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# Ban on weddings, diwanis; govt mulls imposing curfew

96 deportees among 298 flown to Egypt • MoI warns against hiring part-time maids

- 12 new coronavirus cases in Kuwait
- Penalties for home quarantine violators

- MoI won't tolerate violations of gathering ban
- Expat arrested for selling COVID-19 test devices



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, accompanied by Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan, tours a Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company storage facility yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 2)

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a number of decrees yesterday banning social gatherings including weddings and parties as part of preventative measures against the coronavirus. The decrees prevent large non-family gatherings and receptions in halls and in homes. Gatherings in public and private diwanis are also included in the new measures. Police will be tasked to enforce the decrees, arrest violators and send them for interrogation and trial. The measures will be implemented as part of nationwide efforts to prevent the further spread of the disease.

The interior ministry later yesterday affirmed it will not tolerate violations of the health authorities' ban on gatherings of people, with the objective of curbing the spread of coronavirus. The ministry's public relations department, in a statement to the press, urged the public to abide by resolutions enforcing the ban in a bid to avoid penalties - either a fine of KD 50 to KD 200 or imprisonment of

up to three months, or both. Police forces will make sure the public abide by the ban and will not tolerate violations, it said.

Kuwait appears to be headed to impose a curfew in a bid to contain the coronavirus, as National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday the Cabinet will discuss in its meeting today the possibility of imposing a curfew. Ghanem told reporters that MPs have asked him to convey messages to the prime minister that special consideration should be made for elderly people who live alone and make it easy to allow their relatives to reach them.

The speaker told reporters after a group of lawmakers met Minister of Social Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel that MPs also called for imposing strict curfew in areas where there are problems and poor compliance of government directives to stay at home, and a lax curfew in other areas. Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh has repeatedly warned that if people do not comply with directives to stay at home, the government will impose a curfew.

Continued on Page 16

## Schools call to end academic year, seek fees

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait Union of Private Schools urged Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi to issue a decisive decision concerning concluding the school year as soon as possible so that related measures could be taken, according to a letter sent by the union's chairman Omar Al-Ghurair to the Cabinet. In a meeting with Harbi yesterday, the union stressed the need to protect private schools' financial rights if a decision is made to conclude the 2019-2020 academic year, which requires parents to pay the remaining fees in full so that schools can pay salaries, rent and other expenses.

The union urged the state to compensate private school owners for the financial losses they could suffer so that they can pay their dues in case parents do not pay the remaining fees. In addition, the union urged Harbi to accredit the results of the first semester as the final results for the 2019-2020 academic year. "We had a similar successful experience on merging semesters after the liberation (in 1991) when two school years were merged into one," the union elaborated, calling for allowing teaching and administrative staff to leave as soon as possible to help the government focus on fighting the coronavirus epidemic and alleviate the burdens exerted in fighting the virus and power consumption.

The union also expressed objection to the idea of e-learning on grounds that students are not fully trained to use the system, the lack of student-teacher interaction and the lack of a clear assessment and follow-up methodology to be used. The union warned against resuming the 2019-2020 school year under the current

Continued on Page 16

## Global virus infections top 200,000 cases

PARIS: The number of global coronavirus infections shot past 200,000 yesterday, as governments across Europe, North America and Asia rolled out tough measures to put the brakes on the ferocious spread of the deadly pandemic. Worldwide fatalities topped 8,000 and more deaths have now been recorded in Europe, the new virus epicenter, than in Asia since the outbreak first emerged in China in December.

From Belgium to Britain and the United States, governments across the

world have imposed draconian lockdown measures, forcing unprecedented social change and sending financial markets into a tailspin. The European Union sealed its borders yesterday, barring travellers from outside the bloc for 30 days to try to slow the rapid spread of the virus. Europe has now recorded 3,437 deaths - including 2,503 in Italy - leapfrogging Asia's 3,384 fatalities, according to an AFP tally.

There are more than 79,000 cases across Europe, with Italy, Spain and France leading infections and fatalities. The number of people infected by COVID-19 in Spain soared past 13,700 yesterday with the number of deaths rising to almost 600, government data showed. "We have 13,716 cases in Spain, which is 2,538 more than yesterday, which implies an

Continued on Page 16

## Yemeni women sew masks in face of virus

SANAA: More than a decade after it closed, 20 Yemeni women have revived the war-torn country's oldest factory to make face masks in anticipation of an outbreak of the new coronavirus. The situation is especially fraught because Yemen's health system has all but collapsed following years of conflict. In the factory in the capital Sanaa, rows of desks line a cavernous hall with women in black niqab and white gloves hunched over sewing machines meticulously assembling medical masks. For them, the situation feels like a race against time to prepare for the kind of outbreak that is already stretching wealthy, stable countries to the limit.

"We have been working on the masks since Monday and, thank God, we started working on them before the disease reaches us as a precau-



SANAA: Yemeni women make facemasks at a textile factory in the capital on March 16, 2020. — AFP

tionary measure, without the need to import from outside," mask maker Faten Al-Masoudi told AFP. "I am willing to work here for free for the health of our children, infants and women," added Masoudi who, like all the women, does not receive a regular salary but is paid per mask. In another section, one woman sanitized plastic bags as another filled them with masks.

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## Coronavirus can survive for days on some surfaces

WASHINGTON: The novel coronavirus can survive on some surfaces for days or in the air for several hours, according to a US-government funded study published Tuesday. Scientists found that the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease had similar levels of viability outside the body to its predecessor that caused SARS. This means that other factors like greater transmission between people with no symptoms might be why the current pandemic is far greater than the SARS outbreak of 2002-2003.

The new paper was published in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) and carried out by scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), University of California, Los Angeles and Princeton.

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KABUL: A volunteer wearing a hazmat suit and facemask is reflected in a mirror while spraying disinfectant inside a restaurant yesterday. — AFP



## Local

# Prime Minister calls for providing assistance for Kuwaitis abroad

## Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled holds videoconference with Kuwaiti ambassadors



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks during a videoconference with Kuwaiti ambassadors to Britain, Egypt, France and Italy.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attends a meeting with the top foreign ministry officials and senior staff. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah called yesterday for providing all necessary care and assistance to Kuwaiti citizens abroad until their safe return home. "We are facing a great responsibility and are managing a deep crisis, which required collaboration of efforts and to stay in contact with our citizens abroad," His Highness the Prime Minister said during a meeting with Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah.

He was meeting with the top ministry officials and senior staff to discuss following up of affairs of Kuwaiti citizens abroad amidst rapid spread of coronavirus. He hoped Kuwaiti diplomatic missions help facilitate the return of Kuwaiti citizens to their homeland as soon as possible. His Highness the Prime Minister said the country was managing the coronavirus crisis in line with instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber

Al-Sabah.

He said Sheikh Dr Ahmad briefed him about the emergency team within the ministry to coordinate efforts to reach out citizens in the five continents. His Highness the Prime Minister then held a videoconference with Kuwaiti ambassadors to Britain, Egypt, France and Italy to follow up on their efforts to provide health care for citizens until their return.

Also yesterday, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah held a meeting with his assistants at the foreign ministry's building to discuss how diplomatic missions abroad were following up affairs of Kuwaiti citizens. The meeting, attended by Khaled Al-Jarallah, touched upon measures to help citizens in the foreign countries amidst spread of coronavirus.

Separately, Kuwait's Embassy in Manama called on citizens in Bahrain to follow preventive measures issued by the authorities in Bahrain and aimed at confronting spread of coronavirus. The embassy, in



### Foreign Minister meets assistants

## Premier checks govt's food security efforts

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held a meeting yesterday with Ministry of Commerce and Industry officials, as well as leaders of authorities affiliated to the ministry. Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan attended the meeting, which was held at the headquarters of the Public Authority for Industry to check procedures for securing food and commodities to citizens and residents as well as examine pre-emptive precautions in face of coronavirus.

During the meeting, His Highness the Prime Minister noted that he came to the department in line with instructions by His Highness the Amir to secure all needs for citizens and residents of the country and affirmed the government full support for any action that would help the ministry and the related bodies to fulfill their tasks. He expressed appreciation for noticeable presence of the ministry teams on the fields, their follow-up on the government precautions, namely activating the contingency scheme.

Moreover, he lauded efforts by the ministry, the industry authority, Kuwait Foods Company and Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company for securing such needs, affirming that the ministry decisions and circulars have been implemented to maintain reasonable prices of the commodities and ensure their availability everywhere in the country. He affirmed the pivotal role of the local producers for supplying the market with the goods and basic products. Later, His Highness the Prime Minister, accompanied by the Minister of Commerce, toured facilities of the flour companies and the Public

Warehousing Company to check on strategic stockpiles of imported necessities.

On Tuesday, Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri visited the Union of Fresh Dairy Producers to verify the sufficiency of milk stock in the country. During the tour, Jabri, who doubles as Minister of State for Youth Affairs, was briefed on the union's efforts to provide the market with necessary dairy products under these emergency circumstances in Kuwait, which is fighting the novel coronavirus. Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) said in a statement. The union's chairman Abdulkhaleem Al-Ahmad was quoted by the statement as stressing eagerness to throw much weight behind all state agencies which are struggling to preclude the spread of the novel coronavirus. Meanwhile PAAAFR's Board Chairman and Director-General Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah also visited the union to make sure that it is ready to answer the public needs of dairy products nationwide, according to the statement. —KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is seen during the tour. —KUNA photos



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs a meeting with his assistants at the foreign ministry's building.

a press statement, urged Kuwaitis to contact the mission if they need assistance at: +973-3220-0300. Bahrain had announced suspension of gov-

ernment and private schools, while forcing all arrivals to stay in home quarantine. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah poses for a group photo during a tour at a Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company facility yesterday.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is seen during the tour. —KUNA photos

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 142 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With the exception of four cases in critical condition, all cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while hundreds have been discharged after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 15 people have 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. Meanwhile, Kuwait requires all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center

to test people for possible infection.

### Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights to and from the Gulf Arab state starting March 13 and until further notice, with the exception of cargo flights. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to March 26, with work resuming on March 29, while entities providing vital services will remain open. The government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed restaurants to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people.

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 March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs); first from March 1 to March 12, and later extended it until March 29. In the mean-

time, the Civil Service Commission suspended the biometric fingerprint system for staff attendance until further notice.

### Visa suspension

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. Previously, 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.

The Civil Service Commission 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.

### Types of quarantine

All arrivals to Kuwait from Egypt, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Italy, Iran, Iraq, Germany, France, Spain, the United States and the United

Kingdom are to be placed under quarantine for 14 days. Meanwhile, all arrivals to Kuwait International Airport coming from other countries must enter 14-day mandatory home self-quarantine.

### 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

# Coronavirus correlation to rising temperatures in Kuwait unknown

## Kuwait's action against coronavirus continues as planned: Ministry

**KUWAIT:** It is yet unknown whether the rising temperature in the State of Kuwait during summer will have an effect on the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), said a Health Ministry official yesterday. In a press conference, Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad indicated that there is no reliable study so far that correlates the decrease of coronavirus spread to increasing temperatures. There are regions in the world that had increasing temperatures yet the virus still continues to spread, noted the spokesman.

Whether patients contracting the coronavirus will have immunity, Dr Sanad revealed that in China, 14 percent of tests done on recovering patients had shown that symptoms did not return after hospital discharge; however, such data is still inconclusive. In Kuwait, the Health Ministry continues to be vigilant and some 105 clinics as well as other health facilities work throughout the day and night to fend off the spread of the virus, he said. In regards to those who recovered in Kuwait, currently at 15, Dr Sanad revealed that their ages vary, adding that what is needed now was to increase campaign of awareness in the country to vanquish the disease.

**Health precautions**

Meanwhile, Dr Sanad said that health precautions and preventive measures that have been taken by Kuwait to prevent

the spread of the coronavirus are proceeding according to plans. He further indicated that these measures included discovery of new cases, examining those who got close to persons contaminated with the germ and tracking down how the infection proceeded.

There are 161 medical systems in the world, including Kuwait, facing this challenge, Dr Sanad said, adding that a report by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that number of the cases worldwide was larger than the figure inside China, epicenter of the breakout. The number of registered COVID-19 patients outside China reached 101,000 in contrast to 81,000 in China, he said, also indicating that the situation in the large Asian nation was tending to get "stable."



**Twelve new cases in Kuwait**

**New cases**

Twelve new cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) were discovered in Kuwait within the last 24 hours, bringing the total of infections to 142, Dr Sanad had revealed earlier yesterday during the press conference. He added that out of the 142 in total, 15 cases recovered and 127 are still receiving treatment. He indicated that there are four cases still in the ICU with one stable and three in critical condition. Some 573 individuals had finished the quarantine period, he affirmed. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad speaks during a press conference yesterday. —KUNA

## Doctor explains psychological effects of social distancing

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** The majority of Kuwait's population is home-bound during this present situation, whether due to home quarantine requirements or on the instructions of the ministry of health to stay at home to prevent the spread of coronavirus. This long period of inactivity, which has reached almost three weeks and started with school closures, has become annoying for many people, and it may also have negative psychological effects on them.

According to Dr Khaled Al-Muhanadi, a psychologist at the Behavioral Healthcare Center, the government's measures are called social distancing. "This is a way of managing the infection that aims to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases. The purpose of social distancing is to eliminate the possibility of contact with persons carrying this virus, which will limit its spread. Social distancing includes the closure of schools and other institutions and requesting people to stay at home. This procedure proved its efficacy in the past centuries," he told Kuwait Times.

Social distancing may cause psychological effects. "The most significant effect is fear and anxiety among people - which is called panic - that results in chaos and makes people behave illogically, similar to what we witnessed in the rush to buy food from supermarkets, although the government assured people of enough supplies," stressed Muhanadi.

Depression is another result of social distancing. "During this period, we have noticed that more cases depend on medication rather than psychological and behavioral treatments. This is normal due to a lack of psychological awareness campaigns to make people and officials aware on the way of dealing with the public



**Dr Khaled Al-Muhanadi**

during this crisis, which should be issuing decisions gradually and present them to the public in a way that won't cause panic," he explained.

Muhanadi had some advice for people in quarantine or engaged in social distancing. "They should do distance work or learning to fill their time. Parents should also prepare special activities for their children inside the house or their front yards daily, such as reading, playing games or explaining this crisis in a positive way," he pointed out. He also had a message for officials and influencers. "They should post more positive messages on social media instead of exaggerated negative messages or fake news that cause panic and fear. I also advise them to stop making fun of this crisis," he added.

"People shouldn't be careless, as after this crisis ends, they may suffer either from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or careless indifference. Some people may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This includes psychological diseases such as fear, systematic anxiety or fear of germs and microbes, which is obsessive hygiene. People are affected differently depending on their personality, age and the family environment they live in. After the crisis ends, some people who suffered from these symptoms will become normal again, while some will need to see a psychologist or psychiatrist if the case requires medication treatment," stated Muhanadi.

## Clarification on store closures

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Municipality issued a clarification for private sector closures as follows:

**The following stores and locations shall be closed:**

1. Malls.
2. Barber shops and beauty salons.
3. Health clubs, gyms and swim-

ming pools.

4. Entertainment halls and children's games.
5. Friday market and Souq Al-Mubarakiya.

**The following are exempted from closing:**

1. Administrative offices in upper floors of malls.
2. All types of stores with an entrance facing the street or yards while all doors that are not overlooking the street should be locked.

3. All food stores and supermarkets inside malls provided that special entrances are designated for them.
4. Shopping centers of all types belonging to co-operative societies.

**Restaurants and cafes may not:**

1. Serve food inside the place and limit service to take-out and delivery orders only.
2. The number of customers should not exceed five at a time and there must be a one meter distance between them in a line.
3. Shisha is strictly banned.

## No injuries among staff in power plant fire

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** No casualties have been reported in a recent fire reported in part of Sulaibiya power plant, Chairman of the Ministry of Electricity and Water's (MEW) employees syndicate Duajj Khalifa Al-Azmi said yesterday. Azmi added that he called MEW assistant under-secretary for power grids Jassem Al-Nouri to make sure staff members were safe and that there were no casualties. He also urged MEW officials to enhance safety precautions at all MEW facilities.

"Repetition of accidents lately proves that due to their jobs' nature, MEW employees are subject to dan-

ger all the time, which requires providing a safe working environment at all MEW worksites," Azmi underlined. Notably, MEW announced resuming power supplies to affected areas in Sulaibiya after partial power disconnection in the early hours of yesterday due to the fire at Sulaibiya AW plant. MEW added that the fire was contained and that 177 megawatts of the 210 megawatts of lost power was restored, and that work is in progress to restore full capacity as soon as possible.

In other news, Meteorologist Mohammed Karam forecast today's weather to be moderate with 10-25 kph northwesterly winds and expected clouds to accumulate tomorrow evening and light to moderate rain by Saturday morning. Karam added that since Tuesday, Kuwait has been affected by the seasonal low African front accompanied by over 50-kph southeasterly winds and thunderstorms all over Kuwait.

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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A silhouette of Kuwait City's skyline taken from Doha in this file photo. — Photo by Mustafa Kankrollwala (KUNA)

# Taxi drivers hope daily payment will be waived by operators

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Taxi drivers are supposed to benefit from the suspension of public transportation in Kuwait (KPTC, Citybus and KGL), but this is not the case. According to a cabbie named Murthi, they hardly get passengers, and if they do, it's barely enough for sustaining daily fuel and food expenses. "How can we benefit if there are no passengers? Compared to regular days, we are struggling hard because we do not have regular passengers. If this situation continues, we'll end up on the streets," he told Kuwait Times.

"How can we pay our house rent? How can we have food on the table? The worst thing is that taxi operators still want to be paid daily. I have to pay KD 7.5 daily - I went to my boss yesterday to ask for help and if he could extend the payment duration since we do not have much customers. But he didn't listen and threatened to throw us in jail if we do not make the payment," Murthi lamented. "All we ask is to at least give us more time to pay the amount - it's hard to produce KD 7.5 daily nowadays."

In Kuwait, many taxi operators and companies own the cabs, and provide them to drivers in return for a daily payment. Very few taxi companies hire drivers on a regular monthly salary. "We are appealing to anyone who can help us. I hope the government intervenes and waives this amount for two months like some have done with house rents," he said.

James, another taxi driver, also hoped his taxi company will heed the demands of many of his colleagues. "I hope the government will oblige taxi operators to stop collecting the money during these slow days. Business is down and we



KUWAIT: Taxi cars lined up at open yards in Kuwait yesterday.

need some relief as well," he said.

"There are few passengers now, and those that are taking taxis are low-income workers, because those who are still working have cars. Many people who are still reporting to work are menial laborers - they cannot afford to pay even KD 1.5. So we encourage them to share a cab; but remember, only three passengers are allowed in a taxi, so we cannot do more and need the support of the government," James said.

## Kuwait oil price down to \$31.89 pb

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti crude oil dropped 27 cents to \$31.89 per barrel Tuesday against \$32.16 pb Monday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In global markets, crude oil price dropped below \$30 pb Tuesday amid economic growth stagnation and falling demand for the oil due to a market glut and ongoing jitters worldwide, caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Energy demand drastically dropped after many states took stringent measures to stem spread of the virus that has taken 7,500 lives.

Countries closed border checkpoints, ports and airports and advised citizens to restrict movement locally and across borders except for vital necessities. Meanwhile, forward contracts of the Brent crude decreased \$1.32 settling at \$28.73 pb. It was the first time that the crude benchmark closed lower than \$30 pb since 2016. American West Texas Intermediate crude fell \$1.75 to \$26.95 pb. Saudi Energy Ministry announced on Tuesday that the kingdom exports of the crude oil would increase to



more than 10 million barrels per day.

The OPEC daily basket price went down 27 cents a barrel on Tuesday to settle at \$30.36 pb, compared with \$30.63 pb the day before, the organization said yesterday. The annual average of the OPEC basket price hit \$52.43 pb last year, it said in its daily bulletin. The OPEC Reference Basket of Crudes (ORB) is made up of Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Oriente (Ecuador), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Meroy (Venezuela). —KUNA

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## Local

# UAE bars entry to visitors, Saudi Arabia limits private sector work

**DUBAI/RIYADH:** The United Arab Emirates said yesterday it would bar foreign visitors and banned citizens from going abroad, while Saudi Arabia included most of its private sector in a work suspension to battle the spread of the coronavirus in the Gulf region.

Kuwait recorded 12 more cases yesterday, including six Kuwaitis, an American resident and a Spanish resident who had all been to Britain. This took the total number of infections in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council to more than 1,100.

The UAE, a major air transit center and the region's tourism and business hub, yesterday banned Emiratis from travelling abroad and said it would suspend the issuance of visas on arrival from today until further notice. It had already barred those who did not qualify for visas on arrival.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have already been under virtual lockdown after temporarily suspending all international flights last week and closing most public venues. Qatar, which has the highest number of cases in the Arab Gulf region at 442, and Oman have banned entry of foreigners.

Muscat, which has also prevented citizens from travelling abroad, asked travel operators to advise foreign tourists against staying in the sultanate. Oman also suspended public transportation, excluding buses serving remote areas, while Qatar said 80 percent of government employees would work from home.

The moves are the latest in a series of exceptional measures by Gulf states to combat the outbreak, including cancelling the Umrah pilgrimage in

Saudi Arabia and closing mosques, malls and restaurants across the region.

## Work closures

Saudi Arabia, the largest Arab economy, suspended work in most of the private sector for 15 days and directed businesses to implement work-from-home policies. The human resource ministry said businesses should close main offices, reduce staff levels at secondary locations, limit staff contact and monitor them for symptoms of infection.

It outlined exceptions for companies providing vital food and health services as well as utility services for government agencies. Pregnant women, workers over 55 and those with severe pre-existing conditions must be given 14 days additional leave.

Police cars patrolled streets in several Saudi cities, asking people to leave parks and public areas, local media said. "Young people, you are banned from being in public rest areas!" police in the northern Tabuk province repeatedly said through loudspeakers, videos posted on social media showed.

Earlier this week, the government suspended work for public sector employees beyond health and security and halted its regular cabinet meetings, while the central bank implemented work-from-home measures for banks.

Oman's central bank became the latest to offer stimulus packages to shield the region's hydrocarbon-dependent economies, saying yesterday it would provide some 8 billion rials (\$20.8 billion) in extra liquidity to banks.

Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said the regional approach to fighting the coronavirus had so far been "uneven" and that much more should be done. Improved access to information would allow the WHO to track its spread closely and quickly apply proven public health measures, Mandhari told reporters in a video-conference briefing.

"Unfortunately, even today, as the situation is becoming critical, information on cases is insufficiently communicated by countries to WHO," Mandhari said, referring to "under-reporting on the part of some countries with regard to positive cases."

The WHO had seen efforts to strengthen surveillance, scale up testing and support families who are isolating relatives or in quarantine, he added, but some states were not fully engaged. "Frankly we are seeing uneven approaches across the region. While we have observed impressive progress in several countries, not all are yet applying the whole of government and whole of society approach. The time to act is now. I cannot stress enough the level of urgency."

Across much of the region outside Iran - which is one of the worst affected countries worldwide - the number of confirmed cases has been relatively low compared to east Asia and Europe but WHO officials fear real figures could be considerably higher than reported due to a lack of testing and a prevalence of mild cases.

So far, Mandhari said just over 18,000 cases

## Animal lovers hit hard by coronavirus market closures

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Many animals in Kuwait are at risk of starvation or death after the government closed the Friday Market due to the coronavirus outbreak. The closure of the market by the Municipality last week as a precautionary measure was a blow to pet owners in Kuwait. Many animal lovers in Kuwait were affected by the decision, as shops that sell wholesale animal food were also included in the closure decision.

Manar Sahili, who has five cats, told Kuwait Times that the decision has badly hit her finances. "I have to now buy food and cat litter at retail prices, which is expensive. I can't find bags of cat litter larger than 10 liters in the market," she said. Sahili affirmed that the closure was the right thing to do, but said pet markets shouldn't be included because they are like supermarkets and co-ops. "Animals need food too," she argued.



**KUWAIT:** The entrance to the Friday Market closed by the Municipality.



**DUBAI:** A general view of construction projects in Dubai that require a big number of workers and are currently empty due to fears of the spread of the coronavirus in the Gulf emirate yesterday. —AFP

## Bahrain evacuates citizens

Many of the cases in the region are linked to travel to Iran, where the death toll from coronavirus has hit 1,135 and the number of infections 17,361 so far. Bahrain, which this week recorded the GCC's first death from the disease, will evacuate more citizens from the Iranian city of Mashhad with a second repatriation flight scheduled for today, a Bahraini official told Reuters.

He said the flight, using an Omani aircraft, had been delayed for a week while quarantine facilities were being prepared in Bahrain, where a main isola-

tion center has been set up on a barren island linked to the mainland by a causeway.

Gulf airlines have suspended dozens of routes as the coronavirus outbreak disrupts global travel. The UAE still allows entry of foreign diplomats and residents and foreign visitors can still enter Bahrain. Qatar and Oman continue to permit transit flights. Qatar Airways laid off about 200 Filipino staff in Qatar this week, Philippine Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello told Reuters. Dubai-based Emirates said it has asked pilots to take unpaid leave. —Reuters

## Border closures

Countries have to strike a balance between protecting health and minimizing economic and social disruption, he said, adding that border closures that can impede healthcare supplies and assistance were not generally recommended.

Two-thirds of countries in the region suffer from crises that have impacted health systems. Millions of refugees and displaced people living in camps could be especially vulnerable. UN agencies have released guidance about recommended action in such camps, said Rick Brennan, emergency director for the region.

At camps in northwest Syria, measures were being taken to improve surveillance systems, set up testing and establish isolation facilities for the sick, as well as accelerating outreach to community about the risks, he said. Asked about prisons, Brennan stopped short of advising the mass release of prisoners such as in Iran, but said authorities should implement measures such as spacing out beds within dormitories and reinforce hygiene measures.

"The general measures around hygiene and social distancing become even more important in overcrowded and congested settings such as prisons, camps, dormitories and elsewhere," said Brennan. —Reuters

It seems this decision hasn't only affected house pets, but also stray cats and dogs. Alia Al-Qassem, who has a daily routine of feeding stray cats on the streets, was frustrated by the decision, saying the closure made her to be less helpful towards these poor animals around Kuwait. "Instead of buying cat or dog food at a reasonable price, I pay a lot of money for a small amount of food, which means fewer animals to help. They are living creatures and the government must reconsider the decision," she said.

"I am seeing many animals on the streets now. People are abandoning their pets because they are afraid of the coronavirus, although the World Health Organization has said pets cannot transmit COVID-19 to people and there is no evidence that a dog, cat or any pet can transmit the virus," Qassem said. She urged people to wash their hands after handling animals, their food or waste, and practice good hygiene and clean up after their pets properly. Qassem also called on people to help helpless street animals, because as the coronavirus spreads, stray cats and dogs cannot find anyone to feed them.

Meanwhile, many animal activists are hoping the government will consider the situation of the animals trapped inside the Friday Market. Workers are still allowed to enter the place for an hour daily to feed, water and clean after the animals.



**A rabbit in a cage inside a shop at the birds market. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh**

## Mideast states must share more info on coronavirus cases: WHO

**CAIRO/GENEVA:** The World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday that Middle East states needed urgently to offer more information about coronavirus cases to help bolster the fight against the disease across the region.

Legalese

## COVID-19 Legalities - Part 1



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

We are in a time that is very different then what we are used to. Everyone in the world, regardless of age, color, gender, religion, nationality and so on, is being affected, in one way or another. On the bright side, as I always like to look at the brighter side, we are all in this together. We are hopefully doing good for our environment by staying in. We finally have time to slow down and reflect, and some of us are getting to spend more time with family (those working abroad alone, may God bless you and we hope you get to reunite with your family soon).

With that said, this is an unusual and unfortunate time for many, bringing out legal concerns that we have never had before, and therefore, my email has been flooding with questions from everyone such as:

Can I be forced to take leave at this time?

Am I entitled to a bonus for being the only one from many colleagues working?

What do I do as a small business owner if I cannot fulfill orders at this time?

What do I do if I cannot fulfill a legal obligation in an agreement?

As a small business, should I pay rent, even though I am not operating right now?

What are the implications of sharing fake news or rumors at the current times?

These are all questions that although most have some legal framework we can follow to answer, it is still a new time. And as a legal practitioner, I do expect that governments and legal bodies will intervene and bring about new frameworks and laws. I will start answering the above questions in a set of articles starting next week. You can always send me other concerns to fajer@ftl-legal.com.

For now though, I do want to say, be aware of new bylaws that are coming out on a daily basis. You can get updates on Kuwait Times Instagram account (@Kuwaittimes). Also, stay home, wash your hands, spread positivity, be aware of others' needs, and be good and kind to others.

## News in brief

### Kout Hotel quarantine sterilized

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Finance is sterilizing and clearing Al-Kout hotel after the Ministry of Health ended its use of the facility as a quarantine, an official said yesterday, to prepare for its use by guests. Adel Al-Manna, Finance Assistant Undersecretary for Services, said the sterilization process was underway to hand over the hotel. Al-Manna said the process was taking place in coordination with the ministry of health. The finance ministry is responsible for the quarantines, which are sterilized and cleaned once quarantine ends.

### Citizens' evacuation

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Airways is ready to receive orders to evacuate more citizens from abroad, Board Chairman Youssef Al-Jassem said yesterday. In a press release, Jassem stressed that the Kuwait Airways' fleets, staff, and crew members will answer the call of duty whenever needed. He affirmed that Kuwait Airways will use all of its assets to serve the Kuwaiti people in these trying times.

### Violators penalized

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said yesterday that three commercial stores and a number of vegetable vendors' stands were closed for violating regulations against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The ministry said in a statement that teams inspected 238 pharmacies, issued 72 penalty notifications to commercial stores for breaching laws and allowed re-opening nine others after receiving pledges to tackle the violations. The inspection teams have also examined 23 branches of supply centers for the Flour Mills Company and bakeries to ensure easy sales and work. It warned traders against bids to take advantage of the current extraordinary circumstances in the country.

### Legal action

**KUWAIT:** Since coronavirus emerged in Kuwait, a total of 23 accounts on social media have been taken to the Public Prosecution for posting misinformation and panicking people, said Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri, adding that his ministry would resolutely face these accounts for stirring public panic and tensions. Meanwhile, the minister reassured that the Gulf country has enough food stock to meet public needs for several months to come, citing identical remarks by other ministers in this regard. He added that all state agencies are on high alert for fighting the novel coronavirus, with the virus response team trying hard to put the situation under control.

### Stiff measures

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Public Prosecutor Dherar Al-Asousi warned that stiff measures would be taken against rumormongers who insist on posting misinformation and fabrications about coronavirus on social media, websites and media. He vowed in a press statement that anyone who may circulate false data and news about measures taken by state agencies to fight coronavirus, or air posts that could stir public panic or undermine state morale and public morals would be inevitably brought to legal accountability. He added that the Public Prosecution had received several reports from the ministries of interior and information against some individuals and websites in this regard. The top Kuwaiti prosecutor, therefore, urged mass media and websites to ensure accuracy and to get information from official sources. —KUNA





Indian guru's tips to ward off coronavirus anger professionals

## China to expel US journalists as media freedom row grows

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IN THE AIR: This undated handout from Vietnam Airlines released yesterday shows a crew member in a protective suit, as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, serving passengers onboard a flight between Europe and Vietnam.—AFP

# 'Worse than 9/11': Virus hits airlines

## 'Most airlines in the world will be bankrupt'

**NEW YORK:** Fears of massive bankruptcies and calls for emergency bailouts swept global airlines yesterday as a top US official warned the coronavirus crisis threatens the industry even more than the September 11 attacks, which saw US airspace shut down entirely. Italy moved to take over insolvent Alitalia while Sweden and Denmark offered 275 million euros in guarantees to help prop up Scandinavian carrier SAS.

In the United States, airlines sought \$50 billion in help from the government as the White House prepared a reportedly \$850 billion plan to support the entire economy. "This is worse than 9/11 for the airline industry - they are ground to a halt," US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said. Industry officials said most airlines face burning through their cash reserves in three months or less. And airlines warned that vital air cargo could be impacted by the shutdown of 185,000 passenger flights around the world.

"Most airlines in the world will be bankrupt" by the end of May, Market intelligence firm CAPA warned. "If the crisis will continue at that intensity, it's clear we will see a consolidation," Alexandre de Juniac, director general and CEO of the International Air Transport Association, said in Geneva.

### Alitalia nationalized

More airlines slashed flights Tuesday as millions of passengers cancelled travel to self-quarantine and countries blocked arrivals to stem the spread of the COVID-19 infection. Belgium-based Brussels Airlines, a Lufthansa subsidiary which operates 48 aircraft, suspended all flights for at least a month on Tuesday. Lufthansa has already cut back flights by 90 percent.

In Australia, Qantas slashed international capacity by 90

percent early Tuesday, as the government required that anyone arriving from abroad needs to isolate themselves for 14 days to be sure they are not carrying the virus. Italy's government said it would take over Alitalia, the former flag carrier already mired in bankruptcy negotiations since 2017. "At a time like this, a flag carrier gives the government more leeway," said Deputy Economy Minister Laura Castelli. "We all saw the difficulties our compatriots faced in returning to Italy.



### Europe airports bracing for 'near total collapse'

Our decision stems from this."

Even with the takeover, the plan was to furlough 4,000 of Alitalia's 11,000 employees. In Russia, Alexander Neradko, head of the federal agency Rosaviation, said their airlines, hit beginning in February with the shutdown of flights to China, the original epicenter of the virus, were also in trouble. "There is a rising risk of bankruptcies by airlines that are in a tough financial situation," Neradko said. "The government is actively discussing how to support airlines," said Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov.

cies being implemented. This opens up a new avenue for malicious actors using phishing emails or "social engineering" to gain access or steal sensitive information. "When someone is working from their home it is a similar threat profile as at an airport or a Starbucks, you just don't have that protection you might have in the workplace," DeGrippo said. "And if we're at home with our family where we feel safe, you might see a family member hop on to do homework, and might not understand the security controls. Keeping mom's and dad's computer for mom and dad is the right thing to do."

### Preying on fear, sympathy

Tom Pendergast of the security and privacy training firm MediaPRO said many of the millions of people adjusting to the new landscape are unprepared for teleworking. "It's one thing if people have been working remotely with equipment that has been properly configured," Pendergast said. "It's different for people who haven't had that experience." Attackers are taking advantage of people's fears about COVID-19 with scare tactics to get people to click on malicious links or attachments, but also playing on sympathies with fake crowdfunding pages purported to be for people who

of compassion, which are nonetheless decisive and important - for example, a hot dish, a caress, a hug, a phone call."

Italian rules instruct everyone to keep one meter apart while in public but say nothing about what people can do at home. Most business have been closed and public events cancelled since last week. Italian streets stand deserted except for the few who go out shopping or walk their dogs. The Argentine-born pope has made no secret of his own discomfort at having to communicate with the world's 1.3 billion Catholics via livestream.

The Vatican's Saint Peter's Square has also been sealed off. He complained of feeling like he was sitting in a "cage" this month while delivering his first Sunday Angelus Prayer into a camera

**Airports also desperate**  
Brian Pearce, economist of IATA, said their early March estimate of \$113 billion in losses to the global industry now looks very low. "Seventy-five percent of the airlines we have looked at have less than three months of cash to pay their fixed costs," Pearce said. Such numbers put aviation in perhaps the top position of industries requiring a bailout, like banks in the 2008 financial crisis. "Connectivity is crucial," said the IATA's de Juniac.

"The world will get through this crisis," he said. "And when it does it will need a functioning air transport sector. Without financial relief that is not guaranteed." Airports too said they were under threat. The Airports Council International Europe said they were bracing for a "near total collapse" of traffic, wiping out earnings while they hold high fixed costs. ACI Europe president Jost Lammers called in a letter to the European Union Tuesday for urgent financial support.

"This funding needs to be available under similar conditions as those that will be considered for airlines," Lammers wrote. In the United States, however, some bristled at again, like in 2008, using taxpayer funds to rescue industries and well-paid executives who took excessive risks with their companies. Critics said US airlines, rather than build up cash reserves, used nearly all their profits in recent years to buy back shares to prop up share prices. According to Bloomberg, over the past decade US airlines used nearly 96 percent of their free cash flow to buy back shares, with American Airlines the most aggressive, paying out \$12.5 billion. "We cannot permit American and other airlines to use federal assistance, whether labeled a bailout or not, to weather the coronavirus crisis and then return to business as usual," wrote Columbia Law School professor Tim Wu in The New York Times.—AFP

have fallen ill, he added.

Pendergast said health care organizations are especially susceptible to schemes such as ransomware because "they are less likely to shut down their systems by refusing to pay." This was highlighted with a major hospital in the Czech Republic hit with ransomware following an email campaign with a coronavirus "awareness" message, according to media reports.

"The COVID-19 scare has proven lucrative for cybercriminals in recent weeks as healthcare institutions scramble to test patients, treat the infected and protect their own staff from the contagion," said a blog post from Filip Truta of the security firm BitDefender. "Healthcare infrastructures are highly susceptible to hacker attacks because of lax cybersecurity skills and safeguards."

### Stepped-up warnings

The potential for costly cyberattacks has prompted warnings for stepped up vigilance. The French public-private cybersecurity alliance this week warned businesses to be alert for faked emails related to purported orders or bank transfers, or phone calls aimed at obtained financial account information.—AFP

instead of out of his Vatican window facing thousands of faithful. Italy was the first country in Europe to be seriously hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Its 2,503 official COVID-19 deaths account for more than half of those reported outside China.

Some of the "social isolation" measures now being unrolled across the rest of Europe and parts of the United States have been in effect in Italy's northern epicenter of the virus since last month. An Italian government hinted yesterday that some measure such as school closures will be extended past their April 3 expiration date. "I do not exclude it," Transport Minister Paola De Micheli said. The pope himself has been suffering from a cold since last month.—AFP

## Iran rivalry takes the stage at Saudi music festival

**AL-ULA:** Exile Iranian musicians critical of religious hardliners in Tehran converged this month to perform in the most unlikely locale: Saudi Arabia. Taking place amid heightened tensions between the regional enemies, the event was promoted as cultural dialogue but also allowed the kingdom a subtle dig at Tehran, with Saudi-owned MBC Persia airing the concerts for Iranian viewers.

The concerts in the Al-Ula desert site were among the last big public events in Saudi Arabia before authorities imposed a virtual lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. They featured two of Iran's most celebrated singers, Ebi and Leila Forouhar, alongside stars like Sasy, Arash and Andy. "Never. I never thought one day I would be able to sing in Saudi Arabia ... but I'm very, very happy that I'm here," Ebi, who flew in from Los Angeles, told Reuters.

Some of the performers have previously attracted scorn from Iranian authorities, including for some overtly political tunes, and their Saudi tour drew criticism on social media. "If someone goes and sings in Saudi Arabia, which is the symbol of hostility (against Iran) and the direct source of many problems of Iranians, the most polite word to describe this person is 'traitor,'" tweeted one user. Ebi, whom fans describe as "Iran's Frank Sinatra", sang in Farsi, drawing applause from a dancing crowd of Saudis and invited Iranian guests that only partially filled the 500-capacity theatre.

He dedicated one song to women, including two bandmates on stage: "I wish one day the ladies in my country are allowed to perform on a stage." Saudi Arabia has enacted social reforms to open up the conservative Muslim kingdom, including allowing concerts and letting women drive and enter sports stadiums. Yet it remains locked in a decades-long rivalry with Iran that has played out in regional conflicts.—Reuters

Asked about the concerts' political undertone, performers and attendees said they preferred to focus on the tunes. "I try not to get so much involved into the politics," said Swedish-Iranian pop singer Arash. "This is not my work, my work is to make people happy." Wisam Kabli, a 30-year-old consumer goods importer from Jeddah, said he came to learn something new and that geopolitics should be set aside at least for an evening. "Music doesn't know language, doesn't know religion, doesn't know country," he said.—Reuters

## Threat: Surge in COVID-themed cyberattacks

**WASHINGTON:** It may look like an email from a supervisor with an attachment on the new "work from home policy." But it could be a cleverly designed scheme to hack into your network. The abrupt move of millions of people to working remotely has sparked an unprecedented volume of attacks to trick people into giving up credentials to attackers, according to security researchers.

"We've never seen anything like this," said Sherrod DeGrippo, head of threat research for the security firm Proofpoint. "We are seeing campaigns with message volumes up to hundreds of thousands which are leveraging this coronavirus." The pandemic has created a perfect storm for cyberattacks, with millions of people working in unfamiliar, less secure circumstances and eager for information about the virus and new organizational poli-

## Pope urges hugs, and phone calls to fight off isolation

**VATICAN CITY:** Pope Francis stressed yesterday the importance of families and friends making small gestures such as hugs and phone calls during times of isolation in a pandemic. "We must rediscover the concrete nature of small things, of making small gestures toward those around us - family, friends," the 83-year-old pontiff told the La Repubblica newspaper. "They are gestures of tenderness, of affection,



RIYADH: An electronic billboard displays a message by the Saudi health ministry advising people to wash their hands for 40 seconds as a precaution against COVID-19 coronavirus disease, along Tahli street in the centre of the Saudi capital Riyadh.—AFP



## International

# After head start on virus, Africa begins clampdown

## Nigeria bans entry from 13 countries to combat coronavirus

**NAIROBI:** African countries have been among the last to be hit by the global coronavirus epidemic, but as cases rise, many nations are now taking strict measures to block the deadly illness. Here is a snapshot of the situation on a continent plagued by weak health systems and shortages of doctors and hospital beds, but where many countries have top-level expertise in fighting contagious disease.

### Slow to arrive, but now spreading

The first case in Africa was recorded in Egypt on February 14, and by early March there were only two more cases in Algeria and Nigeria. Experts initially wondered why the continent appeared to have so few cases—and some speculated whether the virus was spreading undetected. Since then, confirmed cases have spread steadily and in a little over a week, more than 20 new countries have been infected, bringing the total to 30 of 54 African nations with 450 known cases of the virus. The worst-affected countries are in North Africa, where local transmission is now taking place and 10 deaths have been confirmed.

Egypt has recorded 166 cases and four deaths, and Algeria 60 cases and also four deaths. Sudan and Morocco each have one death. Economic powerhouse South Africa has 62 cases, many of which were imported, although the virus is now spreading in the community. In East Africa, home to hubs Ethiopia and Kenya, there are a total of 20 cases across six countries. Senegal is the worst-affected in West Africa with 27 cases—most of whom were infected by a single citizen who had returned from Italy.

### Travel restrictions

Watching from afar as disaster unfolds in Asia and Europe—where many are suffering the consequences of being slow to act—some African countries have wasted no time in taking drastic measures. Air traffic in particular has been hard hit as nations across the continent realized their first cases had come from citizens returning from travel abroad in infected countries.

In comparison to many countries in the West, measures have been decisive and very strict. Morocco has stopped all international flights “until further notice”, aside from special planes authorized to repatriate European tourists. Somalia, a country riven by decades of conflict, also banned all international flights—including for cargo—after confirming its first case. Humanitarian flights, however, will be allowed to proceed.

Chad, where no cases have been reported, has also shut its airports and borders with affected Sudan and Central African Republic. Similarly, neighboring Mali, also with no confirmed cases, has announced all commercial flights from virus-affected countries will be stopped. Guinea-Bissau is also set to halt all flights in and out of the country. Cape Verde is due to stop flights too, from virus-hit European countries, as well as Senegal, Nigeria, Brazil and the United States.

Others are banning flights and travelers depending on their origins. Senegal has blocked air links with seven European countries and the Middle East. Togo and Madagascar have taken similar measures.

Others like Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and Ivory Coast have blocked foreigners from high-risk countries—in some cases allowing those in who hold resident permits. Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana and Equatorial Guinea are among those insisting on self-quarantine for travelers from high-risk countries. Tourism has been hard-hit, including the cruise industry, with ships blocked by many countries including Madagascar, Senegal, Seychelles and Mauritius.



### Worst-affected countries are in North Africa

### Bans and cancellations

At least 13 countries on the continent have closed or are preparing to shut down their school systems all the way up to university level. This includes Kenya, Rwanda, Morocco, Egypt, Senegal, South Africa, Zambia, Equatorial Guinea and Ivory Coast. To add to this measure, Kenya has encouraged working from home, which has seen thousands streaming from the capital to their rural houses. Some countries have also taken strong measures regarding religious gatherings.

