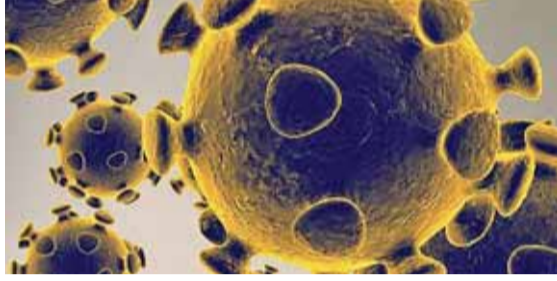




**2** Rumors in coronavirus time hurts society's morale, state's efforts



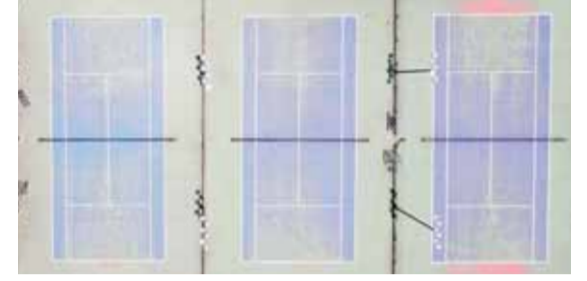
**8** N Korea fires 2 short-range 'ballistic missiles' into sea



**9** Nextdoor, network for neighbors, grows in age of social distancing



**20** Hunger games? Tennis foot soldiers struggle in time of virus



# 20 new cases of coronavirus in Kuwait; all cafes shuttered

## Ban on cemetery visits, restrictions on funerals • No cases at Central Prison

By A Sakeh

**KUWAIT:** The health ministry yesterday confirmed 20 new cases of coronavirus in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of cases in Kuwait to 255. The ministry's spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said at the ministry's daily press conference that seven cases - six Kuwaitis and one Filipino - are related to travel to the UK.

Sanad added that the 13 other cases include a Kuwaiti in contact with another Kuwaiti who had traveled to Saudi Arabia, nine Indians in contact with three Indians (under epidemiological investiga-

tion) and three Bangladeshis in contact with another Bangladeshi (under epidemiological investigation as well). He pointed out to the concentration of a number of cases resulting from contact with infected cases in Mahboula, Industrial Shuwaikh, and some commercial areas of the capital.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah earlier announced the recovery of three new cases, bringing the total of those who have recovered to 67. Twelve cases are in intensive care - three critical and nine stable - out of 188 cases in hospital, while 910 persons completed the quarantine period.

Meanwhile, Municipality Director General

Ahmad Al-Manfouhi announced on Saturday the closure of cafes everywhere in Kuwait. The decision is applied to cafes in markets, shopping malls, fuel stations and rest stations on highways. However, they are allowed to continue delivery services from 5 am until 5 pm, when the daily partial curfew goes into effect. Manfouhi affirmed that the decision is part of precautionary and preventive measures that have been taken by the municipality to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The director general of funeral affairs Faisal Al-Awadhi announced a ban on visits to cemeteries. As for funerals, only relatives of the deceased are

allowed to be present, in line with directions by the health ministry. Moreover, the municipality has set the burial time from 8:00 am until 3:00 pm, adding the body must be buried immediately.

The interior ministry also categorically denied reports circulating on social media about coronavirus cases among prisoners at the Central Prison. The ministry's public relations and information department said in a statement that the directorate general for correctional institutions and execution of verdicts has affirmed that all preventive and precautionary measures have been taken to ensure inmates' health.

## Wealth funds seen shedding up to \$225bn in stocks

**LONDON:** Sovereign wealth funds from oil-producing countries mainly in the Middle East and Africa are on course to dump up to \$225 billion in equities, a senior banker estimates, as plummeting oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic hit state finances. The rapid spread of the virus has ravaged the global economy, sending markets into a tailspin and costing both oil and non-oil based sovereign wealth funds around \$1 trillion in equity losses, according to JPMorgan strategist Nikolaos Panigirtzoglou.

His estimates are based on data from sovereign wealth funds and figures from the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, a research group. Sticking with equity investments and risking more losses is not an option for some funds from oil producing nations. Their governments are facing a financial double-whammy - falling revenues due to

Continued on Page 16

## First virus death in Qatar; Europe, US deaths surge

**DOHA/MADRID:** Qatar recorded its first death from the new coronavirus on Saturday, while confirmed infections rose by 28 to 590, the health ministry said. A "57-year-old Bangladeshi national resident (in Qatar)... suffering from chronic diseases" died from the COVID-19 respiratory disease, the ministry said on Twitter.

The majority of the cases in Qatar are among migrant laborers, where foreigners make up most of the workforce. Qatar said on Saturday it was quarantining 31 Bahrainis who travelled from Iran to Doha on Friday. They cannot go directly to Bahrain, one of four states boycotting Qatar since mid-2017 due to a political dispute. Qatar's Government Communications Office said that Doha offered to return them home on a private charter flight.

"The government of Bahrain declined this option. Bahraini officials have said they will send a flight for them at some undefined point in the future," it said in a statement, adding that Qatari authorities had tested the group for the virus.

Continued on Page 16



DUBAI: Municipal workers disinfect the streets of Palm Island as a preventive measure against the spread of the novel coronavirus on Saturday. — AFP

## Saudi intercepts missiles over Riyadh, Jizan

**RIYADH:** Saudi air defenses intercepted ballistic missiles over Riyadh and a city on the Yemen border late Saturday, leaving at least two civilians wounded in the capital that is under curfew in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Multiple explosions shook Riyadh in the attack, which the Saudi-led military coalition blamed on Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi rebels who have previously targeted Saudi cities with missiles, rockets and drones.

It was the first major assault on Saudi Arabia since the Houthis offered last

September to halt attacks on the kingdom after devastating twin strikes on Saudi oil installations. "Two ballistic missiles were launched towards the cities of Riyadh and Jizan," the official Saudi Press Agency reported, citing the coalition fighting the rebels.

Their interception sent shrapnel raining on residential neighborhoods in the cities, leaving two civilians injured in Riyadh, a civil defense spokesman said in a separate statement released by SPA. There was no immediate comment from the rebels. At least three blasts rocked the capital, which is under a 15-hour coronavirus curfew, just before midnight, said AFP reporters. Jizan, like many other Saudi cities, faces a shorter dusk-to-dawn curfew.

The assault comes despite a show of support on Thursday by all of Yemen's warring parties for a United Nations call

for a ceasefire to protect civilians from the coronavirus pandemic. Saudi Arabia, the Yemeni government and the rebels all welcomed an appeal from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for an "immediate global ceasefire" to help avert disaster for vulnerable people in conflict zones.

The call coincided with the fifth anniversary of Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen's civil war, which was launched to shore up the internationally recognized government against the Houthi rebels. The Yemen government condemned the attack, which it said undermined efforts to scale down the conflict amid the coronavirus outbreak. Information Minister Moammer Al-Eryani said in a tweet that the strikes also confirmed the "continued flow of Iranian weapons" to the Houthi militias.

Continued on Page 16



AL-KHARJ, Saudi Arabia: In this file photo taken on Feb 20, 2020, a member of the US air force looks on near a Patriot missile battery at Prince Sultan Air Base in central Saudi Arabia. — AFP

## Fears of setback in liberties in Middle East

**CAIRO:** Armored vehicles in the streets, hundreds arrested, smartphone surveillance - sweeping measures to fight the coronavirus have raised concerns in the Middle East over the erosion of already threatened human rights. As the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic, more than three billion people are now living under lockdown and, in some cases, strict sur-

veillance. While there is widespread acceptance that robust measures are needed to slow the infection rate, critics have voiced fears that states will overreach and, once the public health threat has passed, keep some of the tough new emergency measures in their toolkits.

This concern is amplified in the Middle East and North Africa, with poorly ranked human rights records, a cast of authoritarian regimes able to bulk up security apparatuses largely unopposed and many states already reeling from political turmoil and economic hardship. The sight of military vehicles patrolling otherwise empty roads to enforce curfews or lockdowns in countries such as Morocco and Jordan

stands in stark contrast to mass protests which last year brought down leaders in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan.

The region had as of Saturday recorded 2,291 COVID-19 deaths out of 35,618 confirmed cases, according to figures collated from states and the World Health Organization, which has urged "concrete action" from governments to contain the virus. Authorities have curtailed movement, clamped down on gatherings and arrested those who disobey the confinement orders.

In Jordan, where King Abdullah II signed a decree giving the government exceptional powers, hundreds of people have been arrested for breaking a curfew.

