ball into the unguarded net from over 25 metres out.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's United are now unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions. The last time United completed the league double over City was in the 2009/10 season.

Earlier, two goals in each half from a rampant Chelsea earned them a 4-0 victory over Carlo Ancelotti's disappointing Everton yesterday, cementing their place in the Premier

League's top four. Everton coach Ancelotti, who spent two years at Chelsea, leading the team which included current Chelsea boss Frank Lampard to the league and FA Cup double in 2010, enjoyed a warm greeting from the Stamford Bridge crowd.

Yet he cut a forlorn figure on the touchline, with his team managing only one shot on target, as Chelsea opened a 2-0 lead with goals from Mason Mount and Pedro before adding to their tally with efforts from Willian and Olivier Giroud.

Everton lie in 12th place in the table, 11 points behind fourth-placed Chelsea. Mount scored the first in the 14th minute, bursting from midfield and playing a one-two with Pedro before controlling the ball, turning and shooting low into the corner.

Sixty seconds earlier the youth team graduate had forced Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford into a reflex save from a close-range volley. Seven minutes later Spain's Pedro, revelling in space, latched on to a fine through ball from former Everton midfielder Ross Barkley and picked his spot to the left of the advancing Pickford.

The home side doubled their lead in three second-half minutes. In the 51st the indefatigable Barkley set up Willian to shoot across goal and into the far corner from 20 metres with Pickford stranded. Then France striker

Giroud poked the ball home from a Willian cross after a corner.

Giroud, who has been starting for Chelsea in the last few weeks with Tammy Abraham struggling for fitness, had been linked with a move away in January. Yet yesterday he said he felt physically and mentally fit.

"We've been killers in the box. It showed the team character and confidence," he said. "It was good to get a goal."

Dominic Calvert-Lewin missed an open goal with the score at 2-0 when he tried to chip past advancing goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga but put the ball wide. Everton had Pickford to thank for keeping the scoreline to four after the keeper made sharp saves from Willian, Giroud and Barkley.

"Everything went wrong," Ancelotti said. "We were not good enough defensively, too open defensively. With the ball we did a lot of mistakes on passes. It was not a good day." Lampard, who has delighted fans by bringing youth team players into the senior squad, felt able to give Premier League debuts to two more local teenage players who joined the club as young children.

Attacking midfielder Fausto Anjorin came on for Willian and Armando Broja, born in Slough but who plays for Albania's under-21 team, replaced Giroud for the last five minutes. Midfielder Billy Gilmour, 18, also started



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus (R) is tackled by Manchester United's English defender Aaron Wan-Bissaka (C) and Manchester United's English defender Harry Maguire during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Manchester City at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

the game after a fine performance in the team's 2-0 FA Cup win over Everton's neighbours Liverpool last Tuesday.

Lampard said the young players brought energy to the team but he needed to keep a balance and the senior players also performed on Sunday with motivation, speed and confi-

dence. He singled out fine showings from Pedro, 32, and Giroud, 33. "We need to keep our feet on the ground but today we saw really good stuff," Lampard said. "The whole attitude and focus of the team was strong today...the application of the team today was spot on." — Reuters



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