In Senegal, the powerful Muslim brotherhoods have suspended religious festivities planned for this month.

Tunisian authorities have suspended group prayers, including on Fridays. Major sporting and cultural events have also been hit by the wave of bans. The annual Bushfire music festival in Eswatini has been cancelled, while in South Africa, the popular AfrikaBurn festival will also not go ahead, while a plethora of sporting events have been blocked. Tunisia meanwhile is continuing with sporting events without spectators.

### Nigeria bans entry

Nigeria will from Friday ban entry to arrivals from 13 of the countries worst affected by the coronavirus epidemic, its Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) said. All countries on the list have more than 1,000 cases, and include the United States, Britain, Germany, China, Italy, Iran, South Korea and Japan, it said in a Twitter post yesterday. “We urge the public to restrict all non-essential travel to these countries,” it said, adding that the government was temporarily suspending the issuance of all visas on arrival. Nigeria has recorded eight confirmed coronavirus cases, health ministry officials said yesterday.

Several governments in Africa, where the virus present in at least 26 countries but has spread more slowly than in Europe and Asia, have closed borders, cancelled flights and imposed strict entry and quarantine requirements. The NCDC said the entry ban would operate for an initial period of four weeks, and that anyone arriving in Nigeria who had visited any of the 13 countries in recent days would be subject to supervised self-isolation and testing for 14 days. — Agencies



**LONDON:** A picture shows phone boxes on a quiet street in Westminster in London on March amid the coronavirus outbreak. The British government yesterday unveiled a raft of emergency powers to deal with the coronavirus epidemic, including proposals allowing police to detain potentially infected people to be tested. — AFP

## British govt unveils sweeping coronavirus emergency laws

**LONDON:** Britain has unveiled sweeping emergency powers to deal with the spiraling coronavirus outbreak, including proposals allowing police to detain potentially infected people to be tested. Details published on Tuesday night outlined sweeping new laws to be introduced in parliament that will give various public bodies tools and powers to respond to the pandemic.

There have been 1,950 confirmed cases and 71 deaths in Britain. Developed in partnership with devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as opposition parties in London, the legislation will be time-limited for two years. It will allow the authorities to “switch on” the new powers when needed and switch them off again once they are no longer necessary, based on the advice of top medical officials.

“The Emergency Coronavirus Bill... will only be used when it is absolutely necessary and must be timed to maximize their effectiveness,” Health Secretary Matt Hancock said. The measures “give the government the powers it needs to protect lives”, he added. Some measures are not expected to come into force immediately, the health department said. It called the proposals “temporary” and “proportionate”, and insisted they would “only... be in place for as long as required to respond to the situation”.

### ‘Wartime government’

Britain has ramped up its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, after initially taking a more cautious approach than other countries. Chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance said Tuesday it was “reasonable” to estimate that 55,000 people inside the country could now have the virus. On Monday Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government recommended household isolation, home-working and an end to mass gatherings to try to stem the rapidly accelerating outbreak.

It followed up with a huge package of support for businesses to help them survive the tough new social measures, including government-backed loans of at least £330 billion (\$395 billion, 360 billion euros). Johnson said his administration was now on a war footing.

The emergency powers will enable action in several key areas, from increasing the available health workforce and “easing the burden” on front-line staff to “managing the deceased with respect and dignity”. Other measures include giving people who volunteer to help care for patients in the health and social care sector additional employment safeguards enabling them to “pause” their main jobs for up to four weeks. Britain’s Border Force will be able to suspend operations at airports or transport hubs if there are insufficient resources to ensure security.—AFP

## Militia ‘sect’ wreaks havoc in remote DR Congo region

**BUNIA:** With three fingers chopped off his left hand, Father Guy-Robert Mandro bears physical witness to a resurgence of violence in DR Congo that has gone widely unnoticed in a world fixated by the coronavirus pandemic. Since the start of the month, around 50 people have been killed in the eastern province of Ituri, 15 of them overnight Sunday alone, according to local sources. Bloodletting in this troubled region has already claimed some 700 lives since late 2017 - a tale of trauma and sexual violence blamed on a little-known militia.

Mandro, the parish priest in Fataki, about 80 kilometers north of the provincial capital Bunia, said he

was attacked after mass about a week ago. “A group of young people came up to me. They hit me about the head with machetes. I protected myself and that’s how I lost three fingers,” he said. The injured man was flown by helicopter to Bunia, where he underwent lengthy surgery. A local priest gave him a room on the bishop’s premises to convalesce, with both hands bandaged.

### Rape

Valerie, a Fataki woman of 44 going by an assumed name for her safety, said she covered beneath a parish building as the priest was assaulted. But the young men found her. “Three of the attackers raped me, taking turns,” she said. One of Bunia’s many displaced people, Valerie spoke at the headquarters of the Sofepadi, a medical non-governmental organization that “repairs women” victims of sexual violence. It is modeled on the famous Panzi clinic in Bukavu, in South Kivu province, managed by gynaecologist Denis Mukwege, the 2018 Nobel Peace laureate.

## Russia feeding ‘disinformation’ to sow panic in the West: EU

**BRUSSELS:** Russian media have deployed a “significant disinformation campaign” against the West to worsen the impact of the coronavirus, generate panic and sow distrust, according to a European Union document seen by Reuters. Pushing fake news online in English, Spanish, Italian, German and French, the Russian campaign uses contradictory, confusing and malicious reports to make it harder for the EU to communicate its response to the pandemic, the report said.

There was no immediate comment on the document by Russia, which has previously denied accusations that it has been spreading fake news about the coronavirus on social media. “A significant disinformation campaign by Russian state media and pro-Kremlin outlets regarding COVID-19 is ongoing,” said the nine-page internal document, dated March 16, using the name of the disease that can be caused by the coronavirus.

“The overarching aim of Kremlin disinformation is to aggravate the public health crisis in Western countries ... in line with the Kremlin’s broader strategy of attempting to subvert European societies,” the document produced by the EU’s foreign policy arm, the European External Action Service, said. A specialist EU database has recorded almost 80 cases of disinformation about coronavirus since January 22, it said.

The EEAS declined to comment directly on the report, but a spokesman said the EU was in contact with Google,

Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft to “to discuss the spread of disinformation around the outbreak of COVID-19.” The EU and NATO have accused Russia of covert action, including disinformation, to try to destabilize the West by exploiting divisions in society.

Russia denies any such tactics, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has accused foreign foes of targeting Russia by spreading fake news about the outbreak to sow panic. Russian media in Europe have not been successful in reaching the broader public, but provide a platform for anti-EU populists and polarise debate, analysis by EU and non-governmental groups has shown.

The EEAS report cited riots at the end of February in Ukraine, a former Soviet republic now seeking to join the EU and NATO, as an example of the consequences of such disinformation. It said a fake letter purporting to be from the Ukrainian health ministry falsely stated here were five coronavirus cases in the country. Ukrainian authorities say the letter was created outside Ukraine, the EU report said. “Pro-Kremlin disinformation messages advance a narrative that coronavirus is a human creation, weaponised by the West,” said the report, first cited by the Financial Times. It quoted fake news created by Russia in Italy, the second-most heavily affected country in the world, that health systems would be unable to cope and doctors would choose who lived or died because of a lack of beds.—Reuters



**AMSTERDAM:** Tourists wearing facemasks gather in the Red Light District of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) regional office for Europe said there is a need for bold measures in all European countries, calling the continent the ‘epicenter’ of the new coronavirus pandemic. — AFP



**GAZA CITY:** A Palestinian health worker checks the body temperature of a child at a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees school as preparations are underway to receive, examine and isolate victims of the Covid-19 coronavirus. — AFP

## Social distancing, super-spreaders: Coronavirus lingo goes viral

**PARIS:** Social distancing, fourteen-in-one, super-spreader: as the novel coronavirus balloons across the globe, new vocabulary associated with the illness is taking hold. Here is some lingo - both new and old - linked to the pandemic.

### COVID-19

The current epidemic first broke out in late December in the central Chinese city of Wuhan. It is caused by a new strain of the coronavirus. The illness it causes in humans has been named COVID-19 for “coronavirus disease 2019” by the World Health Organization (WHO).

### Barrier gestures

Used to describe the measures people can take to reduce the risk of infection. Regular hand washing, coughing and sneezing into one’s elbow and using a tissue only once are three signature barrier gestures recommended to prevent the spread of the virus.

### Social distancing

People are also advised to carry out “social distancing” measures to minimize contact with other people to diminish the risk of contagion. In countries across the globe, people have been advised against stop shaking hands and kissing to say hello - common greetings in many parts of Europe. People are also advised to stay at least one meter away from others and avoid gatherings, including dining out or attending sports matches or concerts.

### Super spreader

This refers to a person who has infected a large number of other people. Unless protective measures such as isolation are taken, it is estimated that an infected person will transmit the illness to at least two or three other people. The notion of “super spreader” is relatively old - the term was applied in the US during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. Then as now, they are hard to pin down. “It is possible that what we call ‘super spreaders’ do exist,” said Eric Caumes, head of the infectious diseases service at the Pitie-Salpetriere hospital in Paris. “The problem is we can not manage to find them”.

### Cluster

In medical terms, ‘cluster’ means several people infected in a specific place. In the case of an epidemic a cluster is a disease hotspot.

### Fourteen-in-one

This term stems from the word quarantine, which originally referred to the 40-day isolation period for people suspected of having the plague. The COVID-19 incubation period - the time between infection and the appearance of symptoms - is estimated at between one and 14 days, according to the WHO. Most governments around the world have imposed 14-day isolation periods for suspected cases. But the WHO says infected people could still be contagious after they stop feeling sick and recommends isolation for at least two weeks after symptoms disappear.—AFP



## International

# China to expel US journalists as media freedom row grows

## A bitter fight between the world's top two economies

BEIJING: China is withdrawing the press credentials of American journalists at three US newspapers, intensifying a bitter fight between the world's top two economies that has widened to include the coronavirus outbreak and media freedoms. Beijing announced yesterday what it said was retaliation against US restrictions on Chinese journalists that includes revoking the accreditations of American correspondents with the New York Times, News Corp's Wall Street Journal and Washington Post whose credentials expire by the end of 2020.

The move is a sharp escalation of a dispute that saw Washington last month force Chinese state media firms to register as foreign embassies. Beijing then expelled three Wall Street Journal correspondents - two Americans and an Australian - following an opinion column by the newspaper that called China the "real sick man of Asia." Washington then slashed the number of journalists permitted to work in the United States at four major Chinese state-owned media outlets to 100, from 160 previously. It cited a "deepening crackdown" on independent reporting inside China. Beijing said the expelled journalists would not be permitted to work in mainland China, Hong Kong or Macau. It said they must hand back their press cards within 10 days.

The expulsion is expected to affect at least 13 journalists, according to the Foreign Correspondents Club of China, which said it "deplores" China's decision. China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment on how many journalists are affected. Beijing also said the China branches of the three papers plus the Voice of America broadcaster and Time magazine must "declare in written

form information about their staff, finance, operation and real estate in China."

### War of words

The latest development follows a war of words between Washington and Beijing over the outbreak of the new coronavirus, which causes a highly contagious, sometimes fatal, respiratory illness COVID-19. The virus originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year and has so far killed 7,400 people globally, bringing normal life in many parts of the world to a standstill.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters at a State Department news conference that Beijing's move yesterday would deprive the world and the Chinese people of information in "incredibly challenging" times brought about by the coronavirus. "I regret China's decision today to further foreclose the world's ability to conduct the free press operations that frankly would be really good for the Chinese people," he said. "This is unfortunate... I hope they'll reconsider." Media executives denounced the move.

"We unequivocally condemn any action by China to expel US reporters," Washington Post Executive Editor Marty Baron said in a statement. "The Chinese government's decision is particularly regrettable because it

comes in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis, when clear and reliable information about the international response to COVID-19 is essential." Dean Baquet, executive editor at The New York Times, also condemned the decision. "It is a grave mistake for China to move backwards and cut itself off from several of the world's top news organizations," he said.

Matt Murray, editor in chief at The Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones Newswires, said: "We oppose government interference with a free press anywhere in the world. Our commitment to reporting fully and deeply on China is unchanged." Time Editor in Chief and CEO Edward Felsenthal said: "We oppose any effort by the Chinese government or any other government to expel reporters or intimidate those whose job is to provide accurate information, especially during this crucial period for the world." A representative of Voice of America was not immediately reachable.

### New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal affected

### 'One country, two systems'

A striking aspect of Beijing's move was its decision to bar the journalists from working in Hong Kong and Macau, two semi-autonomous territories of China with their own media accreditation rules. In the past, foreign journalists kicked out of China were allowed to work in

Hong Kong. That raised questions about Hong Kong's autonomy under the "one country, two systems" agreement that still prevails between the territory and the mainland.

"There's no precedent for China dictating who can and can't report from Hong Kong openly," said Steven Butler, the Committee to Protect Journalists' Asia program coordinator. "It very seriously erodes Hong Kong's autonomy and freedom of the press." The Foreign Correspondents' Club in Hong Kong said it was alarmed at the decision to expel the journalists and even more concerned that they would be banned from working as journalists in Hong Kong.

It said Hong Kong must provide assurances that foreign journalists working in Hong Kong and those applying to work in the city will continue to be issued employment visas without interference from the Chinese government. Beijing said yesterday that its actions "are entirely necessary and reciprocal countermeasures that China is compelled to take in response to the unreasonable oppression the Chinese media organizations experience in the United States."

Pompeo said he did not think Beijing's latest move was a balanced response. "This isn't apples to apples," he said, charging that the Chinese journalists who had faced restrictions were part of "propaganda outlets." China has repeatedly denounced the Wall Street Journal's "sick man" column as racist and, after the newspaper declined to apologize, revoked the visas of the three reporters in Beijing. Another reporter with the paper had to leave last year after China declined to renew his visa. — Reuters



PESHAWAR: Afghan trucks line up as they wait to cross the Pakistan-Afghanistan closed amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, in Torkham some 54 kms from Peshawar. — AFP

## Coronavirus makes Taliban realize they need health workers alive not dead

KABUL: Scared by the prospect a coronavirus epidemic in parts of Afghanistan under their control, the Taliban have pledged their readiness to work with healthcare workers instead of killing them, as they have been accused of in the past. Back in September, the Taliban lifted a ban on the World Health Organisation and Red Cross from operating in militant-held territory, having warned them off in April because of suspicions over polio vaccination campaigns.

Whatever reservations the militants held over eradicating that crippling disease, they have clearly grasped the dangers posed by coronavirus pandemic sweeping the rest of the world. "The Islamic Emirate via its Health Commission assures all international health organizations and WHO of its readiness to cooperate and coordinate with them in combating the coronavirus," said Suhail Shaheen, the Taliban's spokesman, on Twitter, using the term the group uses to describe itself.

In a report in December, the World Health Organization refrained from naming the Taliban or any other militant group as it counted the human and social cost of targeted attacks on healthcare during 2019. At least 51 healthcare workers, patients and supportive staff were killed and 142 others wounded. As a result of the attacks 192 health facilities were closed, of which only 34 were re-opened. The Taliban denied responsibility for the attacks that Afghan authorities have blamed on their fighters.

Afghanistan currently has 22 confirmed coronavirus cases, with concerns growing particularly over the danger of infections among the thousands of Afghans crossing the border with Iran - one of the worst-affected nations. The country's woefully inadequate health system would undoubtedly be overwhelmed if the virus were to take hold. Moreover, after 18 years of war the government only controls about half of the country.

The rest is either controlled or contested by the insurgents, who have agreed a peace deal with the United States, but have yet to open talks with the government. Communities in ethnic Pashtun rural areas where the Taliban hold sway could suffer from the loss of access to health support in their villages as a result of past militant action. Access can be even worse for women in these communities due to conservative Pashtun attitudes on gender. — Reuters

## Coronavirus may be 'greater than' tsunami: Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia warned of a fresh wave of coronavirus infections if people did not follow two-week movement restrictions that started yesterday after cases in the country spiked to the highest in Southeast Asia. It has so far reported two coronavirus deaths, including a man who attended a mass Muslim gathering linked to nearly two-thirds of the country's 673 infections. Thousands of the attendees still remain to be tested, raising the risk of an even greater spread of the virus.

"We have a slim chance to break the chain of COVID-19 infections," Noor Hisham Abdullah, director general of Health Malaysia, said in a Facebook post. "Failure is not an option here. If not, we may face a third wave of this virus, which would be greater than a tsunami, if we maintain a 'so what' attitude."

Malaysia and the Philippines, which has quarantined about half its 107 million population, have imposed the toughest restrictions on movements of people in



PENANG: A rickshaw driver looks for passengers in Penang during the first day of a partial lockdown in Malaysia with most businesses and schools closed amid fears over the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

Southeast Asia, causing early confusion and chaos, although capital markets in both countries will stay open. Hours before the movement curbs kicked in at midnight in Malaysia, thousands of people queued up at bus stations to go back to their hometowns. Hordes of Malaysians who commute daily to Singapore for work crossed the border to spend the next two weeks there. — Reuters

## Coronavirus crisis could last 6 months, Australia warns

SYDNEY: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday declared a "human biosecurity emergency" and said the country's citizens should abandon all overseas travel because of the coronavirus epidemic that he warned could last at least six months. The formal declaration gives the government the power to close off cities or regions, impose curfews and order people to quarantine, if deemed necessary to contain the spread of the virus.

The upgrade in official advice to an unprecedented "Level 4: Do not travel" to any country in the world, was accompanied by a ban on any non-essential indoor gatherings of more than 100 people. "Life is changing in Australia, as it is changing all around the world," Morrison said during a televised news conference. "Life is going to continue to change, as we deal with the global coronavirus. This is a once in a hundred year type event." Australia has recorded more than 500 coronavirus infections and six deaths, a relatively small number compared to other countries, but officials are growing increasingly concerned about the prospect of an exponential rise in cases.

New South Wales, the country's most populous state, reported its biggest one-day surge in new cases yesterday, along with the country's latest death, an 86-year-old man who died in a Sydney hospital. Morrison said the tighter ban on indoor social gatherings, down to 100 people from 500 people, did not include essential services like schools, public transport and shopping centers. The Australian leader cited expert health guidance as the rationale for keeping schools open, a strategy that has been questioned by some experts. Several private schools have made the unilateral decision to close ahead of the upcoming Easter break. Morrison reiterated the need for social distancing and good hand hygiene to curb the spread of the virus and announced restricted access to aged care homes. Anybody who travels during a Level 4 ban is warned that the Australian government may not be able to assist if they get into trouble while abroad, according to the government's official SmartTraveller website. It also recommends people already in a "do not travel" area consider leaving. — Reuters



AMRITSAR: A Sikh priest (center) reads the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) as he offers prayers with other devotees for the relief from the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus at the Diwan Hall Gurudwara Manji Sahib of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. — AFP

## Indian guru's tips to ward off coronavirus anger professionals

MUMBAI: Indian healthcare professionals are questioning claims by popular yoga guru and entrepreneur Baba Ramdev who said he has found an ayurvedic remedy that would help ward off coronavirus. In a promotional video made public this week, Ramdev, in his trademark saffron robes and clutching a sample of the medicinal plant produced by Patanjali, the company he co-founded, says: "We've done scientific research and found Ashwagandha ... doesn't allow blending of corona protein with human protein."

He did not provide evidence for the research, which he said had been sent to an unspecified international journal. There are currently no vaccines or drugs approved to treat or prevent COVID-19, only investigational COVID-19 vaccines and treatments under development.

"These kinds of messages give a false sense of security. People who are not well educated, they are the ones who will get misled," said Dr Giridhar Babu, a professor of epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India, urging the government to ban such advertisements. Even potentially harmless tweets about immunity risk confusing people, Babu added. Multiple calls and emails seeking comment from Patanjali and Ramdev went unanswered.

In a series of tweets, Ramdev also urged Indians to take up yoga to boost immunity, using the hashtag #YogaForCorona. Ayurveda is an ancient system that includes herbal medicines, exercise and dietary guidelines practiced by millions in India. Patanjali, one of India's most well-known ayurvedic brands, and several other such firms have been touting their products to fight coronavirus in the densely-populated country of 1.3 billion people. — Reuters

## In slums and windowless apartments, Asia's poor bear brunt of coronavirus

BANGKOK: Millions of homeless people and those living in informal settlements across Asia are at heightened risk of contracting the coronavirus due to their dire living conditions, housing experts said yesterday. The coronavirus has infected about 180,000 people worldwide and killed more than 7,000, according to a Reuters tally.

While the data does not show how many lived in slums, the high density of settlements and meagre facilities raises their vulnerability, said Cecilia Tacoli, a researcher at the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development. "Proximity is an important driver of infection, and low-income settlements in many cities of the Global South are very densely populated," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Given that new infectious diseases will likely continue to spread rapidly into and within cities, low-income settlements need more effective infrastructure," she said. Globally, about 1.8 billion people live in inadequate housing and homelessness, according to the United Nations. While handwashing is a basic precaution against the

coronavirus, about 40% of the world's population do not have such a facility with water and soap at home, according to UNICEF, the UN's children's fund.