Continued on Page 16



RABAT: Moroccan policemen instruct people to return and remain at home as a measure against the coronavirus pandemic in the capital's district of Takadoum on March 27, 2020. — AFP

## Local

# Rumors in coronavirus time ruinous to society's morale, state's efforts: Academics

## Stopping rumors a national duty at this critical time: KU professor

**KUWAIT:** Posting and circulation of rumors and fake news in the time of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak could have detrimental impacts on people's morale and state's ability to handle and overcome the serious health challenge, a group of Kuwaiti academics have warned as judiciary pursuing rumor-mongers. Rumors harm the society and spark panic and fear among its members, Professor of Sociology at the Kuwait University (KU) Dr Ali Al-Zubi said. He underlined that people are already under enormous psychological stress due to the spread of the deadly virus, for which no drug has been found yet. Circulation of fake news and rumors will make things worse, he cautioned. He called for checking the credibility of any information before posting it. The onus of stopping rumors is on everyone, he emphasized, considering it a national duty at this critical time.

Zubi also urged people to refrain from disseminating information that could undermine social security and spread fear. He also advised people to seek information from the state official sources, notably spokespersons of the government and ministries as well as the ministry of information and the official Kuwaiti News Agency. Zubi believes that relying on people's conscious and awareness is good in the fight against rumor-mongers. He argues that it is better to encourage people to act responsibly than to threaten them with tough penalties.

### Adequate information

Meanwhile, Professor of Political Science at the Kuwait University Massouma Al-Mubarak also agreed that rumors undermine the state's plans for addressing crises. The state bodies have to stand up against rumors through providing adequate information, she said, warning that lack of information opens the door wide for rumors and misinformation. Mubarak advised the state bodies to follow up social networking sites and to be transparent in responding to any rumor that may stir panic or discontent. She noted that countering rumors is a collective responsibility on every member of the society.

Mubarak, nevertheless, called for firmly enforcing the law on those who spread rumors and tamper with the state security. "The state has to be firm especially during the current delicate time," she said. Mubarak



Dr Massouma Al-Mubarak



Dr Ali Al-Zubi



Dr Fawaz Al-Ajmi



indicated that Kuwait already has several laws that tackle disseminating of rumors and false information, namely Kuwait's penal code, the audio-visual law, or the electronic crimes law.

### Grave effects

In the meantime, Kuwait University's Media Professor Fawaz Al-Ajmi also warned against the grave effects of rumors on the society especially in the current exceptional circumstances. He called for syn-

hampering the government efforts to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the minister revealed. Furthermore, Public Prosecutor Dherar Al-Asousi has 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 on March 17 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 homage and public morale would be inevitably brought to legal accountability. — KUNA

ergy from the government and people to stop the flow of rumors. In this regard, Ajmi demanded the government to feed people with all important information in a timely manner to close the door in face of any rumor and to nip in the buds malicious attempts to cause public panic and anger. Rumor-mongers are capitalizing on people's desperate need for information, he said, noting that the government has to meet their demands in this regard.

### Lawsuits filed

On March 11, ministries of interior and information filed lawsuits against people who spread rumors related to coronavirus. Information Minister Jabri has also announced that the admins of 23 accounts on social media sites have been referred to the public prosecution for violating the e-media regulation act 8 (2016). The misinformation circulated by such accounts sparked confusion and controversy, thus



## Govt must stand up against rumors

## MoH launches meds delivery service

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

- Amiri Hospital: 50880699
- Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital: 50880755
- Farwaniya Hospital: 50880852
- Adan Hospital: 50880908
- Jahra Hospital: 50881066
- Sabah Hospital: 97632660
- Jaber Hospital: 96992079
- Ibn Sina Hospital: 99613948



Jaber Hospital.

- Chest Hospital: 99258749
- Razi Hospital: 97633487
- Kuwait Cancer Control Center: 96735242
- Psychiatric Hospital: 97350113
- Physiotherapy Hospital: 99824037
- Maternity Hospital: 98559531
- As'ad Al-Hamad Dermatology Center: 98514508
- Zain Hospital: 97552031
- NBK Hospital: 96931761
- Al-Rashed Allergy Hospital: 94162470
- Infectious Diseases Hospital: 96989164
- Palliative Care Hospital: 94024786
- Sabah Al-Ahmad Urology Center: 90952469
- KFH Addiction Treatment Center: 94169363

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has so far recorded 255 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). With the exception of eleven cases in critical condition, all cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while 910 have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 67 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, the ministry said. There are 168 people receiving treatment as of yesterday, and 1,231 quarantined as of Saturday. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested thousands of people. 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 at Hall 6 to test people for possible infection.

### Curfew

Kuwait enforced a country-wide curfew as of Sunday from 5:00 pm to 4:00 am until further notice. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed 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.

### Operating businesses

The following activities are allowed to operate outside of the curfew period between 5:00 am and 4:00 pm:

- 1- Various types of foodstuff and supplies stores and markets.
- 2- Laundromats.
- 3- Various type of repair shops.
- 4- Automobile repair, maintenance and spare parts.
- 5- Money exchangers.
- 6- Pharmacies.
- 7- Various types of restaurants.
- 8- Optical shops.
- 9- Administrative offices.
- 10- Cooking gas branches.
- 11- Co-ops' family needs branches.
- 12- Feed shops.

Meanwhile, the following industrial and craft activities, which are licensed by the Public Authority for Industry (PAI), are allowed to open:

- 1- Food.
- 2- Petrochemicals.
- 3- Gases.
- 4- Plastic.
- 5- Cardboard and paper.

### Precautions

All arrivals to Kuwait from all countries are to be placed under compulsory institutional quarantine for 14 days, during which the person is monitored, and prescribed health procedures are applied, the health ministry said. Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country

from March 12 to April 9, with work resuming on April 12, while entities providing vital services will remain open.

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, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions.

### 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)

### Curfew Diaries

## The wish jar



By Jamie Etheridge

etheridge@kuwaittimes.com

Yesterday a friend posted this really cool idea on Facebook. Set up a wish jar with a stack of Post-it notes and a pen in your house. Each time someone in your family wishes they could go shopping at the mall, meet up with friends for a night out, go to a restaurant and have a meal, take a short holiday abroad or anything else currently made impossible by the global pandemic, write the idea on a note and drop it into the wish jar.

The jar will likely fill up fast, since we all think daily about the things we wish we could do. My favorite wish, for instance, is to go for an early walk in Al-Shaheed Park and then have breakfast with my family at our favorite breakfast cafe.

Keep the jar and when this is all over, go through it and do all the activities you and your family wished for during the coronavirus pandemic. Take your kids to the playground, learn to scuba dive or get a manicure. Whatever you wished for, make it happen. Then when you are making your dream come true - even if it's something as simple as shopping in The Avenues - pull out that yellow Post-it note. Pause for a moment and remember when this simple activity hadn't been possible and be grateful.

Gratitude is one of the best mindsets to have when facing difficult circumstances. Remembering in times of hardship and uncertainty how blessed and lucky we are is a major boon for our mental state and can help ease depression and anxiety and also support a calm and more thoughtful approach. In the current state of global pandemic, we could all use a bit more calm, and so it's good to be grateful.

Gratitude can also help manage the present. Since this crisis began in late February in Kuwait, I have heard more and more people speaking about the plans they have and what they will do when it's over. As the wish jar suggests, looking forward to the future can be a valuable tool for managing the present. But it is also important to find ways to be present, in the present, and still feel ok.

Imagine you are only used to cooking with onions and suddenly there are no onions available in the market. Will you stop cooking altogether? Or adapt to cook what you never before believed was possible to cook without onions? Maybe you will spend all your time lamenting the loss of onions and dream of the sweet sting of onion juice, or how full-bodied and rich onions made your soup or curry.

But what if, instead of focusing on the absence of a thing, we focused on what is present? Perhaps exploring new ways to cook that don't involve onions? New ways of living that don't require frequent shopping trips or flights abroad or regular dinners in restaurants in order to live full and meaningful lives?

We can wish for a future of greater freedom and opportunities while also enjoying a present with more limitations but also more opportunities to explore and be creative within those limitations. Orson Welles is credited with saying that "The enemy of art is the absence of limitations." We are now in a time of limitations. We can wait for wishes to one day come true or we can work within the limitations before us, creating in the present the world we want.