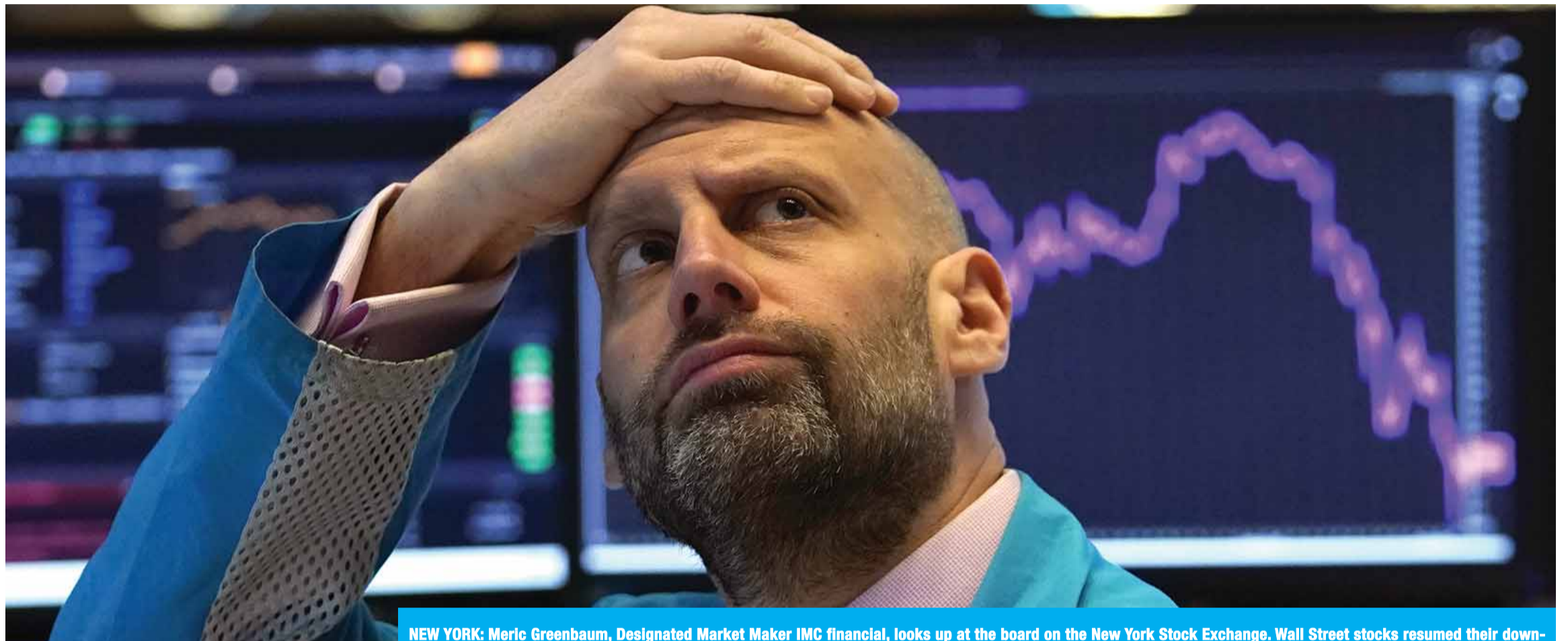
Isolation is also hard when space is constrained and rooms are often shared, said Annie Wilkinson, a research fellow at research organization the Institute of Development Studies. "Slums' informal or illegal status often undermines both the collection of data and the implementation of policies to improve health," she said. "There is a real risk that the impacts on the urban poor will be considerably higher than elsewhere," she said.

In Hong Kong, where thousands of people who have recently visited China or may have had contact with patients, are confined to their homes under quarantine orders, it is particularly risky for those who live in partitioned flats. These units generally have poor ventilation and drainage, and residents are more vulnerable because of the shared kitchen and toilets, said Choyu Cheung, a community organizer at the Society for Community Organization, a non-profit. — Reuters



## Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2020

**10** COVID-19 doom means boom for pasta makers**10** Boeing seeks \$60 billion in US support for aerospace industry**11** BMW to shut down European factories over COVID-19

NEW YORK: Meric Greenbaum, Designated Market Maker IMC financial, looks up at the board on the New York Stock Exchange. Wall Street stocks resumed their downward slide early yesterday as the economic toll mounts from the rapid near-shutdown of key industrial and services sectors.—AFP

# Markets slump as recession fears mount

## Oil prices slide further; Finance chiefs vie to inoculate world economy against virus

LONDON: Global stock and oil markets plunged yesterday as vast stimulus measures failed to offset heightened concerns that the worsening coronavirus outbreak will tip the world into a deep downturn, dealers said. In European trading, Frankfurt, London and Paris tanked around five percent in afternoon deals, after similar dizzying losses across Asia. Wall Street stocks resumed their downward slide early yesterday as the economic toll mounts from the rapid near-shutdown of key industrial and services sectors. About 15 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average stood at 20,040.66, down around 1,200 points or 5.6 percent. The broad-based S&P 500 slumped 5.4 percent to 2,392.27, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index tumbled 4.6 percent to 6,997.10.

Before the market open in Paris, French regulators banned for one month short-selling, or the betting that markets will fall—extending an initial one-day halt, in an effort to curb steep losses. World oil prices spiralled lower on energy demand woes, with New York's WTI crude plunging 12 percent to an 18-year low and Brent tumbling 6 percent.

Yet most market commentators agree that the virus-wracked world economy will likely plunge into recession—which means a minimum of two successive quarters of economic contraction. “From what we see

from the markets’ reaction, massive monetary and fiscal measures deployed are not thought to be enough to prevent economies from plunging into recession,” Swissquote Bank analyst Ipek Ozkardeskaya said.

“Every business and household is expecting governments to replace the coronavirus-led losses, which is simply not possible.” Hence, there is already a massive shock in activity and demand, which almost guarantees a worldwide recession regardless of the measures taken by central banks and governments,” Ozkardeskaya added.

Governments and central banks are injecting eye-popping sums and emergency policy remedies into the global economy as the coronavirus pandemic upends all normal life. Markets have crashed as world growth faces its biggest crisis since 2008, and have so far resisted the efforts to restore calm as the outbreak engulfs the West. AFP surveys responses by major economies as the coronavirus has spread from China to infect the rest of the world, enforcing national lockdowns and crippling businesses:

### North America

On Tuesday, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said officials were drawing up a package that could surpass \$1 trillion, on top of \$300 billion in

deferred tax payments. The measures—far surpassing aid during the 2008 financial crisis meltdown—are likely to include direct cash payments to struggling families. The package is in addition to \$100 billion directed at paid sick leave and expanded unemployment benefits already moving through Congress.

A bailout for US airlines could also be in the works, after Mnuchin said they face a crisis now “worse than 9/11”. In Canada, authorities are rolling out a Can\$10 billion (US\$7.5 billion) credit package to help struggling businesses and have also cut interest rates. The International Monetary Fund is making \$50 billion available for poorer countries and has also appealed for a “global response”.

G7 leaders including Trump on Monday vowed to coordinate and “do whatever it takes, using all policy tools” to safeguard growth, but offered no specific action plans. Dusting off their playbook from 2008, the Fed, European Central Bank (ECB), Bank of Japan and others on Sunday announced measures to try to keep dollars pumping through the global economy.

### Europe

After China, Europe is now the epicenter of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak and governments have scrambled to open the spending taps while at the

same time closing their borders. British finance minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday unveiled an “unprecedented package” of government-backed loans worth £330 billion (\$400 billion). President Emmanuel Macron of France, which is now on total lockdown, said Monday the government would ensure that all bank loans to companies are backed by a state guarantee totalling 300 billion euros.

The French government announced a separate aid package worth 45 billion euros to help businesses and employees cope. Germany has unveiled 550 billion euros in government-backed loans “for starters”, and suspended legal obligations for firms facing acute liquidity problems to file for bankruptcy. In hardest-hit Italy, the government promised to deliver a “very strong injection of liquidity” into the financial system to generate 340 billion euros (\$380 billion) in cash flows. Spain plans to guarantee up to 100 billion euros in corporate loans. For the European Union as a whole, finance ministers pledged Monday to fight the coronavirus “war” but declined for now to tap up the European Stability Mechanism, the eurozone’s 410 billion euros war chest. The ECB is reviving crisis-era measures to encourage bank lending to beleaguered companies, but surprised the markets by keeping its borrowing rates on hold last Thursday.—AFP

## Emirates asks pilots, cabin crew to take unpaid leave

DUBAI/MANILA: Emirates is asking pilots and cabin crew to take unpaid leave and rival Qatar Airways laid off about 200 staff in Doha this week as the coronavirus outbreak hammers demand for travel. The state-owned airlines have slashed dozens of routes crucial to their Gulf hubs dependent on millions of passengers passing through each year. Dubai’s Emirates, one of the world’s biggest international airlines, is offering pilots and cabin crew unpaid leave, according to internal staff emails seen by Reuters.

“You are strongly encouraged to make use of this opportunity to volunteer for additional paid and unpaid leave,” an email to pilots said. There is limited opportunity for unpaid leave for cabin crew who are being encouraged to take paid leave, another email said.

The airline did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Tourism and aviation are vital to the economy of Dubai, which does not have

the vast oil wealth of some of its Gulf neighbors.

Emirates employed over 21,000 cabin crew and 4,000 pilots among more than 100,000 employees overall at the end of March 2019. Emirates has told staff the coronavirus epidemic could be the biggest challenge it has faced in many years, frozen recruitment and continues to cut flights as the situation worsens globally.

The United Arab Emirates yesterday said it would bar entry to foreigners apart from diplomats and residents. Philippine Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello told Reuters yesterday that the government was trying to ascertain the “real cause” behind the Qatar Airways’ unexpected decision to lay off about 200 Filipino workers. Qatar Airways, which employed 46,000 people at the end of March 2019, declined to comment.

The layoffs were reported earlier by ABS-CBN. It said the Filipino employees, including engineers and maintenance staff, were laid off on Tuesday and others had also lost their jobs. State-owned Qatar Airways had warned it would report its third consecutive loss this financial year, which ends this month, before the outbreak battered global travel demand. Abu Dhabi’s Etihad Airways, another Gulf carrier, announced more flight cancellations yesterday, including to Egypt and India.—Reuters

## Pound dives to 3-decade lows as selloff rages

LONDON: The British pound plunged to its lowest levels in more than three decades yesterday barring a flash crash in October 2016 as concerns about the economic impact of the coronavirus overshadowed any stimulus efforts by policymakers so far.



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While the British currency has been under selling pressure since last week after it hit a two-month high above \$1.31, the sell-off accelerated yesterday as traders dumped positions across the board. Against the dollar, the pound plunged 1.7 percent to \$1.1852, its lowest level since the October 2016 flash crash. Barring the low of \$1.1491 hit then, the pound is trading at its lowest level since March 1985, according to Refinitiv data. “The pound is trading at historic lows on a combination of the safe haven dollar bid, the coronavirus stock sell-

off and liquidation of long positions following the British election,” said Neil Jones, head of hedge fund currency sales at Mizuho Bank in London.

Traders shrugged aside news that Britain would launch a 330 billion-pound (\$399 billion) lifeline of loan guarantees and provide a further 20 billion pounds in tax cuts, grants and other help for businesses facing the risk of collapse. While long positions in the British pound have reduced to some extent, they still remain near their highest levels in two years, according to latest positioning data.

Demand for dollars was rife in central bank dollar operations across the board. Banks borrowed more than \$15 billion from the Bank of England’s US dollar repo operations yesterday, part of measures announced by six central banks to keep the financial system working during the coronavirus outbreak.

But that failed to calm a broader selloff in the bond markets, with yields on 10-year British government bonds spiking to their highest level since January 2020. “The main reason for dollar demand is liquidity concerns as in volatile times, companies and investors need dollars to settle transactions and as long as these concerns persist, we expect the pound to remain on the back foot,” strategists at UBS Wealth Management said in a note. Against the euro, the British currency weakened 1.13 percent to 92.21 pence.—Agencies



## Business

# Boeing seeks \$60 billion in US support for aerospace industry

## Pandemic obliterates near-term airline demand, destroys profitability

**NEW YORK:** Boeing is seeking at least \$60 billion in federal support for the aerospace industry to help it navigate a battered aviation environment due to the new coronavirus, company officials said yesterday. The funds would include federal loan guarantees to provide liquidity for Boeing and companies in its supply chain at a time when the virus pandemic has obliterated near-term airline demand and destroyed the industry's profitability. "Funds would support the health of the broader aviation industry, because much of any liquidity support to Boeing will be used for payments to suppliers to maintain the health of the supply chain," Boeing officials said in a statement.

"The long-term outlook for the industry is still strong, but until global passenger traffic resumes to normal levels, these measures are needed to manage the pressure on the aviation sector and the economy as a whole."

Boeing's near-term outlook had already been dimmed by the 737 MAX crisis, which was grounded a year ago following two deadly crashes. The jet has still not been cleared to resume service and continues to face some important regulatory hoops before it will fly again. The dual crises would threaten the survival of other companies, but Boeing still retains considerable support in Washington because of its importance to the US economy, with about 130,000 employees, a

figure that doesn't include workers at about 17,000 suppliers.

President Donald Trump on Tuesday endorsed aggressive measures to assist Boeing, telling reporters at a briefing, "we have to protect Boeing and help Boeing." Airlines are also suffering, and media reports say the government is looking at \$50 billion in assistance that the industry has requested.

Still, federal packages for big companies could come with conditions. Democratic presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont said any bailouts to the airline industry must be conditioned on ending stock buybacks. And Senator Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat who recently ended her presidential campaign, said on Twitter that companies should also be prohibited from paying dividends or executive bonuses during the period of relief and three years after. Credit ratings agency S&P on Monday downgraded its rating for Boeing, saying its outlook has worsened and predicting a likely increase in "aircraft order deferrals, further pressuring cash flows." Boeing disclosed Tuesday that it has fully drawn a \$13.8 billion credit agreement struck only last month with major banks, according to a securities filing. The company still has another credit facility from October 2019, which has not been drawn on and provides "additional liquidity as we navigate the current challenges." —AFP



AMSTERDAM: In this file photo, a Boeing 747 commercial plane of KLM airline lands at Schiphol airport.

## COVID-19 freezes consumer-driven US economy, testing retailers

**NEW YORK:** The coronavirus outbreak has transformed the US virtually overnight from a place of boundless consumerism to one suddenly constrained by nesting and social distancing.

The crisis tests all retailers, leading to temporary store closures at companies like Apple and Nike and manic buying of food staples at supermarkets and big-box retailers like Walmart even as many outlets remain open for business albeit in a weirdly anemic consumer environment. In general, the coronavirus crisis is expected to dent retail earnings while likely accelerating a trend towards online sales as more stores shut down, hastening an industry shakeout that was already underway prior to the public health crisis.

"Weaker balance sheets and relentless margin pressures will continue to push smaller, cash-starved retailers down the ratings scale and closer to default," Mickey Chadha, a Moody's senior credit officer, said in a note to investors Tuesday. "This will be exacerbated with the extreme dislocations caused by the coronavirus pandemic. There is a sharpening divide between those who have the capacity to weather the challenging operating environment and those who do not."

On Tuesday, more leading retailers announced closures, including Macy's, Crate & Barrel and the iconic Saks Fifth Avenue flagship store in New York.

### Shutting down

Many of the increasing number of companies that shut stores, a group that includes Apple, Nike and Lululemon, are stronger brands, analysts note. Apple's

actions in response to the virus map the evolution of the outbreak. The tech giant on February 1 closed all its Chinese stores because of the coronavirus. But by last weekend, Apple had reopened all of its stores in the country, even as it announced it was shutting down everywhere else through March 27 to limit the spread of the virus in Europe and North America.

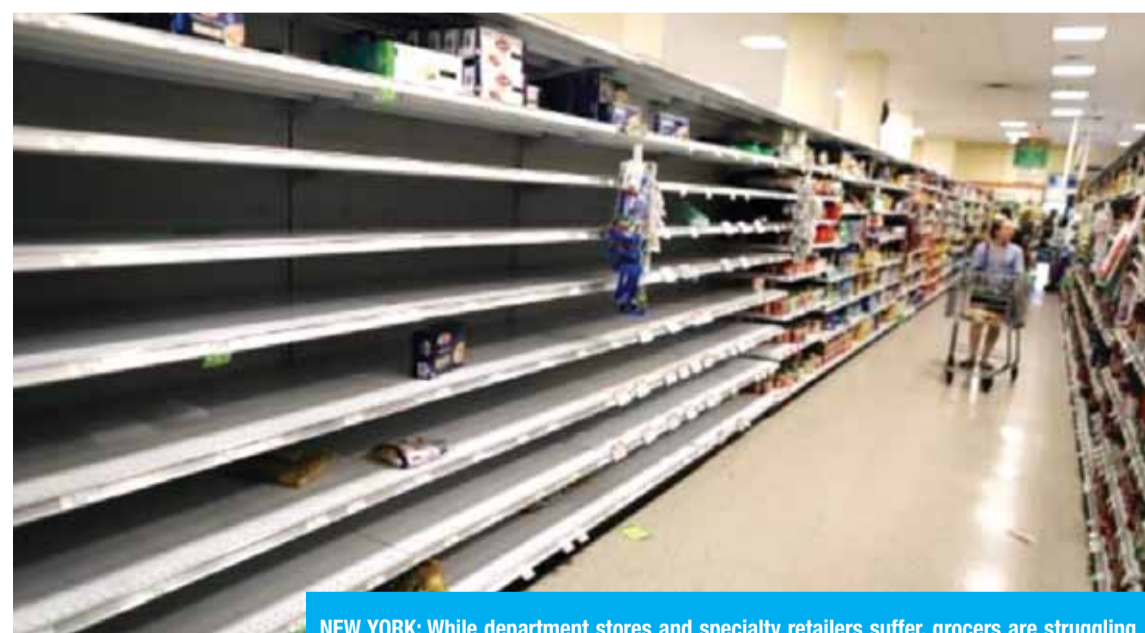
"The most effective way to minimize risk of the virus's transmission is to reduce density and maximize social distance," Apple Chief Executive Tim Cook said as he announced the closure of non-Chinese stores, while adding that online stores would remain open. Youth-oriented apparel chain Gap also pointed to its experience in Asia as it cut hours throughout the US and Canada, while temporarily closing more than 100 stores in areas hit hardest by coronavirus.

"While these situations are unsettling and ever-changing, we will continue to make decisions in the best interests of our employees," said incoming Gap Chief Executive Sonia Syngal.

### Online not immune

Other stores have remained open, but stepped up cleaning of high-trafficked areas and restrooms in response to the outbreak. The Westchester Mall, an upscale shopping center about 45 minutes from Manhattan, has trimmed its hours but was still open as of Tuesday afternoon. The outbreak will most certainly boost online sales growth even faster, as shown by Amazon's announcement late Monday that it plans to hire 100,000 warehouse workers to meet surging demand.

However, analysts caution that e-commerce distribution and shipping networks are not immune to challenges from the virus. "All parts of the economy and supply chain are vulnerable," said Neil Saunders, director GlobalData Retail. "That includes delivery companies and online orders." If supply chains are affected by coronavirus outbreaks, that will mean delays to deliveries, said Saunders, who expects consumer spending to be weak overall. —AFP



NEW YORK: While department stores and specialty retailers suffer, grocers are struggling to keep up with elevated demand due to panic buying. — AFP

## COVID-19 doom means boom for pasta makers

**PARIS:** It may be all doom and gloom as the coronavirus outbreak completely upends the world we knew but pasta makers may never have had it so good as panic-stricken shoppers stock up on a basic food to survive the crisis. Scenes of mayhem in supermarkets around the world typically hone in on pasta shelves stripped bare in a matter of minutes, sending manufacturers into overdrive to try and keep up with demand.

"We are now 90 percent up in our sales over the past three weeks and more recently, up more than 100 percent," Xavier Riescher, head of France's top agri-food company the Panzani group, told AFP.

Riescher, who is also head of the French pasta makers industry association, said his factories normally did not operate over the weekend-but that has all changed

now and they are on the go night and day. "We are working seven days out of seven, 24 hours out of 24; there has been an exceptional mobilization of French workers," he added. It is the same story in Italy, the badly hit epicenter of the European outbreak, where production runs non-stop at La Molisana, the country's fourth largest pasta maker. "Since the beginning of February, output is up more than 50 percent in Italy," said Michel Liquidato, sales director for the company in France.

The problem now is to keep up with demand. Longer hours for the workforce are not enough on their own, Riescher said, noting that manufacturers have concentrated on making the simple forms of pasta rather than more elaborate versions. "When you make farfalle, you need twice the time you need for shell pasta because its more complex," he said.

So for the industry the focus is on about 10 types of the simplest pasta such as shell, spaghetti, macaroni or penne, to reduce production time and costs. "That is true for Panzani, for Barilla, for Garofalo, which makes very up market versions. You concentrate on what you can make," Riescher added.

## IMF rejects Venezuela's \$5bn aid request

**CARACAS:** The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday rejected economically devastated Venezuela's request for a \$5 billion loan to help it cope with the onslaught of coronavirus on the country that an aid agency warned is as prepared as war-torn Syria. President Nicolas Maduro made the request earlier Tuesday but, in a statement hours later, the Washington-based institution indirectly cited a dispute over Maduro's leadership in denying his petition. In a letter to IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva, Maduro said a \$5 billion loan from the IMF's Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) "will contribute significantly to strengthening our detection and response systems." It was the country's first loan request to the IMF since 2001.

"Unfortunately, the Fund is not in a position to consider this request," because there is "no clarity" on international recognition of the country's government, the Washington-based institution said in a statement. "As we have mentioned before, IMF engagement with member countries is predicated on official government recognition by the international community, as reflected in the IMF's membership. There is no clarity on recognition at this time," the statement said.

More than 50 countries including the United States have not recognized Maduro for more than a year, after switching allegiance to opposition leader Juan Guaido who declared himself acting president.

Guaido branded Maduro a usurper over the president's 2018 re-election in polls widely seen as fraudulent. But US sanctions and other international pressures have failed to dislodge Maduro, who is backed by Venezuela's creditors China and Russia and retains the support of the powerful military.

### Five years of crisis

The RFI from which Maduro sought the assistance is a mechanism by which all IMF member countries can get financial assistance without the need to have a full-fledged economic program in place. Venezuela's health system is in tatters after five years of economic and political crisis that has sent millions of people fleeing for lack of basic staples. "We hardly have five percent of the medicine stocks we need," Douglas Leon Natera, head of the Venezuelan Medical Federation, told AFP earlier. Jan Egeland, general secretary of the Norwegian Refugee Council, placed Venezuela in the same category as war-torn Syria and Yemen in its preparedness. Like those countries, "there will be carnage" when the virus reaches parts of Venezuela given that "health systems have collapsed," warned Egeland. —AFP

### No supply problems

It is the same story for another kitchen staple rice, Riescher said, with Panzani's Winged Bull brand seeing sales soar 70 percent in the past few weeks, and couscous. But despite the pressure, he said there would be no problem with supplies. "There is always lots of stock. All the factories in France are continuing to produce and I can speak for all in the industry association on that," he said.

"That is true in Italy too. Certainly there are some factories which have a few problems in the lockdown zone in the north but for the moment, they continue to produce," he added. "Despite this difficult situation, none of our sites are currently subject to lockdown measures," the Barilla group told AFP. However, some companies are finding they are having to make a choice between which customers they can serve.

"We need to supply in priority the Italian market and those countries which have been clients for several years," said Liquidato. The company had only recently started sales in France, he said, adding that it had had to pass up several orders to concentrate on its established markets. —AFP

## From food to tech, virus to spur urban planning rethink

**BANGKOK:** The coronavirus pandemic sweeping across the planet will force city authorities and planners to more seriously consider factors such as population density, technology, food security and inadequate housing, urban experts said. As of yesterday morning the outbreak, termed COVID-19, had infected about 200,000 people worldwide and killed roughly 8,000, according to a global tally kept by Johns Hopkins University. In response, countries have tightened border controls, imposed travel bans, locked down cities and stepped up surveillance using technology powered by artificial intelligence (AI).

"It is likely that COVID-19 will prompt a rethink of urban design and planning in the Asia-Pacific region," said Tony Matthews, a senior lecturer in urban and environmental planning at Australia's Griffith University. "There will probably be consideration of desirable population density levels, a greater utilisation of apps and smart data to track health trends, and many cities will probably start to think about their food security more closely," he said.

Countries including China, South Korea and Singapore are using robots, drones and big data to track the outbreak, disinfect hospitals and deliver supplies. Such technologies may become a fixture in cities to flag potential problems for quicker response, said Matthews. Authorities are also likely to more closely monitor vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever that are shifting due to climate change, and impose limits on the types and numbers of live animals in traditional markets, he said.

Coronaviruses are zoonotic diseases - meaning they are passed from animals to humans - and the rapid pace of deforestation and urbanization are major factors in the spread of these diseases in Asia, health experts say. Authorities in China said they would tighten supervision of traditional markets in the cities.

### Catalysts

This would not be the first time that an epidemic has led to changes in city planning, research shows. The cholera outbreaks of the 1830s led to better sanitation in London and elsewhere, while the tuberculosis epidemic in New York in the early 20th century paved the way for improved public transit systems and housing regulations.

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, which hit cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore, led Singapore to upgrade its medical infrastructure and create systems to map the disease. "Historically, epidemics have acted as catalysts in transforming how diseases are handled, especially in urban areas," said Annie Wilkinson, a research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, a UK-based think tank. "Community engagement is key to effective epidemic control, be it delivering trusted messages, carrying out surveillance, or limiting movement," she said. —Reuters



PARIS: Pasta makers are sticking to the simplest versions — such as tagliatelli here — with demand soaring due to the coronavirus outbreak. — AFP



## Business

# KFH offers remote working solutions to ensure employee health and safety

## Microsoft Teams accelerates collaboration amongst KFH's workforce



Talal Al-Mutairi

**KUWAIT:** In its continued effort to enhance productivity and assure wellness of its employees, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced that it is leveraging modern workplace solutions such as Microsoft Teams to empower its workforce to work remotely, safely and efficiently under all circumstances.

"While we continue to serve our customers in these challenging times, we aim to ensure the highest measures of health and safety for our employees," said Talal Al-

Mutairi, Deputy General Manager HR Operations and Rewards at KFH.

He added, in a press release: "This is where technology comes to play a crucial role by enabling us to accelerate remote working for our people while collaborating and executing their activities. We aim to ensure applying the best technology and safety-driven tools to ensure uninterrupted communication and smooth workflow among KFH staff, and with all other stakeholders. Platforms like

Microsoft Teams electronically bring our people and processes together, so we can continue to deliver superior customer experience."

Microsoft Teams is a collaboration productivity tool that empowers workforces to chat, meet, call, and collaborate all in one place. While companies across the globe are moving to remote work, Teams delivers a complete, intelligent, and secure workplace solution to empower people in achieving more together.

"The health and safety of employees, customers, partners and communities is a top priority for us at Microsoft, and we will continue our efforts to enable them with solutions to collaborate from anywhere," said Alaeddine Karim, Country Manager, Microsoft Kuwait. "We're working across Kuwait's public and private sectors to empower their workforce with tools to stay connected and make remote working easier."

## Huawei, Deloitte collaborate on fighting COVID-19

**KUWAIT:** In collaboration with Huawei, Deloitte has published a new whitepaper discussing how key features of 5G can synergize with other technologies to enhance the effectiveness of pandemic prevention and treatment, as well as drive the digital transformation of healthcare systems in response to major public emergencies.

The whitepaper, titled "Combating COVID-19 with 5G: Opportunities to improve public health systems", analyzes examples of COVID-19 control and treatment in China to ascertain the data demands of different stakeholders during major public emergencies. As well as presenting these findings, the report discusses how key features of 5G—such as high speed connection, large arrays of connection points, low latency and expansive data bandwidth—can synergize with big data, AI, and the Cloud technologies to enhance pandemic prevention efforts. These features can address data transmission challenges during an epidemic, as well as open up possibilities for fresh ideas and new treatment methods.

Amongst its findings, the whitepaper notes that the effectiveness of communication and data exchange has been essential in screening for infected individuals and controlling the outbreak. Robust mobile network infrastructure like 5G is also enabling continuous remote monitoring and diagnosis during patient transfers, and is supporting thermal imaging for contagion monitoring. Supporting pandemic monitoring platforms, natural disaster command centers, and remote medical consultation are three additional applications of 5G that can be taken advantage of after the rapid escalations of COVID-19. Ultimately, healthcare systems with access to 5G connectivity have benefited from improved response times, patient monitoring, data collection and analytics, remote collaboration, and resource allocation. It sets an example for building digitalized, data-driven, and cloud-based public emergency-response platforms.

The whitepaper notes that the success of 5G applications in the public health domain could inspire businesses in other sectors to leverage 5G's popularity and explore new applications of the technology in smart city management. These may include manufacturing resource allocation to environmental protection and transportation systems maintenance. Huawei has been leading 5G expansion in the Middle East as part of the first wave of deployments worldwide, and is focusing on vertical industry, ecosystem, and 5G talent development in 2020.

## Centrify streamlines FIDO2 passwordless authentication API

**DUBAI:** Centrify, a leading provider of Identity-Centric Privileged Access Management solutions, yesterday announced that it is leveraging the FIDO2 Web Authentication API to enable passwordless authentication for administrators. With the new capabilities, Centrify customers can replace passwords with stronger factors of authentication such as fingerprint or facial recognition, ensuring a frictionless user experience with a higher level of security. Enforcing FIDO2-based authentication for privileged administrator logins based on risk makes Centrify a single source of truth for privileged users to access and manage hybrid infrastructure, achieving stronger security balanced with better productivity.

FIDO2 is the newest set of specifications from the FIDO Alliance, enabling users to leverage common devices to easily authenticate to online services in both mobile and desktop environments. FIDO2 supports biometric methods like Apple's Touch ID electronic fingerprint recognition, Apple Face ID facial recognition, and Microsoft's Windows Hello, which lets Windows 10 users authenticate to their devices, apps, online services, and networks with just a fingerprint, iris scan, or facial recognition.

Ultimately, FIDO2 makes security stronger and less disruptive because it can eliminate passwords, which is critically important given that 81 percent of security breaches involve weak, stolen, default, or otherwise compromised passwords, according to Verizon. Passwordless authentication ensures that login credentials are unique across every website, never stored on

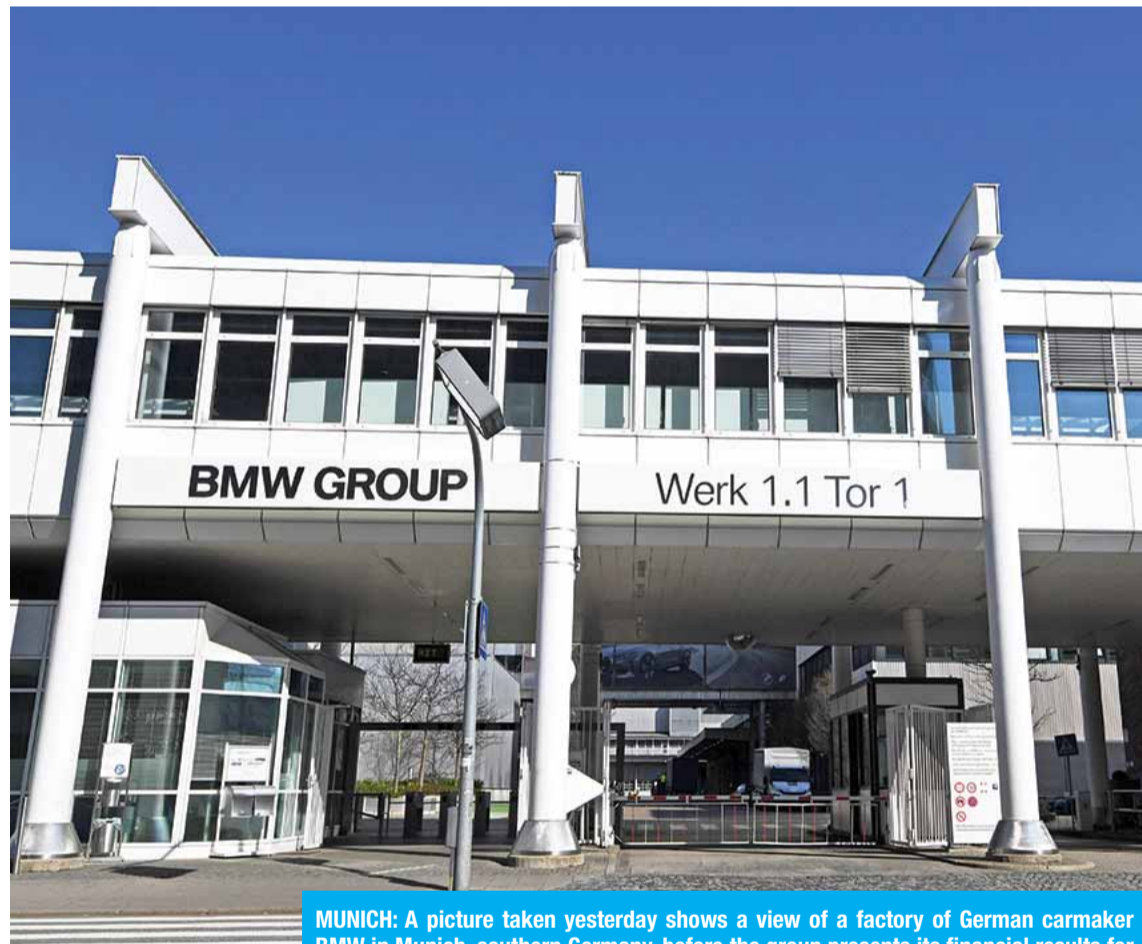


Jeremy Stieglitz

a server, and never leave the user's device. This security model helps eliminate the risks of phishing, as well as all forms of password theft and replay attacks.

"Centrify's support for the FIDO2 standard, along with our existing multi-factor authentication and real-time analytics capabilities, now offer stronger authentication factors to verify privileged user identities, greatly reducing the risk of security breaches that might exploit weak, default, or stolen passwords," said Jeremy Stieglitz, Vice President of Product Management at Centrify. "The reality is that out-of-sync passwords can hamper employee productivity, interrupt IT operations, and compromise security. Our new biometric support adds an additional roadblock for attackers while removing barriers for administrators to authenticate without the need for passwords."

Centrify has supported FIDO for years and is a member of the FIDO alliance. In providing support for FIDO2, Centrify further enables organizations to move away from passwords, which are often the target for external and internal threat actors. Centrify has been using passwordless access to systems using ephemeral tokens as part of its Privileged Access Service for a number of years, and this support for FIDO2 further builds on that vision that passwords are the weak point in security. Using biometrics eliminates the risk of credential theft techniques and provides better alignment with NIST 800-53 high-assurance authentication controls. Centrify also leverages on-device authenticators that register new devices and tie them directly to the user's identity. Once new devices are registered and authenticated, they can be used for multi-factor authentication.



**MUNICH:** A picture taken yesterday shows a view of a factory of German carmaker BMW in Munich, southern Germany, before the group presents its financial results for 2019. — AFP

## BMW to shut down European factories over COVID-19

**FRANKFURT:** German carmaker BMW said yesterday it would close European and South African factories accounting for half its output for a month, matching other car giants stricken by coronavirus containment measures. It also warned that profits this year would be significantly lower as a result of the crisis. "From today, we will shut down our European car factories and the Rosslyn factory in South Africa," chief executive Oliver Zipse said, adding that the interruption is expected for now to last "until April 19".

BMW's factories around Europe—in Bavaria, elsewhere in Germany and further afield—combined with the South Africa plant accounted for half the 2.56 mil-

lion cars the group built in 2019.

Around Europe, other manufacturers including Mercedes-Benz parent Daimler, Volkswagen, Ford, Fiat and Peugeot have also moved to shut factory doors through the coronavirus crisis.

"As for many goods, demand for cars will sink sharply" because of the virus and associated containment measures, BMW CEO Zipse said. Workers at the Munich-based group benefit from "highly flexible and effective working-time tools" that can help cushion the impact, he added.

The German government has already simplified rules governing compensation for workers whose hours are slashed during the crisis. BMW finance director Nicolas Peter said the group now expects pre-tax profits this year to be "significantly lower" than the 7.1 billion euros (\$7.8 billion) reported in 2019. "Measures related to the coronavirus will have a significant impact on the course of our business," Peter said. — AFP

fallout of the crisis, and the government said more aid is likely to follow soon. "How big the deficit will ultimately be cannot currently be foreseen," the Finance Ministry said in a statement accompanying the draft, due to be approved by cabinet and submitted to parliament later yesterday.

Finance Minister Gernot Blumel will give a shorter-than-usual speech to parliament on the budget on Friday. The draft is based on a GDP growth forecast of 0.8 percent provided by the Wifo economic institute that compiles GDP data, a Finance Ministry official said. The forecast, a downward revision of Wifo's previous prediction of 1.2 percent, was provided to the government on March 11 and is likely to be overtaken by events soon if it is not already out of date, he added. "The only thing that is currently certain is that we are doing what is necessary and we are helping where we can," Blumel said in the Finance Ministry statement. — Reuters

## Spanish PM sees economy contracting

**MADRID:** The Spanish economy will contract as a consequence of the coronavirus crisis, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez told a near-empty parliament yesterday, urging all to rally in what he called a "war" against the virus. To avoid any propagation of the virus in parliament, there were only 28 lawmakers and five ministers to listen to Sanchez in a chamber that normally houses a 350-strong assembly.

"We have never lived through anything like this. And our society, which had grown used to changes that expand our possibilities of knowledge, health and life, now finds itself in a war to defend all we have taken for granted," Sanchez said. Between speeches, a masked and gloved cleaner climbed the stairs leading up to the speaker's platform wiping down the handrails, as well as the table and microphones.

"It is clear that annual GDP will fall, as the European Commission has already pointed out. 2020 will not have 12 months, but 10 or even 9," Sanchez told parliament. "If we manage to maintain employment levels and the production structure as long as the crisis lasts without major and irreparable damage, at the end of the crisis there would be a quick recovery, including a possible rebound effect that would accelerate activity."

In describing the cruelty of a crisis that had led Spain and several other European countries to shut schools and most shops, Sanchez noted that those losing loved ones to the disease could not hold normal funerals. With nearly 500 dead as of Tuesday's official data, Spain is the second-worst hit country in Europe after Italy.

Pablo Casado, leader of the conservative People's Party, pledged his support to Sanchez, despite saying the government had been slow to react to the outbreak and should take far more drastic measures.

Casado appealed to the nation to stand united against an "invisible and relentless enemy". "Now is the time for us all to pitch in together and row in the same direction," he said. Far-right Vox lawmaker Ivan Espinosa de los Monteros also accused the government of acting too late, especially with regards to closing borders.

"You tried to make us all believe the crisis would be lesser than it is," Espinosa said. "Concealing the seriousness of the problem prevents the necessary measures from being taken to combat the virus." Spain initially took few steps to combat the crisis, moving abruptly to shut down shops and curb public life just over a week ago as the number of cases started soaring. Spain announced a 200 billion euros (\$220 billion) package on Tuesday to help companies and protect workers and other vulnerable groups affected by the spiralling coronavirus crisis, including state-backed credit guarantees for companies and loans and aid for vulnerable people. — Reuters



## Tencent sees profit jump, may benefit from coronavirus

**HONG KONG:** Chinese internet giant Tencent recorded a jump in profit last year and said it could be a rare beneficiary of the global coronavirus pandemic as people stay home and businesses ramp up remote working. The Shenzhen-based behemoth, one of the largest stocks on the Hong Kong bourse, said yesterday net profit last year rose 19 percent to 93.3 billion yuan (\$13.3 billion).

Total revenues in 2019 were up 21 percent at 377.3 billion yuan (\$53.7 billion), primarily driven by its international gaming and lucrative cloud services, the latter bringing in 17 billion yuan in revenues and consistently outgrowing the market. The company said the global economic chaos caused by the spread of the deadly coronavirus, which began in China late last year, would be a short term challenge. Initially its fast growing cloud computing services might take a hit, it said. But the company remained more bullish in the long term, cushioned by the expectation that many more people will turn to remote working and online health care services that often require significant cloud computing power.

"We believe enterprises will be increasingly keen to adopt cloud-based solutions over the longer term, in order to facilitate remote working and remote interactions with their customers," chairman Ma Huateng said in the annual results statement. Figures in the annual report revealed how vital remote working apps have become during the pandemic. With vast chunks of China locked down in January and February, users of Tencent's "meeting" program surpassed 10 million within two months.

Many more users of its WeChat platform turned to "Tencent health" for real-time pandemic data, online consultation and self-diagnosis services. Ma added that the virus outbreak had boosted the need for home learning programs. More than 120 million users had used the company QQ School-plus-Home groups with features including live broadcast, online tutoring programs as well as tools for schools to facilitate online and offline education.

The company also picked up millions of new gamers during the coronavirus pandemic in China. "Looking forward, we will seek to both meet the immediate needs for our products brought about by the pandemic, and develop our capabilities to anticipate and serve enterprises' long term demands as the economy digitizes," Ma said. Shares in the Hong Kong-listed company fell 4.5 percent yesterday shortly before the results were announced, tracking the continued losses the city's bourse has faced amid a global sell off. — AFP



Health & Science

# Virus concerns rise for Florida's 'snowbirds'

DELRAY BEACH, US: Florida, often called "the grayest state" in the US because so many elderly retire here, is facing up to the fact that it has an alarming concentration of the demographic most at-risk from coronavirus.

"Everything is an uncertainty because we don't know how this is going to end, you know?" said Anita Lammersdorf. "How bad is it going to be?" asked the 80-year-old Lithuanian-American who still works as a real estate agent.

Lammersdorf spoke to AFP on the doorstep of her home surrounded by the orchids and poinsettias which thrive in Florida's subtropical climate. In keeping with medical guidance, she kept a 10-foot (four meter) distance between her and the visiting members of the press.

Aside from a pacemaker, Lammersdorf has no other underlying health conditions that put her at extra risk should she get infected. "I hope I am strong enough to meet the guy if it comes," she said, referring to the virus sweeping the country. Lammersdorf lives in Delray Beach, in northern Miami, having spent a large part of her life in the nation's capital Washington and in Venezuela.

Like many other pensioners across the nation and even from other countries, she chose to retire to this balmy southeastern state. Others live here four or five months of the year to escape the colder northern winters, an annual migration that-together with their white hair-earns them the nickname "snowbirds."

**'Deadly to older adults'**

Florida usually has the largest proportion of elderly people in the United States: 20.5 percent of its population is

over the age of 65, according to a 2019 study by the Population Reference Bureau. Last year, that trend was beaten slightly by Maine, with 20.6 percent of its 1.3 million people over 65. But Florida has more than 21 million people, and 1.1 million are over the age of 80.

"This particular virus is particularly deadly to older adults, and Florida's demographics are somewhat unique within the country," said Jeff Johnson, the Florida director for AARP, a non-profit organization for people over 50. Some Florida seniors live in retirement homes, but most are independent and live in communities designed especially for older people.

These are often built around golf courses or tennis courts and feature social clubs where members play bridge, attend book clubs or do handicrafts. Senior living communities impose age limits on residents-no one under the age of 55 can move in-and their streets often have special lanes designed not for bicycles but for golf carts, the favored mode of transport in Florida.

Now they house the community most vulnerable to the coronavirus that has caused international borders to be shut and led to millions of people being confined to their homes. The risk of dying from the virus is low, except for people with underlying health problems and those over the age of 60.

**'Just waiting'**

A report by the World Health Organization carried out with the Chinese authorities found that for people over 80 years old, there was a fatality rate of 21.9 percent. "There's Floridians all across the state who are in those tar-



Denise Bedard (left), 70 years-old, and Dian Lemay (right), 69, Canadian "snowbirds" who live in Florida four months a year from Quebec, speak during an interview with AFP at Leisureville, an age-restricted senior community, in Pompano Beach, Florida. — AFP

get categories," Johnson told AFP. "And we have large pockets of people who either have retired here from other parts of the country or who have been here their whole lives."

"While there are tens of thousands of people in nursing homes, there are millions of older Floridians who are living relatively happily in their communities," he said. "And obviously we need to pay attention to them, too." For now, that may mean not taking part in social activities, avoiding visits and keeping in

touch by telephone. In a community for the over-55s in Pompano Beach, in the north of Miami, two Canadians from Quebec-both of them "snowbirds" in their seventies-try to stay optimistic given the circumstances. "We know this is going to last a while," said Denise Bedard, of herself and fellow Quebecer Dian Lemay. "But we are in good health, and we'll wash our hands like we know we should."

As of Tuesday, Florida had 216 confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to

John Hopkins, and six deaths-three of which were in the same assisted living facilities, the Miami Herald reported. Thirty-nine of the cases are in Broward county, where the Pompano Beach community is located and which is slowly becoming ground zero for the coronavirus in Florida. Another 23 cases are in Miami-Dade county. Lammersdorf said she is "just waiting."