Local

# Kuwait FM meets team tasked with repatriation of citizens

Kuwaitis returned home from Tehran, Paris, London, New York



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs a meeting with a team tasked with repatriation of Kuwaiti citizens back home. —KUNA

This file photo shows a Kuwait Airways plane shortly after landing at Kuwait International Airport on March 25, 2020, carrying Kuwaiti nationals repatriated back home.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah met with a team tasked with arranging repatriation of Kuwaiti citizens back home, to discuss means of guaranteeing safety of nationals until their return from abroad amidst the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a foreign ministry statement said. The meeting, attended by President of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Helal Al-Sayer and held at Seif Palace Saturday night, touched upon completion of urgent measures to deal with latest developments related to the coronavirus, added the statement. They also discussed coordination among relevant state bodies for the repatriation of Kuwaiti citizens. The meeting grouped representatives of the foreign, finance, interior, health and defense ministries, as well as Directorate General

of Civil Aviation, KRCS and information technology agency.

Four incoming flights were scheduled yesterday to bring Kuwaiti repatriates from Iran, France and the United Kingdom. Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said on its official Twitter account on Saturday that two Al-Jazeera aircrafts would fly to Kuwait from Tehran, Iran; one scheduled at 12:00 am and the other 3:00 am. A Kuwait Airways plane would fly back Kuwaiti repatriates from Paris at 6:00 pm and another would come from London at 9:00 pm, it said. A plane carrying Kuwaiti repatriates from Lon-

don had touched down at Kuwait International Airport late on Saturday, while another plane carrying Kuwaiti nationals arrived from New York the same day. The flights were part of the state's 'air bridge' operation to bring back home thousands of nationals stranded abroad due to the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said on its official Twitter account.

The latest incoming flight was organized as part of phase one of the operation, carried out in coordination with the ministries of foreign affairs, interior, health, customs and fire departments as well as Kuwait Airways, DGCA ex-

plained. Kuwait International Airport received, on Friday, three plane-loads of Kuwaiti returnees: one from Spain, the other from Britain and the third from Italy. Last Thursday, there were three flights: one from Germany, the other from Britain and another from Abu Dhabi, the UAE, a day after arrival of three planes from Lebanon, Egypt and Bahrain.

Phase one of the operation to bring back Kuwaiti citizens kicked off last Wednesday and was scheduled to end yesterday. The operation is being executed according to health conditions and terms, set by local authorities in Kuwait and the World Health Organization (WHO). Basically, such aircrafts are disinfected and the passengers must take prescribed health precautions from start to end of the flight. They are also examined to ensure they are free of symptoms of coronavirus. — KUNA

## 'Phase One' concluded yesterday



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive amidst heavy rain which hit Kuwait on Saturday. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

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Local



KUWAIT: A combination of photos showing traffic police officers carrying out an inspection campaign recently in Hawally during curfew hours, as part of efforts to maintain order amidst government measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

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### Kuwait condemns 'heinous attacks' on Saudi Arabia

KUWAIT: Kuwait strongly condemns the "heinous" rockets' attacks on Saudi Arabian cities of Riyadh and Jazan on Saturday, a foreign ministry source said. This "cowardly attack does not only target security of the Kingdom and safety of its people, but

the security and stability of the Gulf region," the source said in a statement. The attacks, he added, were violating international law and came at a time the whole world was mobilizing efforts to fight coronavirus (COVID). The State of Kuwait, reiterated the source, fully supports Saudi Arabia and all measures it was taking to maintain the country's security and stability. —KUNA



### Minivan catches fire in Khaitan

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen put out a blaze in a minivan parked in an open area in Khaitan Saturday night. Farwaniya Fire Station men arrived to the scene minutes after the fire was reported, and managed to extinguish the flames before they could spread to other vehicles parked nearby. No injuries were reported, and an investigation was opened to determine the cause of the blaze, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said.



## Local

# Customers with high temperatures not allowed into supermarkets

## Minister issues decisions to limit crowds, help prevent COVID-19 spread

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem announced issuing a decision mandating measuring the temperature of all supermarket and store staff and customers prior to entry and reporting any case with temperatures above 37 degrees centigrade. Jassem added that he had issued several decisions and directives to help limit crowds in supermarkets, protect customers' health and prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), including obliging stores and supermarkets to provide customers with sanitizers and gloves on entry and maintain a distance of at least one meter between customers waiting in line. Jassem also noted that the decision included not allowing in more than 10 customers at a time with two meters between one another inside, and banning the entry of children to avoid legal actions stipulated in decision number 703/2020.



### Commerce ministry sets food prices

Khaled Al-Roudhan, noting that such decisions were made to avoid overburdening citizens and prevent unjustified foodstuff price increases. Earlier, Roudhan had issued a decision fixing the prices of livestock and meat, according to the following:

- Three to four month-old local Naimi sheep will cost no more than KD 95, while sheep older than six months will be sold for a maximum of KD 115.

- Two to four month-old Shefali sheep will be sold for a maximum of KD 80, 2-4 month-old male goats will be sold for a maximum of KD 50, and those older than 4 months will be sold for a maximum of KD 60.

- Four month-old and older Australian sheep will be sold for a maximum of KD 60, younger animals will be sold for KD 53, and 3-4-month-old Somali sheep will be sold for a maximum of KD 50.

- Four to six month-old Jordanian sheep will be sold for a maximum of KD 90, while 4-6-month-old South African sheep will be sold for a maximum of KD 55.

Roudhan warned that violation of the above decision will be subject to legal penalties and actions.

### Foul tobacco

Hawally municipal inspectors raided a warehouse in



KUWAIT: People lined up outside a vegetables' store in Hawally. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Hawally, where foul shisha tobacco and products were being stored and sold in the local market. Inspectors had watched the warehouse for two days prior to the raid and confiscated large quantities of the tobacco that did not match specifications, in addition to a truck being loaded outside. The place was closed down.

### Police impersonator arrested

A Syrian man was arrested for impersonating as

a police detective and violating the curfew hours, said security sources. Case papers indicate that Farwaniya detectives suspected someone using a police flasher on his vehicle, and when he was stopped, he was found to be a Syrian, who admitted that the flasher belongs to a friend working for Ahmadi police detectives, who was also arrested. Both were referred to relevant authorities pending further legal action.

## Amiri Hospital stays in touch with patients online

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Capital health zone director Dr Afrah Al-Sarraf announced launching the Amiri Hospital online portal to communicate with hospital patients, both citizens and expatriates. Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting she headed to launch the service, Sarraf said the new platform had been

devised in view of the current health circumstances and as part of measures taken by the hospital to limit the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and protect patients by reducing their visits to the hospital.

Sarraf added that the portal will provide the services of prescribing medicines, nutrients and medical materials, renewing prescriptions, medicine home delivery, inquiring about outpatient department and visit appointments, medical test requests, complaints, inquiries and warnings. "There is a team including members from the hospital's 14 departments operating the portal," she underlined, pointing out that the second phase of the project due to be launched soon will include online consultation, through which patients will be able to communicate with doctors by video.

Amiri Hospital Director Dr Ali Al-Alandah said 2,187 patients had been registered through the portal and that the number will increase in view of the growing number of hospital patients wishing to use the service. "The Amiri Hospital is the first to use an online portal in Kuwait," he underlined.

The hospital's official spokesperson Dr Raed Sayyed Hashem stressed that the portal aims at facilitating services for patients and helps them stay at home amidst fears of the spread of COVID-19. Gastroenterologist at Thunayyan Al-Ghanem Center Dr Maasouma Al-Ali added that medicines will be delivered to patients within 24 to 48 hours and that 920 home deliveries had been made so far. Amiri Hospital's IT department manager Mezyad Al-Mutairi stressed that the portal ensures privacy of patients' information.

local spotlight

## Health system



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The coronavirus has exposed the vulnerability and strength of the health system of almost every country in the world. It clearly showed that no country can claim to be proud of being the strongest in terms of its health system because the number of coronavirus infections, specifically deaths, and the ability of each system to provide treatment are the best criteria, and numbers don't lie.

There is no doubt that most countries in the world were not prepared for a pandemic and international health solidarity is needed between all countries in the world. Whether this virus came from a bat or from a human mistake in a laboratory, it triggered real terror and fatalities in humans, and no one knows for sure when this virus will be eliminated.

In a short period of time, the world of finance and oil were hit deeply, with millions of people pushed into quarantine, whether domestic or institutional. All governments are working now to isolate their citizens and prevent them from gathering in order to halt the spread of the virus.

Also, there's a shortage of medical equipment such as masks, clothing and eyewear for medical personnel. Operating medical devices is a difficult process for some states because they need a number of parts imported from abroad, and this is not available due to the escalating crisis. In fact, everyone is busy with their internal crises and need the equipment for themselves. This is the truth.