"But I'm worried," she said. "I'm worried about everything... trying to be as careful as I can." —AFP

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Dar Al Shifa Hospital  
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa  
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

**DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM**  
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368  
Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

**DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED**  
Consultant of General Surgery  
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email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228 Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building



## Lifestyle | Gossip



## Idris Elba is 'feeling good' after being diagnosed with coronavirus

**T**he 'Luther' star announced on Tuesday he had tested positive for the virus and has given fans an update on his condition. He shared: "Yesterday was good and bad. Bad because I tested positive, but it was also good because it opened up a lot of conversation around it. I think it made it a lot more real for some people. Definitely made it more real for me and my family. There was so many positive responses to, you know, me talking

about it. Some negative too. But there were some definite positive ones. I certainly felt ... "My wife and I felt like it was the right thing to do, to share it with you guys. Right now though, I am feeling okay. Woke up this morning, didn't have any symptoms. My voice is a little tired ... checking my fever twice a day. Feel good, feel okay. Been doing a lot of reading about it. You know, asymptomatic is what comes up." And the 47-year-old actor assured his wife Sabrina Dhowre is

doing good too and has now been tested for coronavirus, too. He added in his own post: "Sabrina's good too. Sabrina today finally managed to get a test, and we're thankful for that. Generally, Sabrina's fine. Nervous of course. Worried. Just for clarification, Sabrina wanted to be by my side. We calculated that risk and decided to be together. Hope you guys can understand that."

## Hudgens under fire for coronavirus comments



**V**anessa Hudgens has come under fire for saying deaths from coronavirus was "inevitable". The 'High School Musical' star was forced to backtrack on comments she made online after US President Donald Trump said it may take until July for everything to get back normal. She said on Monday (16.03.20): "Until July sounds like a bunch of \*\*\*\*. I'm sorry, but like it's a virus, I get it. I respect it. Even if everybody gets it, like yeah, people are going to die which is terrible, but inevitable? I don't know, maybe I shouldn't be doing this right now." And she has now shared on her Instagram story: "It's a crazy time, it's a crazy, crazy time and I am at home and in lockdown and that's what I hope you guys are doing too. Yeah I don't take this situation lightly, by any means, I am home."

Meanwhile, Justin Bieber is just one of a number of stars who have spoken out amidst the coronavirus pandemic, urging people to self-isolate and practice social distancing as our "grandparents are counting on us". Whilst Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds have donated \$1 million to foodbanks in North America to help support their coronavirus relief efforts. He wrote in an Instagram post: "Covid-19 has brutally impacted older adults and low income families. Blake and I are donating \$1 million to be split between Feeding America and Food Banks Canada. If you can give, these orgs need our help. Take care of your bodies and hearts. Leave room for joy. Call someone who's isolated and might need connection. (sic)"



## Bieber urges people to self-isolate amidst the coronavirus

**J**ustin Bieber has urged people to self-isolate amidst the coronavirus. The 'Yummy' hitmaker took to Instagram to encourage his fans to practice social distancing, telling them their "grandparents are counting on us". He shared to Instagram: "Obviously this is a really scary time ... I wanted to remind everyone what we can do when we come together!! LETS COME TOGETHER BY ISOLATING OURSELVES UNTIL WE HAVE MORE ANSWERS! Our grandparents are counting on us (sic)" And Justin isn't the only person raising awareness of the devastating affects of coronavirus to young people as Ariana Grande recently urged her fans to take the coronavirus pandemic more seriously and shared her frustration at those who have the "mindset" of "we will be fine, because we're young".

## WATT HAS TESTED POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

**T**he music producer - who has worked with the likes of Ozzy Osbourne, Liam Gallagher and wrote hits for Justin Bieber, Post Malone and Cardi B - revealed through social media he has COVID-19. Writing on his Instagram, he said: "12 days ago, early morning of March 6th, I started feeling like I was hit by a bus, I couldn't move out of my bed for days and started to run a fever. I was seen by a doctor at my house who told me I am positive for the regular flu and there's no way I could have COVID-19 as I haven't left the country and all I do is go to the studio and go straight home. I was put on Tamiflu and constant Tylenol to fight the fever ... but the chills, sweats, and fevers did not stop. I started to become delusional and then began the dry cough ... I immediately rushed to the emergency room and begged to be tested for COVID-19 as this 'flu' was not subsiding. I was turned down for

the test because of federal regulations. I begged and pleaded to be evaluated and finally was given a chest x ray ... the results of which were viral pneumonia ... but still ... no test. (sic)" Andrew is now recovering and has urged others to social distance for the sake of their older relatives. He added: "I am laid out in bed chugging Gatorade and using an oxygen machine to give my lungs as much relief as possible. I can't stress this enough ... this is not a joke. Stay inside, stay sanitized. Please stop everything and take care of yourselves. And the people you love around you, until we are all through this. To have this mentality 'I'm young this can't affect me' is just straight up stupid and so dangerous to everyone around you. Social distancing is to protect someone's mom and dad, someone's grandmother ... it's not about you. (sic)".



## Chalamet 'heartbroken' by coronavirus

**T**imothee Chalamet has been left "heartbroken" by the coronavirus pandemic. The 24-year-old actor has been particularly hit hard by the "stories" he's heard coming out of Crema in Italy - the hardest hit country in Europe - where he filmed 2017's 'Call Me By Your Name'. He wrote on Twitter: "I'm thinking of EVERYONE in hotspots right now, young and old, but CREMA - my heart is with you. I can't believe this is happening. Heartbroken at these stories I'm reading, in locations I know!! Please try to stay safe (sic)" The movie industry has been deeply impacted by the global outbreak, with many film sets being abandoned and movie release dates being postponed. The 'Beautiful Boy' star previously said he cherished his time working on the coming-of-age LGBTQ+ movie. He previously admitted he doesn't think he'll ever have an "immersive" acting experience like 'Call Me By Your Name' again. Timothee starred alongside Armie Hammer and spent months with the actor biking and bonding around Italy, and Chalamet said the relationship that blossomed is precious. He said: "I don't think I'll have an acting experience as immersive as that. I came of age as an actor during my time with Armie. The relationship that blossomed out of it is the most precious gift." 'Call Me By Your Name' - which is based on the novel of the same name - follows the story of a young Italian man named Elio (Timothee) who meets Oliver (Armie) after he visits the country to stay at his parents' villa. The pair then develop a passionate relationship, as they bond over their shared Jewish heritage and their sexuality. Timothee had to act in Italian despite coming from a French background but believes his "cultural dissociation" helped him nail Elio's character. He said: "Your personality changes when you're using a second language. Certainly for me, my command of the language wasn't as strong [as my English], it doesn't come to me so easily. "And by the nature of it, I think, the way people carry themselves in France, compared to New York, I became a little more deferential.—Bang Showbiz



## The Billboard Music Awards have been postponed

**T**he annual music event - which was set to take place on April 29 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas - has been pushed back as the world battles the coronavirus pandemic. Producers said in a statement: "In accordance with the current guidelines set forth by national and local health officials and in order to ensure the health and safety of our artists, fans, guests and staff - we are postponing the Billboard Music Awards. For more than two decades, the Billboard Music Awards has honoured the best in music based on the Billboard charts, and we look forward to celebrating the incredible artists who topped those charts over the last year." Kelly Clarkson was due to return as host of the music awards show, and had previously shared her excitement at being put in charge of proceedings for the third year running. She said at the time: "I'm thrilled to be back with my Billboard family. I love being part of an event that celebrates our greatest artists and entertains our fans. This is a night of music that you won't want to miss!" In 2019, the 37-year-old singer kicked off the show with a musical medley of the year's biggest hits. The 'Behind These Hazel Eyes' hitmaker walked through the audience, taking a seat next to actor Terry Crews and discussed Taylor Swift and Brandon Urie's show-opening performance of 'Me!' Thereafter, Kelly was ejected by former New England Patriots star Rob Gronkowski, who claimed he was a security guard and she was in a seat needed by Florida Georgia Line. But when the country stars claimed they didn't recognise the evening's host, Kelly said: "Oh, you got jokes, you got jokes? Okay. I'll prove it." The pop star was then joined by a guitarist and back-up singers and performed the duo's hit 'Meant to Be', before making her way to Ella Mai for a chorus of 'Boo'd Up'. Kelly subsequently climbed on stage and was joined by dancers as she sang snatches of tracks, including Maroon 5's 'Girls Like You', a country take on Zedd's 'The Middle', Calvin Harris and Dua Lipa's 'One Kiss', Panic! At The Disco's 'High Hopes', as well as an impressive take on Cardi B's 'I Like It'.



## Witherspoon was 'assaulted and harassed' as a young actress

**R**eesee Witherspoon was "assaulted and harassed" as a young actress. The 'Big Little Lies' star has opened up about what she went through when she was younger and thinks social media has helped people open up about their own experiences, and thus encouraged others to talk too. She said: "Bad things happened to me. I was assaulted, harassed. It wasn't isolated. I recently had a journalist ask me about it. She said, Well, why didn't you speak up sooner? And I thought, that's so interesting to talk to someone who experienced those things and then judge them for the way they decide to speak about them. You tell your story in your own time when you're ready. But the shame that she tried to put on me was unreal, and then she wrote about how selfish I was for not bringing it up sooner. There wasn't a public reckoning 25 years ago when this stuff hap-

pened to me. There wasn't a forum to speak about it either. Social media has created a new way for people to express themselves that I didn't have. That's the great strength in power and numbers. I think we have a lot of judgment and that's unfortunate because we're all tender-footed in these new times. We're trying to find our identity." And the 43-year-old actress recalled how she used to be the only woman on a set of 150 men with "maybe" a couple of women in wardrobe. Speaking to the April issue of Vanity Fair magazine, she added: "I can remember being in pictures in which I was the only woman on the set and there would be 150 men. Maybe there would be a couple of women in wardrobe. I remember when I was a kid I would find them and cling to them."





These pictures show women wearing face masks dancing at a park in Beijing.—AFP photos

## As world cowers, China glimpses coronavirus aftermath

Restaurants are reopening, traffic and factories are stirring, and in one of the clearest signs yet that China is awakening from its coronavirus coma, the country's "dancing aunties" are once again gathering in parks and squares. As the rest of the world runs for cover, China — where the virus first emerged — is moving, guardedly, in the opposite direction as domestic infections fall to nil following unprecedented lockdowns and travel restrictions. But ordinary life is far from normal.

Masks and temperature checks are essential to enter most places and many eateries are banning diners from facing each other in a mass "social distancing" campaign — no easy task in the world's most populous nation. Beijing retiree Wang Huixian was among a dozen women practicing the national pastime of dancing in unison to music from portable speakers in a public park — but now with a gap of three meters (10 feet) between them. "During the epidemic, everyone was very tense and afraid. So we want to relax now," said Wang, 57.

But she added: "Everyone is cautious and keeping a distance from each other to avoid getting infected." Alongside more than 3,200 deaths and over 81,000 total infections, the coronavirus outbreak has left further scars. China, the world's second-largest economy, was shut down for weeks, with factories silent and massive cities locked down. The pain from that is expected to persist, with a surge in joblessness and many businesses gone bust.

### Sense of relief

Most of the country is now slowly lifting restrictions and people are returning to work, unlike many Western countries where governments have ordered sweeping restrictions not

seen during peacetime. Many European countries are in near-total internal lockdown, and popular tourist spots are deserted. But after weeks of empty streets and citizens sheltering at home for safety, Shanghai has transformed in recent days. Cafes and some tourist sites have reopened, and residents of China's biggest city are re-emerging for tai chi in the park, or to take selfies along the riverfront under bright spring sunshine. "I was very scared. A sense of fear persisted," said 50-year-old Zhang Min, the owner of an office-supply company, while strolling in a Shanghai park. "But now all is good... not like the people overseas who are engaged in panic-buying."

The flow of daily commuters into Shanghai's financial district is picking up and some inter-provincial travel restrictions have eased. However, many provinces and cities like Shanghai now require citizens to show a downloaded QR code on their mobile phone that rates them as "green", "yellow" or "red" — based on tracking of whether they visited a high-risk zone — before entering many businesses. "My feeling is that people with (virus) issues can't come out, but people who can are safe, so we're reassured," child-care worker Lai Jinfeng, 41, said while strolling the Shanghai's

famous Bund. People shrink from an offered handshake, many restaurants have removed half their chairs to disperse customers, and other restrictions on large gatherings remain in place.

And the now-ubiquitous face mask is being worked into cosmetics routines, with online beauty influencers instructing millions of women on applying make-up only to the upper half of the face, without staining the mask itself. President Xi Jinping declared during a March 10 visit to the still locked-down epicentre city of Wuhan in Hubei province that China had "turned the tide," and a top economic official said Tuesday that 90 percent of businesses outside Hubei were operating again. But as China emerges from the worst of the virus on its soil, the costs of the pandemic will become clearer in the coming weeks and months, analysts say. "Basically before the epidemic, last year, my business was very good, but not now," said Cai Qizhen, 52, who runs a small cobbler's shop in Shanghai. "Now basically I don't come in the morning... and I'm finished by 3 pm with nothing left to do."—AFP



## Riding to the rescue: New York food delivery during coronavirus

With New York restaurants closed because of the coronavirus pandemic, residents unused to eating at home are increasingly relying on the city's army of bicycle delivery people for their dinner. The 40,000 workers, almost always immigrants without health insurance or legal papers, are playing a critical role since all eateries and bars were ordered shut on Monday until April 1. The riders, who zip around the Big Apple on pedal and electric bikes with parcels of takeout hanging from handlebars, fear contagion but say they have no choice but to continue working. "While others are at home, we face the risk of getting COVID-19. This truly worries me," Alberto Gonzalez, who has no health care coverage, told AFP. "I have a wife and four children at home, they are all taking steps to stay inside, but what good is it if I put them at risk for being on the streets?"

The closures allow New Yorkers to order a delivery or pick-up a takeout, just not sit in restaurants, providing some consolation to the millions stuck at home. Gonzalez, who lives in Brooklyn and also works with the pro-immigrant organization Make The Road New York, says the riders "need more protection." "It is not clear who has priority for the tests, and whether those without insurance or legal status will have to pay for the tests and treatment," he said. The drivers are trying to eliminate as much as risk as possible so they don't catch the virus which has killed more than 7,000 people worldwide and brought cities grinding to a halt.

Many wear gloves and masks and regularly apply disinfectant gel while some have even taken to wrapping plastic bags around the handlebars of their bikes. "Every time I deliver food I put sanitizer on my hands and change my gloves," Mexican delivery driver



Many New York delivery men wear gloves and masks, while some have even taken to wrapping plastic bags around the handlebars of their bikes.

Luis Ventura told AFP as he got off his electric bike in the central Manhattan. The 30-year-old lost his job as a chef at a Greek restaurant a few days ago due to plummeting business sparked by the fast-spreading outbreak. Some restaurants are closing and letting staff go after a collapse in orders have left them struggling to pay rent and wages.

Ventura continues to work for food delivery company Postmates, where he makes \$9 an hour, less than New York's \$15 minimum wage. "Honestly this month the money will not reach me," he lamented. Abdoulaye Diallo, from Guinea in West Africa, says he takes extra care when touching doorknobs

and elevator buttons in customers' buildings. "You don't know who could be sick," said the 19-year-old, who has worked for delivery company Seamless for two years. "I am going to continue working because I have no choice. If I sit at home I don't get paid at all," he added. The delivery men are part of America's gig economy: they receive no benefits and only get paid for the work they do.

Some New Yorkers on social media have called on residents to increase tips for delivery people out of solidarity. But about a dozen dealers interviewed by AFP said they hadn't seen an uptick in citizens' generosity. "The job is down too much, 70 percent," said 60-year-old Mexican Martin Balderas, a delivery man for Manhattan fried chicken restaurant Atomic Wings. "I pray to God to avoid contagion, but we are all at risk," said Balderas, who earns \$8 an hour and has no health insurance.

Balderas, who supports his wife in New York, and sends money to children and grandchildren in Mexico, says he also cannot afford to self-isolate. "The family has to eat, and the rent is not forgiving here," he said. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio offered interest-free loans of up to \$75,000 for businesses with fewer than 100 employees that prove they have lost at least 25 percent of their income. But it cannot save many restaurants burdened with sky-high rents. For Ousmane Savadogo, a 33-year-old delivery man from the Ivory Coast, it all depends on how long the crisis goes on for. "If this lasts two weeks, that's fine. But if it lasts longer, things get complicated!" he told AFP.—AFP



A food delivery man crosses the street in Times Square in Manhattan on March 17 in New York City.



A food delivery man crosses 1st Avenue in Manhattan on March 17, 2020, in New York City.—AFP photos



This combination photo shows (clockwise from top left) Arsenal's Spanish head coach Mikel Arteta, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau, Utah Jazz star Rudy Gobert, Chelsea's English midfielder Callum Hudson-Odoi, Australia's former home affairs minister Peter Dutton and US actor Tom Hanks. Arteta, Gregoire Trudeau, Gobert, Hanks, Dutton and Hudson-Odoi have all tested positive for the COVID-19 novel coronavirus.—AFP

## CELEBRITIES INFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS

US actor Tom Hanks, the wife of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta are among the rich and famous infected by the coronavirus:

### Entertainers

Tom Hanks and his wife, actress and singer Rita Wilson, are the first Hollywood stars to announce they are infected. They have been placed in quarantine in a Gold Coast hospital in Australia. Hanks has urged the public to heed the advice of experts.

Best-selling Chilean writer Luis Sepulveda, who lives in northern Spain, has also been infected, showing symptoms of the new Coronavirus in February, after he had returned to his home from a literary festival in neighboring Portugal.

### Sport

England's football Premier League, the richest in the world, is badly affected: Arsenal's Spanish manager Arteta and Chelsea winger Callum Hudson-Odoi, who is British, have both contracted the coronavirus. Italian football team Juventus has announced that one of their players, defender Daniele Rugani, has tested positive.

French basketball player Rudy Gobert has become the first US National Basketball Association player to test positive, prompting the NBA to abruptly suspend the season.

Utah Jazz star Gobert has apologized for potentially exposing people to the coronavirus, after triggering scorn on social media for pointedly touching every microphone and voice recorder on a table in front of him at a media availability on Monday.

A second Utah player, Donovan Mitchell, has also been confirmed to have tested positive for COVID-19.

Colombian cyclist Fernando Gaviria, is doing well after being admitted to hospital in the United Arab Emirates 10 days ago. He is the second of two cyclists at the UAE Tour to have been identified with the virus after Russian Gazprom cyclist Dmitry Strakhov.

### Politicians

Canadian premier Trudeau has been placed in isolation for two weeks after his wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau tested positive. Spain's equality minister Irene Montero has tested positive and has been quarantined along with her partner, deputy prime minister and radical left Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias.

French Culture Minister Franck Riester is staying in his Paris home after contracting the coronavirus earlier this week. British MP Nadine Dorries, a minister in the health department who helped craft the legislation to fight the bug, has tested positive, the first British politician to do so.—AFP



## News



DETROIT: In this file photo taken on March 9, 2020, Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden gestures as he speaks during a campaign rally at Renaissance High School. — AFP

## Coronavirus can survive for days...

Continued from Page 1

The new coronavirus was detectable for up to four hours on copper and two to three days on plastic and stainless steel, and for up to 24 hours on cardboard.

The team used a nebulizer to simulate a person coughing or sneezing, and found that the virus became an aerosol - meaning its particles became suspended in the air - making it detectable for almost three hours. The study was first posted on a medical pre-print website last week before it was peer-reviewed, and attracted much attention, including some criticism from scientists who said that it may have overstated the airborne threat.

The virus is predominantly transmitted by respiratory droplets and in this form it is viable for only a few seconds after a person coughs or sneezes. Critics questioned whether a nebulizer accurately mimicked a human cough or sneeze. That said, there is other evidence to suggest it can become an aerosol, albeit in rare circumstances.

A Chinese paper that was posted last week and

is awaiting peer-review found an aerosolized form of the new coronavirus was present in the bathrooms of patients in a Wuhan hospital, as the virus is shed in stools. An aerosolized form of SARS was responsible for infecting hundreds of people in a Hong Kong apartment complex in 2003, when a sewage line leaked on to a ceiling fan creating a virus-laden plume.

The team behind the NEJM study performed similar tests on the SARS virus, finding the two viruses behave similarly. But their similar viability fails to explain why the novel coronavirus pandemic has infected close to 200,000 people and caused almost 8,000 deaths, while the SARS epidemic infected about 8,000 and killed nearly 800.

"This indicates that differences in the epidemiologic characteristics of these viruses probably arise from other factors, including high viral loads in the upper respiratory tract and the potential for persons infected with SARS-CoV-2 to shed and transmit the virus while asymptomatic," wrote the researchers. SARS-CoV-2 is the technical name for the new coronavirus. The findings affirm guidance from public health professionals regarding social distancing, avoiding touching the face, covering your cough or sneeze and frequently disinfecting objects using cleaning sprays or wipes. — AFP

## Yemeni women sew masks in...

Continued from Page 1

Yemen, ravaged by an ongoing war described by the United Nations as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, has not yet registered any COVID-19 cases. Unlike neighboring Gulf countries, Yemen has not taken drastic measures to prevent the virus' spread, but is also less vulnerable to imported virus cases, with swathes of the country under siege and air links severely curtailed. The women have nonetheless stepped up to help. Fighting between the Saudi-backed government and the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels has crippled the economy and healthcare system, making their intervention especially timely.

The storied Chinese-designed factory opened in 1967 producing cotton, which was a major contributor to Yemen's economy in the 1970s, making garments including army uniforms before shuttering in 2005. Parts of the complex have been damaged in airstrikes while others have become dilapidated. Abdullah Shaiban, the factory's chairman, hopes the crisis preparations will see the site achieve its "full potential". "There is a great demand for this kind of mask, which people use to protect their health," he told AFP. "We transformed a section of the sewing department that

manufactures clothes into one that produces masks."

He was hopeful that with 80 machines, the plant could make 8,000 to 10,000 masks daily. Another factory in Sanaa is now manufacturing hand sanitizer. The World Health Organization confirmed Tuesday there were no registered cases in Yemen. It said it was working with authorities in Sanaa and the southern city of Aden - where the government has been based after the rebels seized control of the capital in 2014 - to screen people entering the country.

"The virus does not respect borders," said Yemen's WHO representative Alaf Musani. "There is a shortfall in the number of tests... we're about to increase... testing capability." Musani added the WHO had distributed protective kit, including masks and gloves, but not "nearly enough", and was working to get more. Back at the factory, Shaiban said some opportunistic market traders had hiked imported mask prices to a level unrealistic for ordinary Yemenis. "This is not something we accept," Shaiban said. "There must be an ethical, moral, religious and humane approach."

Millions are struggling to survive without aid and three million are displaced, many in camps especially vulnerable to diseases like COVID-19. In Sanaa, the Iran-backed Houthi insurgents who control the capital and large parts of the north have suspended school classes as cases in nearby countries soar. Nearly 1,000 cases have been recorded across the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations - mostly among those returning from Iran where nearly 1,000 people have died. — AFP

arrested in a crackdown jointly carried out by quadripartite taskforce representing the ministry of interior, the Public Authority of Manpower, Kuwait Municipality and the ministry of commerce and industry," the minister revealed.