I also believe that protecting medical and nursing staff from infection is essential to shield them and their patients from infection and transferring it to others, but the lack of medical supplies puts their lives at risk and that of other workers caring for infected patients. Some reports indicated that the coronavirus may lead to a fundamental change in the global system, especially as it is not directed against a specific system, peoples or nations, but rather threatens everyone without exception.

Last week, a set of developments related to the coronavirus occurred, such as when Italy recorded the largest death toll in one day, and yet some Cuban doctors went there for help and support in a campaign of medical diplomacy. This is a heroic action indeed.

I think the health system in Kuwait is excellent, and it works hard at its best to prevent the spread of disease among people, along with tightening the curfew and banning social gatherings. In a country with a population of approximately four million people, the rates of disease and recovery mean that things are under control, even if the number of infected cases reached 235 cases on Saturday.

I need to say that Kuwait did not ban its citizens returning from abroad, but rather encouraged this and took all precautions to protect and treat them. I believe that Kuwait is better than many other countries that have refused to accept the return of their citizens, because they are likely to be infected!

I think this virus may bring a new awakening to the world. French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he is preparing with US President Donald Trump and other countries a new initiative to tackle the coronavirus. Hope and prayers are all we have to call for the importance of improving the health system to face the unexpected.

## Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission takes space photograph of Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission captured this satellite image of Kuwait on July 25, 2019. The image was received at the Matera Space Centre (Italy), where Italian-headquartered aerospace and defense company Leonardo - through the joint venture e-GEOS (Telespazio 80 percent / Italian Space Agency 20 percent) - acquires, processes, stores and distributes data from the main Earth observation satellites, and also produces images, products and services in near real-time for maritime surveillance.

The Copernicus program is coordinated by the European Commission in collaboration with the European Space Agency (ESA) and is designed to monitor the environment and to mitigate the effects of climate change, contributing to the management of humanitarian emergencies, natural disasters and civil security. The Copernicus Sentinel missions provide high-resolution radar and optical images of our planet that allow us to capture images such as this one from space, but also allows us to monitor changing places on Earth. Flying 800 km above, satellites take the pulse of our planet by systematically imaging and measuring changes taking place, which is particularly important in regions that are otherwise difficult to access. Kuwait is generally low lying, with the highest point being only 300 m above sea level. The image shows the flat, sandy Arabian Desert that covers the majority of Kuwait and appears as a vast expanse of light sand-colored terrain. During the dry season, between April and September, the heat in the desert can be severe with daytime temperatures reaching 45 degrees C and, on occasion, over 50 degrees C.

Kuwait City, visible jutting out into Kuwait Bay, holds most of the country's population - making Kuwait one of the most urbanized countries in the world. The various colors of Kuwait Bay come from a combination of wind and the amount of sunlight reflected off the waters. The Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-



KUWAIT: A satellite image of Kuwait captured by the Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission on July 25, 2019. — European Space Agency (ESA)

Sabah Causeway can be seen cutting across the bay. The bridge is 36 km long - making it the fourth largest bridge in the world.

Al-Jahra lies around 50 km west of Kuwait City and is visible as a small, green oasis on the west side of Kuwait Bay. It is the center of the country's principal agricultural region - producing primarily fruits and vegetables. The circular shapes to the right of Al-Jahra are an example of the pivot irrigation or

center-pivot irrigation method, where equipment rotates around a central pivot and crops are watered with sprinklers. Just south of Kuwait City lies the Great Burgan oil field - considered the second largest oil field in the world. The Great Burgan comprises three smaller fields: Burgan, Al-Maqwa and Al-Ahmadi. The oil fields can be identified as an extensive network of interlocking roads which connect the individual wellheads.

## Shortage of onions, other veggies

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: There is a shortage of onions and other vegetables in many supermarkets and groceries all over Kuwait. In some supermarkets, produce is available, but for 500 to 750 fils per kilo instead of the regular 250 to 385 fils per kilo. Yesterday, Kuwait Times went around Salmiya, Rai, Farwaniya and Kuwait City and found very little to no vegetables in the storage and display sections of stores. In some co-ops too, there are reported shortages of onions and other green vegetables, according to customers.

"I informed some of my customers last week that we are going to run out of stock, especially of onions and other veggies. Now, this is happening," said a



KUWAIT: Empty shelves inside a local supermarket yesterday. — Photos by Ben Garcia

manager of a chain of supermarkets in Kuwait on the condition of anonymity. "But no worries, because the shortage is temporary - we will have deliveries of produce by mid-next week. The problem is that even in the places from where we get our vegetables, supply is low," he added.



He said due to the suspension of commercial flights, shortages of vegetables and other produce was bound to happen. "Before we got supplies delivered from India daily - it's just a few hours' journey from here. But now we need to wait for cargo flights to arrive before we can replenish our stocks," he said.



N Korea fires short-range 'ballistic missiles' into sea

## Spread of coronavirus accelerates in US jails

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SYDNEY: People wait in a queue to receive benefit payouts, including unemployment and small business support as the novel coronavirus inflicts a toll on the economy, at a Centerlink payment centre in downtown Sydney. — AFP

# Virus drives surge in domestic violence

## Privacy rights may become next victim of killer pandemic

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday announced a nearly US\$100 million boost in funding to tackle domestic violence after support services reported a spike in coronavirus-related family abuse. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said there had been a 75 percent surge in Google searches for help during the ongoing nationwide shutdown of non-essential services to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Women's Safety, a domestic violence charity in Australia's most populous New South Wales state, has reported that more than 40 percent of workers had seen an increase in client numbers, with over a third of cases directly linked to the virus outbreak. In neighboring Victoria, women's support service Wayss said police requests for assistance with cases had almost doubled in the past week, as they dealt with a form of abuse "not experienced before".

"Just having the people in the house, rather than having the pressure release of going to work, or being able to travel freely outside of the house are contributing factors," Wayss CEO Liz Thomas told public broadcaster ABC. "We've also seen half a dozen examples in the past week where perpetrators have actually used COVID-19 as a form of abuse-telling their partner that they have the virus, therefore they can't leave the house."

Perpetrators have also invited "people into the house where the woman is self-isolating, saying that the visitor has COVID-19 and is going to infect them", Thomas said. Prime Minister Morrison said the

Aus\$150 million boost-part of an additional Aus\$1.1 billion in health-related spending announced Sunday-would be spent on telephone support services for both domestic violence victims and abusers.

"We need to put more resources into supporting people who will be vulnerable and may be vulnerable," he told reporters in Canberra. The government is also increasing funding for online mental health services, telephone medical consultations and emergency food relief in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which has left many people largely confined to their homes. Australia has recorded almost 4,000 cases of COVID-19, with the death toll rising to 16 yesterday.

### Privacy rights

Digital surveillance and smartphone technology may prove helpful in containing the coronavirus pandemic-but some activists fear this could mean lasting harm to privacy and digital rights. From China to Singapore to Israel, governments have ordered electronic monitoring of their citizens' movements in an effort to limit contagion. In Europe and the United States, technology firms have begun

sharing "anonymized" smartphone data to better track the outbreak.

These moves have prompted soul-searching by privacy activists who acknowledge the need for technology to save lives while fretting over the potential for abuse. "Governments around the world are demanding extraordinary new surveillance powers intended to contain the virus' spread," the Electronic Frontier Foundation said in an online post. "Many would invade our privacy, deter our free speech, and disparately burden vulnerable groups of people. Governments must show that such powers would actually be effective, science-based, necessary, and proportionate."

The measures vary from place to place. Hong Kong ordered people arriving from overseas to wear tracking bracelets, and Singapore has a team of dedicated digital detectives monitoring those living under quarantine. Israel's security agency Shin Bet has begun using advanced technology and telecom data to track civilians. In perhaps the strictest move, China gave people smartphone codes displayed in green, yellow, and red, determining where citizens can and cannot go. China is also among the countries enhancing cen-

sorship about the crisis, human rights watchdog Freedom House said, while others are blocking websites or shutting off internet access. "We have observed a number of concerning signs that authoritarian regimes are using COVID-19 as a pretext to suppress independent speech, increase surveillance, and otherwise restrict fundamental rights, going beyond what is justified by public health needs," said Michael Abramowitz, president of the group.

### 'Normalized' surveillance

Some activists cite the precedent of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which opened the door to more invasive surveillance in the name of national security. "There is a risk these tools will become normalized and continue even after the pandemic slows," said Darrell West, who heads the Brookings Institution's Center for Technology Innovation. But even some digital privacy defenders say it may be prudent to use some of the available data to help control the outbreak.

"I'm not against fighting this epidemic with data or tech," said Ryan Calo, a University of Washington researcher affiliated with Stanford's Center for Internet and Society. "The problem with implementing surveillance in an emergency is that it might acclimate people to that." Calo said it is a difficult trade-off, noting that even the awareness of being tracked or monitored has an impact on people's feelings of privacy and personal security. — Agencies



## Australia boosts funding to tackle domestic violence

## In rare case, US infant dies from COVID-19

WASHINGTON: A US infant has died from the COVID-19 illness, officials in the state of Illinois said on Saturday, marking an extremely rare case of juvenile death in the global pandemic. At a news conference, Governor JB Pritzker said "an infant" was among the fatalities linked to the new coronavirus over the previous 24 hours. The state Department of Public Health said the child who died in Chicago was younger than one year old and had tested positive for COVID-19.

"There has never before been a death

associated with COVID-19 in an infant," the department's director Ngozi Ezike said in a statement. "A full investigation is underway to determine the cause of death." Pritzker described himself as shaken by the news. "I know how difficult this news can be, especially about this very young child," he said. "It's especially sorrowful for the family of this very small child, for the years stolen from this infant. We should grieve."

Last week, top French health official Jerome Salomon said a 16-year-old girl had died in the Ile-de-France region of Paris and its surroundings. "Severe forms (of coronavirus) with the young are very rare," Salomon noted. In the US state of California last week, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health said that a teenager had tested positive for COVID-19 and died. But the agency added the case is complex and there may be an alternate explanation. — AFP

## 'Super-spreader' guru puts Indian villages on alert

NEW DELHI: At least 15,000 people who may have caught the coronavirus from a 'super-spreader' guru are under strict quarantine in northern India after the Sikh religious leader died of COVID-19. The 70-year-old guru, Baldev Singh, had returned from a trip to Europe's virus epicenter Italy and Germany when he went preaching in more than a dozen villages in Punjab state.

It has sparked one of India's most serious alerts related to the pandemic and special food deliveries are being made to each household under even tighter restrictions than the 21-day nationwide stay-at-home order imposed by the government. "The first of these 15 villages was sealed on March 18, and we think there are 15,000 to 20,000 people in the sealed villages," said Gaurav Jain, a senior magistrate for the district of Banga, where Singh lived.

"There are medical teams on standby and regular monitoring," he told AFP on Friday. Nineteen people who were in contact with the preacher have already tested positive for the new virus, said Vinay Bublani, a local deputy police commissioner. Results are being awaited from more than 200 others.

The guru and his two associates-who have also tested positive-ignored self-isolation orders on their return from Eu-



NEW DELHI: Migrant workers and their family members lineup outside the Anand Vihar bus terminal to leave for their villages during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

rope, and were on their preaching tour until Singh fell ill and died.

The case has stunned India and a popular Punjabi singer based in Canada, Sidhu Moose Wala, released a song about Singh that has been viewed on YouTube more than 2.3 million times in less than two days. "I passed on the disease... roaming around the village like a shadow of death," say the lyrics to the song, which Punjab's police chief Dinkar Gupta has encouraged people to listen to as a warning.

With 873 confirmed coronavirus cases and 19 deaths, India's toll is lower than other countries afflicted by the pandemic, but experts say many infections have not been detected due to a lack of testing. A similar alert has been declared in the town of Bhilwara in Rajasthan state after there were two deaths out of 19 virus cases. No details have been given about the source of the cluster, but a one kilometer (0.6 mile) no-go area has been declared around a hospital being used to treat victims. — AFP



NEW YORK: Photo shows EMS personnel outside Emergency Department, St Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx in New York City. — AFP

## International

## Getting better: China's new virus cases trending lower

New daily cases down to 45, all but one from overseas

**WUHAN:** China reported 45 new coronavirus cases in the mainland for Saturday, down from 54 on the previous day, with all but one involving travelers from overseas, the country's health authority said yesterday. In the last seven days, China has reported 313 imported cases of coronavirus but only 6 confirmed cases of domestic transmission, data from the National Health Commission showed.

Most of those imported cases have involved Chinese returning home from abroad. Airlines have been ordered to sharply cut international flights. And restrictions on foreigners entering the country went into effect on Saturday. Five more people died on Saturday, all of them in Wuhan, the industrial central city where the epidemic began in December. But Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, has reported only one new case on the last 10 days.


A total of 3,300 people have now died in mainland China, with a reported 81,439 infections. Saturday marked the fourth consecutive day that Hubei province recorded no new confirmed cases. The sole case of domestically transmitted coronavirus was recorded in Henan province, bordering Hubei. With traffic restrictions in the province lifted, Wuhan is also gradually reopening borders and restarting some local transportation services.

"It's much better now, there was so much panic back then. There weren't any people on the street. Nothing. How scary the epidemic situation was," a

man, who gave his surname as Hu, told Reuters as he ventured out to buy groceries in Wuhan. "Now, it is under control. Now, it's great, right?" All airports in Hubei resumed some domestic flights yesterday, with the exception of Wuhan's Tianhe airport, which will open to domestic flights on April 8. Flights from Hubei to Beijing remain suspended.

A train arrived in Wuhan on Saturday for the first time since the city was placed in lockdown two months ago. Greeting the train, Hubei Communist Party Secretary Ying Yong described

Wuhan as "a city full of hope" and said the heroism and hard work of its people had "basically cut off transmission" of the virus. More than 60,000 people entered Wuhan on Saturday after rail services were officially restarted, with more than 260 trains arriving or traveling through, the People's Daily reported yesterday.



### Wuhan reported just one new case in 10 days

Yesterday, streets and metro trains were still largely empty amid a cold rainy day. Flashing signs on the Wuhan Metro, which resumed operations on Saturday, said its cars would keep passenger capacity at less than 30%. The Hubei government yesterday said on its official WeChat account that a number of malls in Wuhan, as well as the Chu River and Han Street shopping belt, will be allowed to resume operations on March 30.

Concerns have been raised that a large number of undiagnosed asymptomatic patients could return to circulation once transport restrictions are eased. China's top medical adviser, Zhong

boost in funding to tackle domestic violence after support services reported a spike in coronavirus-related family abuse. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said there had been a 75 percent surge in Google searches for help during the ongoing nationwide shutdown of non-essential services to curb the spread of COVID-19. Associations around the world that help victims of domestic violence have sounded the alarm over fears of an increase in cases, as the stress caused by social isolation exacerbates tensions.

### China's imported cases

China reported 45 new coronavirus infections yesterday, all but one of them imported from abroad. That compares with 54 cases the previous day, all imported. After taking draconian steps to bring the virus spread under control domestically, China is now doing the same to prevent imported infections. It announced this week it would drastically reduce the number of international flights into the country and banned foreigners from entering beginning Saturday.

### NZ, Sri Lanka report first deaths

New Zealand (NZ) has had its first novel coronavirus death: a woman in her 70s with a chronic

The poll will see new MPs elected to the 147-seat National Assembly for the first time since 2013, when President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's Rally for Mali party won a substantial majority. Parliamentary elections were meant to take place again in late 2018 following Keita's re-election, but the poll was postponed several times, largely due to security concerns. After yesterday's first round vote, a second round is scheduled for April 19.

### 'Difficult times'

Casting a shadow over the vote is the fate of veteran opposition leader Soumaila Cisse, who was kidnapped on Wednesday while campaigning in the centre of the country. Cisse, 70, who has been runner-up in three presidential elections, and six members of his team were abducted in an attack in which his bodyguard was killed. He was "likely" being held by jihadists loyal to Fulani preacher Amadou Koufa, who leads a branch of the al-Qaeda-aligned GSIM active in the Sahel, according to a security source and a local official. Cisse and his entourage were probably now "far from where they were abducted," the security source told AFP.

The government's election spokesman, Amini Belko Maiga, has admitted that voting conditions

New York City area could spread COVID-19 in their communities.

He told reporters that "heavily infected" New Yorkers were a threat to Florida, a popular southern holiday destination for people in the northeast. But after strong warnings from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New Jersey Governor Ned Lamont that the move would spark panic and cause further damage to financial markets, Trump reversed course and said there would only be travel warnings for the region.

"On the recommendation of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, and upon consultation with the Governors of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, I have asked the (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) to issue a strong Travel Advisory," he said on Twitter. The CDC then published its advisory which urged residents of the three neighboring states "to refrain from non-essential domestic travel for 14 days effective immediately."

### US epicenter

New York state has reported in excess of 53,000 cases of the new coronavirus, out of more than 124,000



WUHAN: People wearing face masks ride along a street in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province yesterday. —AFP

Nanshan, played down that risk in comments to state broadcaster CCTV yesterday. Zhong said asymptomatic patients were usually found by tracing the contacts of confirmed cases, which had so far shown no sign of rebounding.