The government of Kuwait footed the bill of the tickets of the deportees, Aqeel said, affirming the commitment of all state agencies in taking the necessary measures against law violators, particularly when it comes to the precautions against COVID-19. The minister reminded all expatriates in Kuwait of the need to commit themselves to the provisions of law and the safety guidelines or face legal measures. Aqeel applauded the cooperation of state agencies that arranged for the deportation process, notably the ministries of interior and foreign affairs, PAM and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

The ministry of health yesterday reported 12 new coronavirus cases, raising the total number to 142. The 12 new cases include six Kuwaitis, an American resident and a Spanish resident who had all been to Britain. Sheikh Basel announced that three more coronavirus cases have recovered, bringing total recoveries to 15. Of the remaining cases, four are receiving treatment at the intensive care unit.

The health ministry warned yesterday against fraud committed by some people selling unauthorized coronavirus testing devices, saying an expatriate was arrested for doing so. The ministry "is the only authority in the state that carries out tests under the supervision of specialized medical staff," Dr Abdullah Al-Bader, Assistant Undersecretary for Pharmaceutical and Food Supervision, said in a statement. He reaffirmed that MoH did not authorize any local company or pharmacy to sell coronavirus testing devices.

Bader said MoH is coordinating with health ministries in GCC countries to authorize the official testing devices. He said the expatriate was arrested because he was selling unauthorized testing devices at very high prices on social media. He said MoH informed the ministry of interior, which arrested the person and referred him to prosecution.

Yesterday, the interior ministry warned against hiring domestic workers paid by the hour as part of nationwide measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The ministry's assistant secretary for residency affairs Maj Gen Talal Maarafi said this segment of the workforce has a chance of contracting the virus and spreading it due to the nature of their work. Maarafi asked people to inform competent authorities concerning this matter.

## Sanders to 'assess' campaign as Biden sweeps primaries

WASHINGTON: Leftist Bernie Sanders was reviewing the future of his campaign for the White House yesterday after Democratic rival Joe Biden soundly defeated him in the latest primaries and took a strong lead toward winning the Democratic presidential nomination. With the global coronavirus epidemic forcing more states to postpone primaries and both candidates to halt public rallies and turn to virtual campaigning, former frontrunner Sanders was under pressure to bow out of the race and let Biden focus on the November election fight against President Donald Trump.

"The next primary contest is at least three weeks away," said Sanders' campaign manager Faiz Shakir in a statement. "Sen Sanders is going to be having conversations with supporters to assess his campaign." Political moderate and former vice president Biden, 77, swept all three of Tuesday's contests, building a solid lead in delegates to the party's July nominating convention.

Biden handily trounced Sanders in each of Tuesday's battlegrounds. In the biggest prize of Florida, Biden grabbed 62 percent of the vote against 23 percent for 78-year-old Sanders. In Illinois, Biden topped 59 percent to Sanders' 36 percent, and in Arizona, Biden came in almost 44 percent to Sanders' nearly 32 percent, while former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has already withdrawn from the race, came in a distant third. Biden has now won 19 of the 24 contests, with just over half to be held.

The victories underscored Biden's position as the party's frontrunner and the eagerness of Democratic leaders and party rank and file to come together around a moderate flag bearer, to challenge Trump. According to a count by RealClearPolitics, Biden has racked up 1,153 delegates to Sanders' 874, with 1,991 needed to capture the nomination. Given Biden's substantial lead in national opinion polls among Democrats and in many of the states yet to hold primaries, Sanders faces a very steep battle to overtake his rival.

Former Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill

## Schools call to end academic...

Continued from Page 1

circumstances, because despite the efforts of the Kuwaiti government in this regard, resuming school will not be favored by the public because of parents' fear and concerns about their children's health.

"A survey was conducted by the union and a majority of parents were in favor of concluding the school year and considering the first semester results as final results," the union explained. It said more problems will impede the resumption of schools, such as students' reluctance to attend due to the fear of infections and the fact that resuming school will lead to crowding, which will help the virus spread. Finally, the union stressed that in case schools resume on March 29 or if the suspension is extended till mid-April, this will prolong the school year, increase power consumption and negatively

urged Sanders to drop out. "I think it is time," she told MSNBC. "Bernie's going to have plenty of delegates and power to influence the platform," she said, referring to the party's policy principles to be declared at its July convention. Biden said he was closer to securing the nomination and was building "a broad coalition" that the party requires to defeat Trump. "The next president will have to salvage our reputation, rebuild confidence in our leadership, and mobilize our country and our allies to rapidly meet new challenges - like future pandemics. We need a leader who will be ready on day one," he said in a tweet yesterday.

### Trump taunt

From the White House, Trump taunted the Democrats, repeating his accusation that the party elite sabotaged Sanders - whom the president's own campaign views as the weaker potential opponent in the November contest. The Democratic National Committee "will have gotten their fondest wish and defeated Bernie Sanders, far ahead of schedule", Trump tweeted. "Now they are doing everything possible to be nice to him in order to keep his supporters. Bernie has given up, just like he did last time. He will be dropping out soon!" he said, referring to Sanders' failed fight for the nomination in 2016. Trump also appeared to be attempting to rile up Sanders' supporters, whose willingness to transfer their support to Biden could be crucial in the November contest.

By all accounts it is an astonishing change of fortune for Biden, whose campaign was left for dead just one month ago after poor showings in early voting states. Political analyst David Axelrod concluded that Sanders was a mortally wounded candidate. "No Dem has ever come back from anything like this deficit," tweeted Axelrod, chief strategist for Barack Obama's two successful presidential campaigns.

Sanders has struggled against perceptions that he is too far left to defeat Trump. He admitted as much last week when he said that Democratic voters have told him they back his agenda of health-care for all and battling income disparities, but they were voting for Biden because the former vice president has a better chance of winning back the White House. In Florida, voter Cristina Grand, 56, a psychologist originally from Venezuela, said Sanders lost Florida, home to tens of thousands of Cuban refugees, because he refused to criticize Havana and Fidel Castro. — AFP

affect the next academic year's schedules.

But the Kuwait Society for Education Quality called for completing school curriculums and not using any excuses not to do so, especially in view of the possibility of extending the school suspension. "We will have enough time to make up for lost time during the summer, even if this leads to cancelling a semester or two the following summer," the society said in a statement, noting that this is a must to ensure the quality of academic achievement in schools, universities and applied education colleges, as they are the foundation of readying youth capable of building their nations at all times.

The society hailed the attitudes of teachers who prioritized the love of Kuwait, the future of its children and the soundness of the educational process by not calling to settle for what has been already taught and not extending school during the summer to protect their own interests. In addition, the society urged the Cabinet and Harbi not to compromise the quality of academic achievement and to set a clear plan to resume and complete the teaching of curricula even at the expense of part or the entire summer to make up for time lost in this semester.

## Global virus infections top...

Continued from Page 1

increase of 18 percent," said Fernando Simon, the health ministry's emergencies coordinator. Over the same 24-hour period, the number of deaths rose to 598, an increase of 107, a government statement showed, giving a higher figure than that initially announced by Simon. Madrid remains the worst-hit area, accounting for 5,637 cases, or 41 percent of the infections in Spain, while the number of deaths there rose to 390 deaths - around two-thirds of the national total.

Iran said its novel coronavirus death toll surpassed 1,000 yesterday as President Hassan Rouhani defended the response of his administration, which has yet to impose a lockdown. The COVID-19 outbreak in sanctions-hit Iran is one of the deadliest for any country outside China, where the disease originated. Rouhani's government reported another 147 deaths - a record high for a single day in the month since it announced the emergence of the disease. The virus has now killed 1,135 people in Iran out of 17,361 cases of infection based on official figures.

The health ministry said 5,710 people have overcome the virus. One person who recovered was a 103-year-old woman, state news agency IRNA reported, despite overwhelming evidence that the elderly are the most at risk. The unnamed woman had been hospitalized in the central city of Semnan for about a week. But she was "discharged after making a complete recovery", Semnan University of Medical Sciences head Navid Danayi was quoted as saying.

As the specter of a deep global recession looms large, London and Washington announced massive economic stimulus packages after coming under fire over their response to the crisis. But financial markets were unimpressed, with US, European and Asian stocks all sinking yesterday. And the International Labor Organization warned that the pandemic could leave up to 25 million more people out of work and drastically slash workers' incomes.

US President Donald Trump said the White House was discussing a "substantial" spending bill with Congress that would include immediate cash payments to Americans. Yesterday Trump promised more "very important" news from the Food and Drug Administration to be announced at a press conference later, calling the illness the "Chinese Virus" - a term that irks Beijing.

The EU warned of long-term ripples from the virus as it imposed its new travel restrictions, the

most significant emergency measure from Brussels, which has struggled to develop a unified response. EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told Germany's Bild newspaper that politicians had initially underestimated the virus threat. "But now it is clear that this is a virus that will keep us busy for a long time yet," she said. "We understand that measures that seemed drastic two or three weeks ago, need to be taken now."

Within the bloc some countries have sealed borders, while bars, restaurants and most shops have closed their doors until further notice, grinding life in Europe's normally bustling cities to a halt. Some 850 million youngsters have been kept home globally - about half the world's student population - according to UNESCO. "The scale and speed of the school and university closures represents an unprecedented challenge for the education sector," it said.

Trump said the US-Canada border would close for all non-essential travel - but assured trade would continue unfettered - building on a previous ban on most visitors from Europe and China. In the US itself, Maryland became the latest state to delay presidential election primaries and New York City is considering curfews. Australia's government urged citizens to not travel abroad and banned gatherings of more than 100 people as cases topped 500.

The World Health Organization called for "aggressive" action in Southeast Asia to combat the virus after it was largely spared the alarming number of cases clocked elsewhere in the region early on. Malaysia has already banned travellers from overseas, while Vietnam has blocked visitors from several European nations.

The WHO has called for every suspected coronavirus case to be tested, though many countries, especially in Europe, are only screening those who require hospitalization or who are very sick. Asian hotspots China and South Korea have seen new infections and deaths level out in recent weeks - China reported just one new domestic case for the second consecutive day.

Africa, with its fragile healthcare systems, has also recorded nearly 600 cases - with numbers quickly climbing in South Africa - and Burkina Faso reported the first confirmed death in sub-Saharan Africa. Latin America has more than 1,100 recorded infections and the continent's most populated country Brazil announced its first fatality.

Every sector from tourism to food to aviation is affected as the global economy effectively goes into shutdown. Major world airlines have axed almost all flights temporarily, triggering pleas to help carriers survive. The outbreak has also shredded the global sporting and cultural calendar. In football, The European and Copa America championships have been postponed until next year, and the French Open tennis tournament has been delayed to the autumn. — AFP



# Classifieds

Thursday, March 19, 2020

**Kuwait Times**  
 Now you can browse  
[www.kuwaittimes.net](http://www.kuwaittimes.net)  
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net

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 Fax: (+965) 24348714  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Warm and Cloudy to partly cloudy with moderate to fresh south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind later on, with speed of 20 - 50 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING			Thunder rain + Fresh wind	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 17/03/2020 1200 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	27 °C	19 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	28 °C	17 °C		
ABDALY	31 °C	17 °C		
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C		
JAHRA	31 °C	18 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	27 °C	19 °C		
SALMIYAH	22 °C	19 °C		
AHMADI	23 °C	19 °C		
NUWASIB	29 °C	20 °C		
WAFRA	31 °C	19 °C		
SALMY	30 °C	15 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	03/19	Warm	27 °C	16 °C	NE	08 - 28 km/h
Friday	03/20	Warm and Partly cloudy	28 °C	16 °C	NE-SE	10 - 35 km/h
Saturday	03/21	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain with a chance for rising dust	30 °C	15 °C	SE-SW	15 - 42 km/h
Sunday	03/22	Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust over open areas	25 °C	13 °C	NW	12 - 42 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:35
Sunrise	05:54
Zuhr	11:56
Asr	15:23
Sunset	17:58
Isha	19:15

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	15 °C
MAX. RH	73 %
MIN. RH	36 %
MAX. Wind	SE 36 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, Imran Can, holder of Indian Passport No J3966727 r/o H. No. 163/1, Demani, Cuncolim, Salcate - Goa presently residing in

Kuwait hereby declare that I have changed my name from Imran Khan to Imran Can. Hereafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by the name Imran Can. (C 5496) 18-3-2020

**Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988**

**EMERGENCY 112**

## 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
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

## Daily SuDoku

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

very hard

## Yesterday's Solution

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

medium

## STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**  
 A temporary separation from someone close to you could have you reflecting on the good times you've spent together, especially over the past few weeks. You're likely to talk with him or her on the phone. You're feeling a lot of warmth and affection toward everyone around you, but a little sad as well, particularly when you think of those far away. Call them up, Aries! They'll be glad to hear from you.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**  
 Dreams with mixed messages might trouble your sleep tonight. One minute you'll be having a wonderful dream, and the next could be black and gloomy. Write them down, Taurus. The message is probably more positive than it appears. Worries about money might plague you throughout the day, yet things probably aren't as bad as they seem. Make sure you learn the facts about your situation before allowing yourself to panic!

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**  
 The special person in your life could be working too hard, causing strain for him or her and frustration for you. Their extra hours at work could interfere with your desire to enjoy quality time together. Your own worries could put a damper on your self-confidence, Gemini. You might be wondering if you're doing everything that needs to be done. It might help to make a list and cross off each task you complete.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**  
 Today you might try to continue or complete a creative project of some kind, but your imagination just isn't working the way it normally does. Also, overindulgence from last night could have you feeling a bit sluggish, which doesn't help the situation. Put your work aside before you give up on it completely, Cancer. This is only a temporary situation. Your mind should be back to normal tomorrow.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**  
 Today you might feel especially protective toward all those you love: children, family, friends, pets, and the special person in your life. Leo. Upsetting news might have you wondering about the future, but don't let it get you down. All should be well, so allow yourself to relax and enjoy your loved ones. Distract yourself by going to an exciting movie. That will help release tension and put you in a better frame of mind.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**  
 Today you could make the acquaintance of actors, musicians, or other performers, some of whom might be quite well known. Social occasions could bring valuable contacts your way, which you could make good use of later. You might be having so much fun out among the beautiful people that you really don't want to go home! Don't make it too late a night, however, Virgo. You'll need all your energy tomorrow!

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**  
 Someone who lives far away, someone you haven't heard from for a long time, could give you a surprise phone call today. You'll be delighted and probably stay on the phone too long. You might need to run a few errands, but the weather could keep you indoors. Don't worry about it, Libra. You'll still have time to take care of other pressing matters. You should be feeling especially artistic right now. Be creative!

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**  
 Money could be a source of worry today, Scorpio. You might feel you've spent too much (who doesn't sometimes?) or perhaps some funds you were expecting have been held up. This is a delay and not a permanent situation (although it might seem that way). Too much worry could spoil your day, and you don't want that. If there's anything you can do to ease the situation, do it. Otherwise, hang in there.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**  
 Too much stress and strain over the past few days could cause you to clash with your partner. While not a disaster by any means, Sagittarius, this can put a damper on your day. It might be best if you took a few minutes to get away by yourself and let all your negativity fade away when no one's around. You'll feel better by the time you face your family, friends, and partner again.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**  
 Overindulgence last night could have left you feeling a little woozy today, Capricorn. You're may want to spend the day in bed, but the prospect of leaving tasks undone could cause you to push on anyway. That's a bad idea. Rest is just what you need. Don't force yourself to socialize, either. You need some time alone to recover and gather your resources so you can face the world with a clear head.

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**  
 Plans for getting together with a group of close friends may have to be called off because of sudden unexpected events. This could have you feeling somewhat down, Aquarius, especially if a romantic partner is involved. Try not to worry about it too much. You will be able to reschedule, and you could use the time alone anyway to relax and center yourself.

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**  
 The planetary energy has you feeling a bit sluggish today. You'll probably want to stay home, surrounded by your books, pets, and plants, yet you know you have appointments to keep and responsibilities to fulfill. Your sense of duty is especially strong. Make a deal with yourself to get the bare minimum done and then relax. Try a hot bath and listening to classical music.

## Play a Tune

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

**ACCORDION**      **HARMONICA**      **TRIANGLE**  
**BANJO**            **HARP**                    **TRUMPET**  
**CELO**                **MARIMBA**            **TUBA**  
**CLARINET**        **ORGAN**                **XYLOPHONE**  
**DRUM**  
**FLUTE**  
**GIUITAR**            **RECORDER**  
**SAXOPHONE**



## Sports

# Struggling Super Rugby pushed towards oblivion by virus crisis

## Short-term plans focus on staging local derbies in NZ, Australia and S Africa

**WELLINGTON:** Super Rugby has confronted numerous problems during its 25 years, but experts warn the coronavirus pandemic may prove a knock-out blow for the southern hemisphere's premier club competition.

With 15 teams in five countries straddling 16 time zones from Buenos Aires and Cape Town to Sydney and Christchurch it has long been criticised as unwieldy, expensive to run and exhausting for elite players.

Now virus-related travel bans have put the competition in limbo, leaving administrators scrambling to set up locally-based alternatives that do not require international travel. While officials say Super Rugby is on hold "for the foreseeable future", in reality they are preparing for the season to be scrapped.

SANZAAR admitted that would place the governing body and its constituent unions "in a precarious position", as broadcasters have paid huge sums for the rights to cover the game.

"Without that revenue, without the ability to be playing in front of stadiums that have crowds, it all does have a direct impact on the bottom line," SANZAAR chief executive Andy Marinos told Newshub.

"That's something I know the national unions are dealing with all of their clubs and then indirectly with all their governments." Short-term plans are focused on staging local derbies in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, with Japan's Sunwolves potentially part of the Australian competition and the Jaguares of Argentina based in Africa.

However, that may not satisfy broadcasters. New

Zealand's Sky Network Television noted in a market update this week that "the company has options to recover some costs associated with sports content rights".

Australia-based sports consultancy firm Global Media & Sports (GMS) said SANZAAR's members were in no position to pay back tens of millions of dollars in broadcasting revenues. "I doubt any of the unions could afford to do that, I'd wager that most of that money has been spent already, or at least allocated," GMS managing director Colin Smith told AFP.

Given Super Rugby's myriad structural problems, Smith said, the virus-enforced shutdown would raise questions about its future, with the makeshift local derby matches potentially forming the nucleus of new national competitions.

"It's been very, very expensive and there's an argument for the unions to say 'Is this something we should continue with, can we afford it?'," he said. "It goes to the future of the

competition." Super Rugby began with 12 teams in 1996 but its format has undergone almost constant tinkering in the past decade, testing the loyalty of fans.

Over-ambitious expansion plans have been followed by the painful axing of Australia's Western Force, the Central Cheetahs and Southern Kings in South Africa, as well as the Sunwolves at the end of this season.

The Cheetahs and Kings both joined Europe's Pro14 competition and there has been persistent speculation all of South Africa's teams could ditch Super Rugby for a more lucrative and time zone-



**CARDIFF:** File photo shows a man in a kilt stands in front of the Principality Stadium in Cardiff, Wales on March 14, 2020. This weekend's Six Nations international between Wales and Scotland in Cardiff was postponed on Friday due to the coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

### Broadcast cash 'spent already'



friendly switch to the northern hemisphere.

In Australia, the game has been flatlining in the face of keen competition from other sports, notably rugby league and Australian Rules, after years of poor on-field performances. Rugby Australia has suspended negotiations on a new broadcast deal due to the virus crisis, with reports it had received little interest anyway.

"This couldn't have come at a worse time for

them," Smith said. Despite the issues, New Zealand Rugby chief executive Mark Robinson insisted Super Rugby was viable in the long term. "We're a world-class competition, as we've seen in recent times the quality of the rugby has been outstanding," he told reporters.

"So we believe it's a competition that's got a future, what that might look like is something that we're always revisiting and looking at." —AFP

## Kenya orders closure of training camps

**NAIROBI:** Kenya's athletics authority yesterday ordered the closure of training camps and clubs due to the coronavirus outbreak, a move that threatens the ability of the country's athletes to prepare for the Olympic Games which are scheduled to begin in July.

Athletics Kenya's announcement follows last week's edict to bar athletes from travelling to international events. "All athletics training camps and clubs should remain closed until further notice," the body said in a statement. "Athletes are advised to continue training individually and coaches encouraged to continue monitoring individual athletes."

Sporting events around the world are being suspended or cancelled entirely as countries scramble to contain the spread of the virus, which has infected more than 196,000 people and led to more than 7,800 deaths.

Bernard Ouma, who coaches 1,500m world champion Timothy Cheruiyot, told Reuters that they had moved to minimise group training before the announcement on Wednesday.

"We decided to break the camp, so guys are training by themselves. But I am monitoring the work," said Ouma, who runs Rongai Athletics Club, located on the outskirts of Nairobi, and also coaches Elijah Manangoi, the 2017 1,500m world champion.

There are growing concerns the outbreak may hit the Tokyo Olympics. Japan on Wednesday said it was not making any preparations to postpone the Games, insisting it plans to host the event as scheduled despite the global spread of the virus.

"Hopefully, the Olympics will be there, might not be there as well. But we are preparing individually, my job is to monitor what's going on," said Ouma. "It's tough for everyone, we are in difficult times," he added. "We don't turn out for the Olympics (without being ready) and we are not in good shape... everyone is fighting the dilemma (of) what will happen tomorrow."

Athletics Kenya said yesterday it was halting physical meetings for the next month and urged athletes who had travelled outside the country over the last two weeks to self-quarantine. The Africa Cross Country Championships scheduled for April 8 in Togo have also been postponed with no new date set. —Reuters

## India's Chand says training fraught with virus fears

**NEW DELHI:** After battling in court to be able to run and fighting discrimination when she came out as gay, Indian sprinter Dutee Chand now has to overcome the fear of training in a pandemic to maintain her Olympic hopes.

Chand, who was banned from competing internationally because of the hyperandrogenism gene condition, wants the Tokyo Games to go ahead even if she has not yet made the women's 100 metre qualifying time of 11.15sec.

But running close to other Indian athletes is fraught as the deadly coronavirus spreads across the country of 1.3 billion people.