With the world's second-biggest economy expected to shrink for the first time in four decades

this quarter, China is set to unleash hundreds of billions of dollars in stimulus. The ruling Communist Party's Politburo called on Friday for a bigger budget deficit, the issuance of more local and national bonds, and steps to guide interest rates lower, delay loan repayments, reduce supply-chain bottlenecks and boost consumption. —Reuters

## Asia virus latest: Australia domestic violence cases surge

**HONG KONG:** Here are the latest developments from Asia related to the novel coronavirus pandemic:

### Singapore cancels passport

Singapore cancelled the passport of a citizen who breached his mandatory quarantine period, the latest example of the city-state's strict enforcement of social distancing measures. The 53-year-old man had been ordered to stay at home for 14 days after returning to Singapore from neighboring Indonesia—a rule he then broke by making a further return trip over the border. Singapore, which has imposed tough measures to slow the spread of the virus—including the threat of six months in jail for people who intentionally stand close to someone else—reported its third COVID-19 death on Sunday.

### Australia domestic violence

Australia announced a nearly US\$100 million

## Maliens vote despite virus, security fears

**BAMAKO:** Maliens headed to the polls yesterday for a long-delayed parliamentary election just hours after the country recorded its first coronavirus death and with the leading opposition figure kidnapped and believed to be in the hands of jihadists. There were security fears about the vote even before the war-torn West African country recorded its first coronavirus infection on Wednesday.

Some 200,000 people displaced by the near-daily violence in Mali's centre and north will not be able to vote, because "no mechanism has been established" for them to do so, a government official said. There were also fears that the impoverished state of some 19 million people - where large swathes of territory lie outside state control - is particularly exposed to a COVID-19 outbreak. Late Saturday, just hours before polls opened at 0800 GMT yesterday, the country's first coronavirus death was announced, with the number of infections rising to 18.

## Trump rejects NY lockdown

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump decided late Saturday against imposing a broad two-week lockdown on New York and its neighbors after a strong pushback from local political leaders and warnings of the panic it could spark.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), however, late Saturday advised residents of the region not to travel except for essential purposes.

"A quarantine will not be necessary," Trump tweeted, about eight hours after he stunned the New York metropolitan region, the epicenter of the US coronavirus outbreak, with a proposal to place it under quarantine to prevent residents from leaving. A lockdown of that type would have been the harshest measure yet taken by the US government to slow the spread of the disease. Trump had indicated earlier that he was responding to worries in other states, particularly Florida, that travelers from the greater



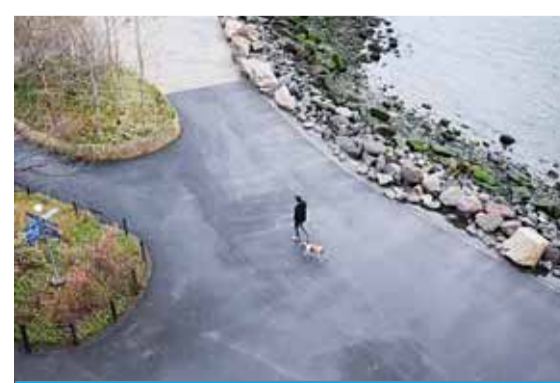
SINGAPORE: People walk near commercial buildings in the central business district in Singapore. Singapore's economy, a bellwether for trade-reliant Asian countries, suffered its worst contraction since the global financial crisis in the first quarter as the coronavirus pandemic escalated, official data showed. —AFP

underlying condition. There are now more than 500 confirmed cases in New Zealand, with 63 new infections reported over the past 24 hours. Sri Lanka also recorded its first Coronavirus death late Saturday. —AFP



BAMAKO: A vegetable vendor wears a mask as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus in the central market of Bamako. —AFP

were not ideal. "It's true that we cannot say that everything is perfect, but we're doing the maximum," he said, referring to the threat of coronavirus. He added that hand-washing kits had been distributed in the countryside, while in the capital Bamako, authorities would make masks and hand sanitizers available. —AFP



NEW YORK: A man walks his dog in Brooklyn in an empty park in New York City, NY. —AFP

nationwide. New York City alone reported a surge of more than 155 deaths Saturday, taking the city's total to 672, about one-third of the 2,185 fatalities across the United States, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Neighboring New Jersey has reported more than 11,100 COVID-19 cases. —AFP

## South Africa police fire rubber bullets at shoppers

**JOHANNESBURG:** South African police fired rubber bullets towards hundreds of shoppers queuing outside a supermarket in Johannesburg as authorities battled to keep people at home in a bid to halt the spread of the coronavirus. With 1,187 confirmed infections and one death, the country has the highest numbers of confirmed infections on the continent.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has ordered a 21-day lockdown for the country's 57 million inhabitants, deploying police and the military to enforce the restrictions. But on day two of the nationwide lockdown, the government was struggling to get people to observe the restrictions. Many in working-class neighborhoods ventured out to buy food, standing close to each other in lines while waiting for turns to get into grocery stores.

Between 200 and 300 people gathered outside a popular grocery store, early Saturday in Yeoville, a crime-prone area in Johannesburg's gritty central business district. Scrambling to secure their spots, many did not observe the recommended safe distance between each other. Police arrived in 10 patrol vehicles and started firing rubber bullets towards the shoppers. Startled shoppers trampled on each other and a woman with a baby on her back fell to the ground.

Later the police used whips to get the shoppers to observe social distancing rules. In Johannesburg's Alexandra township, shopping trolleys helped keep the rules respected. "So for today, what we have adopted is to do the 1.5 meter distance using the trolleys," said Lilly Bophela, Alexandra shopping mall manager. "So as you can see now we are just making sure that people are one meter away using the trolleys". While jogging and dog-walking are banned, shopping for food and other basics, but not alcohol, is permitted.

### Police whip shoppers

South African billionaire businessman Patrice Motsepe on Saturday pledged one billion rand (US\$57 million) to help fight the pandemic. "Our number one concern is to save lives and ... to make sure that we slow down ... the spread of coronavirus pandemic," he told a new conference.

Africa's confirmed cases were Saturday creeping towards 4,000 cases with at least 117 deaths - and governments are scrambling to slow the spread. Zimbabwe starts a three-week lockdown today, while on the same day Lesotho will also go on a 25-day lockdown. Elsewhere on the continent, Ghana has announced a two-week lockdown in the country's two main regions of Accra and Kumasi starting today. The move came as the authorities reported 137 confirmed cases, including four deaths.

President Nana Akufo-Ado said residents would only be allowed to go out to buy food, water and medicines and to use public toilets. On Saturday the Democratic Republic of Congo sprawling capital, Kinshasa, was meant to go into lockdown for four days, but local officials delayed the measure after the announcement caused a spike in the price of basic goods and worries about unrest. And in neighboring Congo-Brazzaville, President Denis Sassou Nguesso declared a health emergency and announced a lockdown in the country, combined with a night curfew, from Tuesday. —AFP

## International

# N Korea fires short-range 'ballistic missiles' into sea

## 4th such launch this month as world battles virus outbreak

SEOUL: North Korea fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast yesterday, the fourth such launch this month as the world battles the coronavirus outbreak. The string of weapons drills come as a prolonged hiatus in disarmament talks with the United States drags on, and despite recent overtures from Washington offering help to contain the pandemic.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North fired the two projectiles, presumed to be ballistic missiles, from the port city of Wonsan into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea. "Such military action by North Korea is an extremely inappropriate act when the entire world is having difficulties due to the COVID-19 outbreak," they added in a statement.

Tokyo's defense ministry said the projectiles fell short of Japanese waters and the country's exclusive economic zone. The nuclear-armed North has yet to issue a statement yesterday's missiles but attributed its three other launches this month-all of which landed in the Sea of Japan-to "long-range artillery" drills. It last week fired what Seoul said were two short-range ballistic missiles, describing them as a new "tactical guided weapon".

North Korean state media announced the following day that the country's leader Kim Jong Un had received a letter from US President Donald Trump detailing a plan to develop ties-a move later confirmed by a White House official. The report cited Kim's powerful sister Kim Yo Jong, who warned that the apparently good personal relationship between

the two leaders would not be enough to foster broader relations.

Trump "explained his plan to propel the relations between the two countries... and expressed his intent to render cooperation in the anti-epidemic work," she said in a statement published by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). North Korea is one of the few remaining countries in the world yet to report a case of novel coronavirus infection. But the outbreak has turned into a major international crisis, with more than 640,000 confirmed cases and 30,000 dead worldwide.

There has also been widespread speculation that the virus has reached the isolated nation, and health experts have warned that it could devastate the country given its weak medical infrastructure and widespread malnutrition. Yesterday's launch was intended to show the country was running normally during the pandemic, said Kim Dong-yub, a researcher at the Seoul-based Institute for Far Eastern Studies.

### N Korea refining its weapons capabilities



### Negotiations deadlocked

Analysts say the North has been continuing to refine its weapons capabilities more than a year after a summit between Kim and Trump broke down in Hanoi. Negotiations have since been deadlocked over sanctions relief and what the North would be willing to give up in return, despite a high-profile June meeting in the Demilitarized Zone that divides the Korean peninsula.

Pyongyang set a unilateral deadline for



SEOUL: A woman walks past a screen showing file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

Washington to offer fresh concessions by the end of 2019, and in late December Kim declared his country no longer considered itself bound by moratoriums on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests. In the past the North has fired missiles capable of reaching the entire US mainland and has carried out six nuclear tests, the most recent of them estimated to be up to 16 times more powerful than

the Hiroshima blast.

North Korea is under multiple sets of United Nations, US and other sanctions over its weapons programs. Heightened tensions in 2017 were followed by two years of nuclear diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington, including three meetings between Kim and Trump, but little tangible progress was made. —AFP

## Spread of coronavirus accelerates in US jails

NEW YORK: Sean Hernandez says he covers his mouth and nose with a t-shirt or towel when he leaves his cell, the only defense he can improvise against the coronavirus outbreak now sweeping through New York's Rikers Island jail system. Inmates have no access to gloves or proper masks and have only cold water to wash their hands, said Hernandez, who was convicted of attempted murder and has served eight years. He said inmates watched on Thursday as a guard coughed, her cheeks turned red and she collapsed to the ground.

"We are pleading with officers" for better defenses, he said. "They just shrug. In the end, we are just inmates, second-class citizens. We are like livestock." As of Saturday, at least 132 inmates and 104 staff at jails across New York City had tested positive for COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. The virus appears to be spreading quickly through a jail system famous for its overcrowded cell blocks. The city's Department of Correction said it is taking many measures to protect detainees, and declined to comment on Hernandez's account of an infected guard collapsing.

Across the United States, jails and prisons are reporting an accelerating spread of the new disease, and they are taking a varied approach to protecting the inmates in their charge. Thousands of inmates are being released from detention, in some cases with little or no medical screening to determine if they may be infected by the coronavirus and at risk of spreading it into the community, Reuters found.

Since March 22, jails have reported 226 inmates and 131 staff with confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to a Reuters survey of cities and counties that run America's 20 largest jails. The numbers are almost certainly an undercount given the fast spread of the virus. Hot spots include Cook County jail in Chicago, Illinois. Since the first case was confirmed there on Sunday, the virus has infected 89 inmates and nine staff. Test results are pending for 92 other detainees.

Inmate advocates, local officials and public defenders are urging jails and prisons to speed up the release of inmates. Jails typically hold people for relatively short periods as they await trial. They have more flexibility to reduce populations than state or federal prisons, whose inmates have been convicted and sentenced. "We are nowhere close to the rate of release we need to see to stop the spread of COVID-19," said Udi Ofer, director of the justice division at the American Civil Liberties Union. "Every day that government officials do not act is another day that lives are put at risk."

Some groups are pushing back. Victims' rights group Marsy's Law, named after the murdered sister of billionaire Henry Nicholas, has criticized the releases, saying victims of crimes should be notified before the people who committed them are let out-a process that could delay releases of some inmates by weeks or months. However, officials supervising releases in New York, Los Angeles, Houston and other major cities say they are releasing only low-level, non-violent offenders. New York City has freed about 450 inmates from its jails since last weekend as it scrambles to contain the virus, which has killed more than 28,300 people, including more than 2,050 in the United States. —Reuters

## How will US bounty affect Maduro's hold on Venezuela power?

CARACAS: The United States ramped up the pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro this week by accusing him of "narco-terrorism" and offering a \$15 million bounty for information leading to his capture. It's the latest in a succession of measures to try and force Maduro from power in favor of Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido. But though analysts said the move could pressure the regime, they were also skeptical it will achieve either the desired effect or an end to the South American country's long-running economic and political crises.

### Fracturing the leadership

The millions of dollars offered in reward by the US Justice Department are aimed at encouraging divisions amongst the command structures in the Maduro regime, experts say. "It's a game of billions... you put the ball in play, hit it against others and those balls hit others, generating reactions," said political scientist Luis Salamanca. He said it "sets a ball in motion in the circles of power" that could create internal divisions.

### Military factor

Washington's overtures have mostly been to the Venezuelan military in a bid to sever their ties with Maduro, who repeatedly claims he's the target of attempted coups. "They've gone from trying to create a crack through threats, to buying a crack... they're looking to see if someone will sell out Maduro," said Sucre. The armed forces remain, outwardly at least, loyal to the leader and once again



CARACAS: In this file photo, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro gestures during a press conference with members of the foreign media at Miraflores palace in Caracas. —AFP

on Friday reiterated their "unwavering commitment" to Maduro in the face of "extravagant and extremist accusations."

Maduro has already bought their loyalty, providing the military with ample political and economic power in a country whose economy has crumbled, forcing millions of ordinary Venezuelans to flee. He has always been able to rely on that military support, including during mass street protests against his rule in 2014 and 2017 when violent crackdowns left around 200 people dead, and an attempted uprising by Guaido in April 2019. —AFP

## At home with virus, UK's Johnson writes to the nation

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is self-isolating at 10 Downing Street after testing positive for coronavirus, will write to every UK household to urge people to stay at home. Johnson, who has described his symptoms as mild, is leading the government's response to the crisis, chairing meetings by video conference. The health minister, Matt Hancock, has also tested positive and is working from home.

"We know things will get worse before they get better," Johnson will write in his letter, which will be sent to 30 million households across the United Kingdom starting from next week. "But we are making the right preparations, and the more we all follow the rules, the fewer

lives will be lost and the sooner life can return to normal," he will say, according to a statement from Downing Street.

Britain has reported 17,089 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 1,019 deaths. The peak of the epidemic in the country is expected to come in a few weeks. After initially taking relatively modest steps compared with other European nations, Johnson ramped up his response to coronavirus in the past week, ordering pubs, cafes, restaurants and shops to close and making social distancing compulsory.

In his letter, he will thank all those working for the state-funded National Health Service (NHS), which provides free healthcare to everyone living in the United Kingdom and inspires huge respect across society. "It has been truly inspirational to see our doctors, nurses and other carers rise magnificently to the needs of the hour," Johnson will say. "Thousands of retired doctors and nurses are returning to the NHS - and hundreds of thousands of citizens are volunteering to help the most vulnerable."

"That is why, at this moment of national emergency, I urge you, please,

other aspect of American life.

Biden, the 77-year-old frontrunner, and Sanders, the 78-year-old underdog, have paused all in-person campaigning. Live town halls are no more. Several states have postponed their primaries on coronavirus fears - New York was the latest to do so on Saturday - and another debate between the two candidates is unlikely. The dozens of reporters who followed the two candidates for months have peeled away.

Even the Democratic National Convention set for mid-July, when the party officially nominates their candidate to challenge President Donald Trump in November, is at risk. "We're doing a virtual campaign, if you like," Sanders said Thursday on National Public Radio. While the Democrats are reduced to basement livestreaming, Trump,

also deprived of hosting his raucous rallies, is monopolizing the spotlight. The daily, nationally televised White House coronavirus task force briefings often stretch on for more than 90 minutes, with Trump sometimes taking up an entire hour at the podium.