"There is fear of catching the coronavirus because we train together and if somebody catches it then it is going to spread," the 24-year-old told AFP over phone from a camp in the eastern city of Bhubaneswar.

"I am not going out other than to train. Home-cooked food is the order of the day, I don't eat out at all. Washing hands has become a 24-hour activity. So hopefully we will overcome the crisis."

But the global sporting lockdown caused by the mounting death toll means there are no races for Chand to run and reach the qualifying time.

### 'TRAINING IS AFFECTED'

Despite mounting doubts about the event, the Games are still scheduled to start on July 24 and time is running out. "Of course with all the meetings cancelled it has become tough for me to qualify," said Chand, whose personal best is currently 11.22sec. "I have to clock 11.15 seconds to make the cut and I am worried how I am going to make it if international events don't happen." With just three reported deaths, India has so far been spared a pandemic that has killed almost 8,000 around the world. But virus fears are widespread and travel is

## Olympic gymnastics qualifier cancelled

**TOKYO:** A Tokyo Olympics gymnastics qualifier next month, which had hoped to feature US superstar Simone Biles among its participants, was cancelled yesterday as the coronavirus pandemic continued to cast a shadow over this year's Games.

The Japan Gymnastics Association announced the scrapping of the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup Tokyo on April 4-5, an Olympic test event, just a few days after saying it would be held without spectators.

"Due to the impact of the spread of coronavirus infections in Europe and cancellations of World Cups in



**JAKARTA:** File photo shows silver medallist India's Dutee Chand celebrates during the victory ceremony for the women's 200m athletics event at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta on August 29, 2018. After battling in court to be able to run and fighting discrimination when she came out as gay, Dutee Chand now has to overcome the fear of training in a pandemic to maintain her fading Olympic hopes. —AFP

increasingly difficult in the country.

"Training is affected because the state government has shut down all facilities though we have got special permission to train because of the Olympics. "But it affects us mentally as schools, colleges, offices are closed. We don't know whether the Olympics will happen or when the next meeting will be."

One of six children born to a poor family, Chand is not new to beating the odds. Her battle against gender testing when she was a teenager after showing elevated levels of testosterone made international headlines.

On top of her four-year battle with the world athletics body over hyperandrogenism — the same condition that affects South Africa's two-time Olympic champion Caster Semenya — Chand last year became the first top Indian athlete to reveal

she is in a same-sex relationship.

The revelation prompted a backlash in her home village in conservative rural India, and Chand said she had been finding it hard to overcome the prejudice. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, Chand became only the fifth Indian to participate in the women's 100m, though she did not get past the heats.

After the Court of Arbitration for Sport definitively ruled in her favour, Chand went to the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, where she won silver medals in the 100m and 200m. Chand said Indian runners want to test themselves against the best at the Olympics.

"But it is tough to qualify for the 100m in India," she said. "We face tough competition from the best athletes from other countries. "But fingers crossed, we have two months left and if there is a competition, hopefully I can make it." —AFP

other countries, many athletes and judges decided not to participate in the event," the JGA said in a statement.

Leading gymnasts including four-time Olympic gold medallist Biles, who is expected to be among the stars of Tokyo 2020, had been on the original entry list for the event.

A rhythmic gymnastics Olympic test event scheduled for April 6 is still going ahead, according to the Tokyo 2020 organising committee.

"After confirming it is safe to do so, Tokyo 2020 will carry out an operational test within the given dates," the organisers said, adding they will consult with the International Olympic Committee and Federation Internationale de Gymnastique.

The cancellation comes as doubts grow about whether the Games can open as scheduled on July 24. Organisers and the International Olympic

Committee insist preparations are moving ahead as scheduled despite cancellations and alterations to events ranging from qualifiers to the torch relay.

Tokyo 2020 organisers said Tuesday they had taken the "heartbreaking" decision to scale back parts of flame's journey across Japan, beginning with its arrival in the country on Friday.

A recent poll by Kyodo News showed 70 percent of respondents in Japan said they did not think the Games could be held as scheduled. But the IOC said Tuesday there was no change to the programme so far.

"The IOC remains fully committed to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, and with more than four months to go before the Games there is no need for any drastic decisions at this stage," it said in a statement after its executive board met in Lausanne. "Any speculation at this moment would be counter-productive." —AFP

## S Africa could go domestic amid virus pandemic

**CAPE TOWN:** South African Rugby may run a domestic competition featuring its six Super Rugby and PRO14 sides in a bid to keep players match fit ahead of the Springboks' scheduled tests against Scotland and Georgia in July.

Both international franchise competitions are on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic and, with no resumption date set, SA Rugby are keen to keep players active and the local rugby economy alive.

The government has banned gatherings of more than 100 people, but domestic travel is open and sports events can go ahead as long as they receive the required approvals.

"SA Rugby is currently evaluating all our competition structures, with a view to restructuring it in the interim so that we are able to

afford game-time to all our franchise and provincial teams," its CEO Jurie Roux said in a statement yesterday.

Nothing would however happen for several weeks until the period of social distancing as instructed by President Cyril Ramaphosa lapsed, he said.

"We are considering local derby matches between our South African teams... (and) we are confident we will be able to put a feasible plan on the table that will be suitable for everyone... (and) will announce plans once we are in a position to do so."

Director of Rugby Rassie Erasmus, who led the Boks to the World Cup trophy in Japan last year, says the team is planning for their international season on the assumption it will kick off in July.

"Our planning for the season will carry on regardless... as we still have a lot to prepare for," Erasmus said. "While there are challenges when it comes to face-to-face interaction with players and team activities, modern communication methods make it possible for coaches, players and management teams to keep in constant contact with one another." —Reuters



Sports

# Copa America postponed from 2020 to 2021 over pandemic

## A host of other events and competitions delayed or cancelled

**ASUNCION:** The Copa America due to kick off in June in Argentina and Colombia was on Tuesday postponed by a year to 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic, organisers CONMEBOL said. The announcement came shortly after UEFA's decision to also push back the 2020 European Championship by 12 months.

Sport and football all over the world has come to a grinding halt due to the coronavirus outbreak with the Champions League, Copa Libertadores and almost all national football leagues suspended.

Other sports like tennis, golf, rugby and Formula One have also either delayed or cancelled a host of events and competitions. According to the latest figures more than 180,000 people worldwide have been affected by the coronavirus outbreak with 7,400 people dying from the COVID-19 disease.

The Copa is South America's main continental competition between national sides and had been scheduled to run from June 12-July 12. "This has hit us hard, we were really excited about staging it," Colombia's Sports Minister Ernesto Lucena told AFP. But "health comes before competition."

It was due to be staged for the first time in two countries rather than one, with 12 teams taking part, including invitees Australia and 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar. "It's an extraordinary measure due to an unexpected situation, and therefore responds to the fundamental need to avoid an exponential evolution of the virus," said CONMEBOL. The tournament is now rescheduled to run from June 11-July 11 in 2021.

**'COPA WILL RETURN'**  
"It wasn't easy to take this decision but we have to safeguard at all times the health of our sportsmen and all the stakeholders that form part of the large South American football family. "There's no doubt that the oldest national team tournament in the world will return with renewed strength in 2021, ready to once again make the continent and the whole world vibrate with the passion that also defines us."

The decision was taken in conjunction with UEFA's move to postpone the Euros. "We also thank UEFA and its president Aleksander Ceferin for working together and the co-ordinated decision to also postpone the 2020 Euros for the betterment of the whole football family," added CONMEBOL.

The South American governing body had decided to align the Copa, which mostly used to be played in odd years, to the Euros in order to reduce the impact on European clubs, where a large number of South American international players ply their trade.

Chile's Colombian coach Reinaldo Rueda said the decision was "coherent" with the aim of aligning the Copa to the Euros. Club football all over the world has been suspended due to the coronavirus leaving teams and leagues sweating on whether they will be able to finish the current season.

The start of World Cup qualifying in South America, which was due to begin at the end of March, has also been postponed. Many governments have imposed travel restrictions and even total lockdowns on their populations' movements.

The suspension of the Copa and Euros increases the chances of domestic leagues being brought to a



**CARAGENA:** File photo shows Brazilian former footballer Juninho Paulista presents the Copa America trophy on the stage during the draw of the Copa America 2020 football tournament at the Convention Centre in Cartagena, Colombia. The 2020 Copa America in Argentina and Colombia was postponed on March 17, 2020 by a year to 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

“ This has hit us hard ”

## What next for Euro football?

**LONDON:** UEFA's decision to postpone Euro 2020 for 12 months on Tuesday buys European club football some time to decide how to proceed, but extremely difficult decisions lie ahead on how, if and when to finish the season.

How long the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic continues will be the decisive factor. Europe has become the epicentre of the pandemic, with France joining Italy and Spain in applying strict lockdown measures and European leaders also planning to ban all non-essential travel into the continent.

UEFA's crisis meeting on Tuesday with its 55 national associations as well as clubs and players bodies agreed on a working group to look at solutions with the hope of still completing the season by June 30.

The end of June is when many players' contracts and loan deals expire. "As the governing body of European football, UEFA led the process and made the biggest sacrifice. Moving Euro 2020 comes at a huge cost," said UEFA president

Aleksander Ceferin. More financial pain for UEFA and Europe's major clubs could be on the horizon if the Champions League cannot be completed. Last season UEFA paid out 1.9 billion euros (\$2.1 billion) in prize money and TV revenue to clubs competing in the Champions League.

This season's competition was cut off with only four of the last-16 ties completed and no date has been set for a return to action. "The focus now will be to come up with solutions to conclude the 2019/20 club season in the most practical manner and, beyond that, ensure football, like society as a whole, returns as quickly as possible to its natural form and rhythm," said Andrea Agnelli, Juventus CEO and chairman of the European Club Association (ECA).

The Champions League and Europa League may therefore need to be streamlined to reach a conclusion. Ties from the quarter-finals on could be reduced to one-off games rather than two legs, while the semi-finals and finals could come together like a "final four" format often used in basketball.

That would see both semi-finals and final played over the course of a few days, with the Champions League final due to be in Istanbul and the

Europa League final in Gdansk. "Without any prejudice, those are also options," said Ceferin. "We have different options, but really it's far too early to be concrete. Whatever we decide, nothing is sure because we don't know when this COVID-19 will stop and allow us to play."

**DIFFICULT DECISIONS TO COME**  
With that in mind, UEFA's goal of finishing by June 30 is highly optimistic. Domestic associations then face the difficult call of whether to let this season roll on until it can be completed at a later date, use the current standings to call the season to a halt or even declare the campaign null and void.

"The competitions have to be completed, if possible before June 30, but that date doesn't have to be an insurmountable wall," said Luis Rubiales, president of the Spanish football federation.

"If there are games to be played after June 30, our opinion is that all teams can play all their games, so that league position is earned on the pitch."

West Ham vice-chairman Karen Brady has been accused of self-interest after declaring: "The only fair and reasonable thing to do is declare the whole season null and void."

conclusion, as long as such social limitations are lifted in the coming weeks or months.

**CHAMPIONS BRAZIL**  
Brazil won the last Copa in 2019 on home soil, beating plucky outsiders Peru 3-1 in the final at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium. For the next edition, the 12 competing teams have been drawn into two geographical groups, one in the north of the continent, hosted by Colombia, and the other in the

south, hosted by Argentina. Australia have been drawn in the south zone and Qatar will play in the north zone. The final will be played in the Estadio Metropolitano in Barranquilla, Colombia. "Obviously there are economic impacts, but for now preparations are just delayed," said Lucena. Colombia's only previous success was in 2001, the last time they hosted the Copa. The 2024 Copa America will be held in Ecuador. —AFP

## All England badminton chose finances over players welfare

**NEW DELHI:** India's former world number one Saina Nehwal said officials had put profits ahead of player welfare by allowing the All England badminton championship to go ahead last weekend despite the coronavirus pandemic. The competition was one of the few international sporting events to conclude Sunday amid the deadly outbreak, which has claimed thousands of lives across the globe.

"Only thing I can think of is that rather than the players welfare n feelings, financial reasons were given more importance," Nehwal, who won bronze at the 2012 London Olympics, wrote on Twitter.

"Otherwise there was no other reason for the #AllEnglandOpen2020 to go on last week." Denmark's Viktor Axelsen clinched his first All England title, while Tai Tzu-ying of Taiwan regained the women's singles crown.

Nehwal bowed out of the event in the first round and is racing against time to qualify for the Olympics scheduled to begin on July 24. Several players took part in the All England Open — an Olympic qualification event — and Nehwal's husband, Indian player Parupalli Kashyap, said the players were "under pressure" to play. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has suspended all tournaments until April 12 due to the virus, badly affecting Olympic qualifying which closes on April 30. —AFP



**KUALA LUMPUR:** File photo shows India's Saina Nehwal serves against Spain's Carolina Marin during their women singles quarter-final match at the Malaysia Open badminton tournament in Kuala Lumpur. Nehwal yesterday said the All England championships preferred financial gains over player safety after the prestigious badminton tournament went ahead despite the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

play may be able to resume is June, ESPN reported Tuesday night. Sources told ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski that former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who joined the league's board of governors in a Tuesday conference call, shared his view that America's recovery from the pandemic was far from over and may not be for some time. Accordingly, the NBA is working through plans to increase its credit line by an additional \$550 million up to \$1.2 billion as a means to assist with expenses for what may be a prolonged shutdown. Murthy apparently was a

bit more optimistic in recent days about a more limited spread of the virus, although sources told Wojnarowski, "No one left that call thinking we could be playing anytime soon." Per the report, teams are hoping the NBA can give them planned dates to possibly resume the season — whether or not it's the regular season and postseason, or playoffs only. But Wojnarowski said the league is remaining patient as owners wait for more tangible estimates on potential lost revenues before committing to any revised calendar. —Reuters

## NBA might not resume until June

**NEW YORK:** With the NBA season suspended because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the league is making financial preparations after being advised that the earliest

## Chelsea open up hotel to healthcare staff

**LONDON:** Chelsea will provide free accommodation to staff of Britain's National Health Service in a hotel at the club's Stamford Bridge stadium during the coronavirus pandemic. The Premier League club's owner, Roman Abramovich, will fund the service that will allow medical professionals in London a chance to rest if they are unable to travel home or face long commutes.

The scheme will be put in place for two months, but could be extended if needed. There have been 1,950 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 71 deaths in Britain. "It was decided the best way Chelsea can assist the NHS is to provide accommodation for NHS staff. Mr Abramovich will be covering the costs of providing the accommodation," Chelsea said in a statement.

"Many of the medical staff will be working long shifts and may not be able to travel home or would otherwise have to make long commutes. Local accommodation helps maintain the health and well-being of these crucial personnel at this critical time."

Chelsea do not know when they will next return to the pitch, with the Premier League suspended until at least April 4, although that date is set to be pushed back at a meeting of Premier League clubs today.

But in the absence of football, the Blues are the latest club to make an offer of community support at a time of crisis. Liverpool players contributed to a £40,000 (\$48,000) donation from the club to help keep local foodbanks running.

Aston Villa and Brighton were among the clubs to donate food prepared for last weekend's matches to homeless charities. Fourth-tier club Stevenage are preparing a community careline that will help isolated local residents over 70 with day-to-day needs such as delivery of food and prescriptions. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE		
Wolverhampton Wanderers FC v Olympiacos CFP	20:55	beIN Sports
Bayer 04 Leverkusen v Glasgow Rangers FC	20:55	beIN Sports
Shakhtar Donetsk v VfL Wolfsburg	20:55	beIN Sports
Getafe CF v Internazionale Milano	20:55	beIN Sports
FC Kobenhavn v Istanbul Basaksehir FK	23:00	beIN Sports
AS Roma v Sevilla FC	23:00	beIN Sports
Manchester United v Lask Linz	23:00	beIN Sports
FC Basel 1893 v Eintracht Frankfurt	23:00	beIN Sports



**18** Struggling Super Rugby pushed towards oblivion by virus crisis



**19** Copa America postponed from 2020 to 2021 over pandemic



**19** All England badminton chose finances over players welfare



LAUSANNE: The Olympic Rings logo is pictured in front of the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne yesterday, as doubts increase over whether Tokyo can safely host the summer Games amid the spread of the COVID-19. Olympic chiefs acknowledged yesterday there was no 'ideal' solution to staging the Tokyo Olympics amid a backlash from athletes as the deadly coronavirus pandemic swept the globe. —AFP

## IOC battles to keep Tokyo Games on track

**ATHENS:** The International Olympic Committee is facing its strongest headwinds in decades as it prepares to brief national committees yesterday on the state of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics amid the coronavirus pandemic, with voices of dissent growing louder.

The IOC has remained committed to staging the Tokyo Games as planned from July 24-Aug. 9, saying on Tuesday after a meeting with international sports federations that measures against the virus were delivering results.

The coronavirus has so far killed more than 7,500 people and infected about 200,000, with the epicentre now in Europe. The IOC has refused to publicly consider cancellation or postponement as possible options, even as other major events including soccer's Euro 2020 and Copa America and the French Open tennis grand slam announced postponements on Tuesday.

The virus has also wreaked havoc with Olympic qualification tournaments with athletes struggling to train, travel or compete and many pre-Games qualifiers cancelled or postponed.

IOC member Hayley Wickenheiser called the

decision to proceed with the Games "insensitive and irresponsible" in the most vocal attack on the Olympic body since President Thomas Bach took over in 2013. Wickenheiser, who competed in five Winter Games in ice hockey and at the 2000 Summer Olympics in softball, said continuing with the Games as planned ignored the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"This crisis is bigger than even the Olympics," Wickenheiser said in a statement on Twitter. "Athletes can't train. Attendees can't travel plan. Sponsors and marketers can't market with a degree of sensitivity."

"I think the IOC insisting this will move ahead, with such conviction, is insensitive and irresponsible given the state of humanity." She is not alone. Several athletes, including reigning Olympic pole vault champion

Katerina Stefanidi, said the IOC decision was putting athletes' health at risk, urging them to train as normal when entire countries have shut down to contain the virus spread. "There is no postponement, no cancellation. But it (the IOC) is putting us at risk," Stefanidi said in an exclusive interview to Reuters. "We all want Tokyo to happen but what is the Plan B if it does not happen?"

"Knowing about a possible option has a major effect on my training because I may be taking risks now that I would not take if I knew there was also the possibility of a Plan B."

Meanwhile, a plane sporting Tokyo 2020 livery departed Haneda International Airport yesterday bound for Athens to collect the Olympic flame, but there was no delegation from organisers onboard due to concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.

Tokyo 2020 said it chose not to send the high-level

delegation, which was originally set to include organising committee president Yoshiro Mori and Olympics minister Seiko Hashimoto, to Greece due to the coronavirus. The flu-like virus has killed more than 7,500 people and brought sport to a standstill around the world. Japan's ambassador to Greece will receive the flame at a hand-over ceremony, organisers said. Lower-level Tokyo 2020 officials who travelled to Greece last week will accompany the flame back to Japan. Some 20 airline and airport staff waved the plane off with very little fanfare at the airport, which was almost empty as travel restrictions aimed at stopping the spread of the virus have led to widespread flight cancellations.

The Olympic flame will arrive on Japanese soil on Friday at Matsushima airbase and be greeted by another low key ceremony. Despite sporting events being cancelled across the world in response to the coronavirus outbreak, Olympics organisers maintain the Games will start as planned on July 24.

The International Olympic Committee said on Tuesday that it does not plan any "drastic" decisions about the Games, saying it remains fully committed to the event being staged in four months' time despite the global spread of the coronavirus. —Reuters



### Japan to collect Olympic flame

### French Open date change over virus rocks tennis

**LONDON:** The global tennis calendar has been thrown into further chaos after a decision by French Open organisers to postpone the Grand Slam, with players and rival tournaments critical of the apparently unilateral move.

The event at Roland Garros, traditionally the second major of the season, was on Tuesday moved from a May 24 start date to September 20. Organisers said strict confinement measures imposed by the French government to tackle COVID-19 had made it impossible to continue with preparations.

FFT (French tennis federation) president Bernard Giudicelli said: "We have made a difficult yet brave decision in this unprecedented situation, which has evolved greatly since last weekend."

But the new dates mean the tournament would start just one week after the US Open, if that event remained in its original slot. Organisers of the Grand Slam in New York acknowledged it might need to be moved but said they would not go it alone in a scarcely veiled dig at French chiefs.

The rescheduled French Open would also clash with the start of the Asian swing and the Laver Cup team competition, due to take place in Boston from September 25 to 27. The men's ATP tour and the women's WTA tour are both currently suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic.

### 'SELFISH DECISIONS'

British doubles player Jamie Murray queried the apparent lack of coordination at the top of the game. "Strong Move by French Open/FFT to move to end of Sept," he tweeted. "I thought the powers that be in tennis were supposed to be all about working together these days?"

Canada's Vasek Pospisil, a member of the ATP player council, was strongly critical of the decision. "This is such a difficult time," he tweeted. "Everyone is being impacted by this catastrophe. Enhancing communication & working together to find solutions should be the priority. Not going Rogue & making selfish/arrogant decisions to further impact the tour in a negative way. #RolandGarros."

It also caught WTA chief Steve Simon by surprise, as well as former US

and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka. "Excusez moi???" tweeted Osaka, while Romania's Sorana Cirstea took issue with the method of communication. "What??? Again finding out through twitter..." she wrote.

The revised dates will leave players contesting a clay-court Grand Slam in the middle of the traditional hard-court season, with limited opportunities to adjust to the slower surface.

Roland Garros will also now clash with a number of tournaments, including the Laver Cup, where Europe's top players take on a World team. Roger Federer has already committed to the event and Rafael Nadal — the 12-time French Open champion — is another key figure at the tournament.

"This announcement came as a surprise to us and our partners — Tennis

Australia, the USTA (US Tennis Association) and the ATP," said Laver Cup organisers. "It raises many questions and we are assessing the situation. At this time, we want our fans, sponsors, broadcasters, staff, volunteers, players and the great city of Boston to know that we intend to hold Laver Cup 2020 as currently scheduled."

The USTA said it would not determine any new date for the US Open without consulting the other major championship organisers, the International Tennis Federation and the ATP and WTA tours. "We recognise that such a decision should not be made unilaterally," it said in a statement. The US Open, usually the final Grand Slam on the calendar, is scheduled to run from August 31 to September 13 in Flushing Meadows, New York. —AFP