The Republican incumbent's handling of the crisis has earned mixed reviews, but his job approval rating has ticked up - and he is front and center every day. Desperate to stay relevant, Biden and Sanders are participating in multiple webcasts, including roundtables with their respective health advisor on the latest coronavirus developments. The events are largely somber, like a CNN virtual town hall Friday on COVID-19, at which the former vice president answered questions from voters in virus hotspots like New York. —AFP



London: A handout picture released by 10 Downing Street, shows an image of Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson on a screen as he remotely chairs the morning novel coronavirus Covid-19 meeting by video link. —AFP

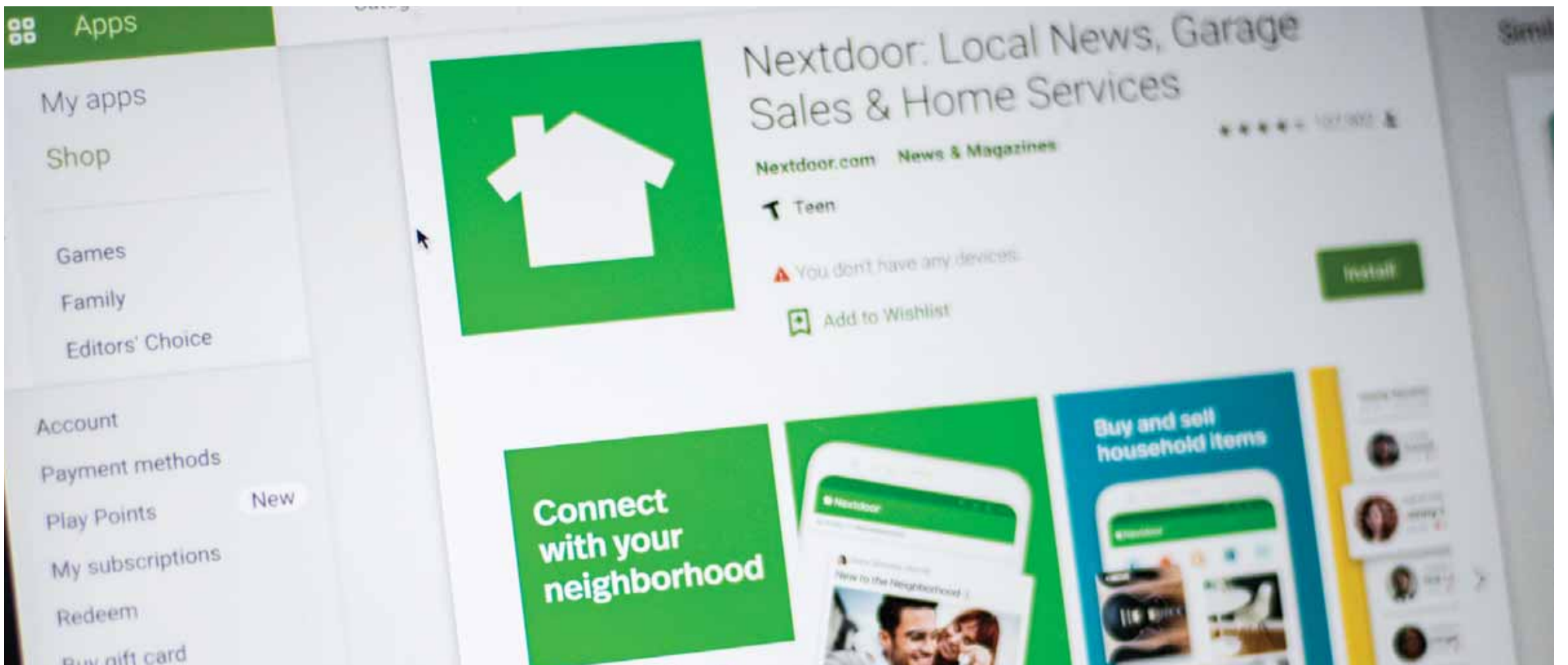
to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives." The letter will come with a leaflet containing the government's advice on hand washing, rules on leaving the house, guidance for those self-isolating with symptoms or shielding vulnera-

ble people, and explanations of symptoms. The letter and leaflet are part of the government's public information campaign on coronavirus, and are expected to cost 5.8 million pounds (\$7 million) to print and distribute. —Reuters



## Business

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WASHINGTON, DC: Nextdoor, the hyper local social network, is seen on a computer screen in Washington, DC, on Friday. There are offers to pick up groceries or medicine for neighbors, to share supplies, or walk people's dogs. — AFP

# Nextdoor grows in age of social distancing

## Hyperlocal social network plays an increasingly important role in the time of corona

**SAN FRANCISCO:** There are offers to pick up groceries or medicine for neighbors, to share supplies, or walk people's dogs—and even intel on where to find scarce items like toilet paper. For people forced to stay home to ride out the coronavirus pandemic, Nextdoor, a hyperlocal social network, has found itself playing an increasingly important role.

Daily usage of the network—an ad-supported privately held start-up which touts itself as a local alternative to Facebook—soared 80 percent in March as people looked to connect more with neighbors. “What we are seeing is proximity matters more than anything right now,” Nextdoor chief executive Sarah Friar told AFP.

“There is a real need in our lives for people who live close by,” Nextdoor is free. The only caveat is that users must verify who they are and live in the real-world location that comports with the boundaries of the online neighborhood network they wish to join.

Launched in late 2011 as a variation on town squares where people could get to know neighbors and catch up on local news, San Francisco-based Nextdoor now boasts 260,000 neighborhoods across 11 countries including Australia, Britain, France, Italy, Spain, and the US.

“I am really touched by the amount of community spiritedness; people helping out, shopping for one another,” said Nextdoor user Paulina Borsook. Borsook lives on a hill overlooking Monterey Bay on the edge of Silicon Valley, and is among those grappling with not venturing outside because their age makes it risky in a time of coronavirus.

“I am used to getting lemons from neighbors, but relying on them for groceries is much different,” she said.

### Help map

Earlier this month, Nextdoor launched an interactive “help map” which lets people indicate how they are able to help with chores, errands or other needs. “Happy to do any errands that don't require heavy lifting,” one user in the suburbs of the US capital wrote. “I'm a fantastic grocery shopper too!”

Nextdoor users share word of which restaurants have takeaway food, what precautions are in place at local markets—and even ideas to soothe one another at a stressful time. “I will be putting our Christmas lights back up tomorrow to add some cheer back to

the neighborhood,” read a Nextdoor post in a Santa Cruz county community.

“They aren't super elaborate, but I think it will give us all something beautiful to look at night while walking. Please join me.” Nextdoor is also being used as a platform to support local businesses: collect donations for food banks, and connect parents dealing with educating children at home because schools are closed.

“There is genuine isolation, loneliness, but there is also kindness kicking in,” Friar said.

“Usage is off the charts at the moment.”

### Nearby news

Nextdoor has long collaborated with agencies and governments to connect with local citizens, positioning it as a hub for local news and resources. It has been used in the past by the US Census Bureau and Federal Emergency Management Agency. Now, the California governor's office is using the social network to provide neighborhood-specific updates about what the state knows and is doing regarding

the coronavirus.

“I find it really valuable for hyperlocal news,” Borsook said of Nextdoor, adding that neighbours are posting information “I am not getting anywhere else.” While Nextdoor watches for misinformation or scams, it benefits from being based on verifying that those who join the social network are who they say they are and live where they say they do.

“The underpinnings are strong from a trust perspective,” Friar said. “When people post, they post with real names so you have more accountability.” Neighbors can report dubious content to the social network while also directly challenging it in the online community.

“If you post something nonsensical, people will call you out on it,” Borsook said. “There is more a sense of ‘we are all in this together.’”

Like Facebook, Nextdoor has seen advertising dip due to the economic disruption of sheltering-in-place, but it is also catching the eyes of restaurants, health care facilities, insurers and other businesses adapting to the crisis. “We do, clearly, have advertisers on the platform that have pulled back,” Friar said.

“On the other side, we are seeing companies lean in that didn't know us before and want to be there in this moment.” — AFP

## UK firms worried about outlook before lockdown

**LONDON:** British companies in key sectors were already bracing for the biggest hit to business since 2009 even before last week's shutdown of the much of the economy as the government moved to slow the spread of coronavirus, an employers' group said.

Surveys conducted in the first half of March showed consumer services firms, such as restaurants, bars and cinemas, were the most pessimistic, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said yesterday. A measure of their expectations for business volumes in the next three months showed a balance of -47 percent.

The balance for manufacturers stood at -20 percent while the retail sector's sales expectations fell to -31 percent, it said. “Expectations of a sharp fall in activity give some sign of what is to come,” Alpeh Paleja, the CBI's lead economist, said.

“With strict social distancing measures still to be reflected in our data, the picture

is only likely to deteriorate from here.” On the other hand, business and professional services firms expected growth in the coming quarter. The CBI data is compiled from surveys of manufacturing and retail sectors, which it publishes separately, and a gauge of the services sector.

The balances represent the difference in percentage points between the share of firms answering that output is, or is likely to be, up or down. Meanwhile, the European Commission will propose a new stimulus package to help the bloc recover from the economic damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Saturday. “To ensure recovery the Commission will propose changes in the MFF proposal that will allow to address the fallout of the coronavirus crisis,” von der Leyen said in a statement.

The MFF is the multi-annual financial framework (MFF), the European Union's long-term budget.

“This will include a stimulus package that will ensure that cohesion within the Union is maintained through solidarity and responsibility,” she added. “At this juncture, the President is not excluding any options within the limits of the treaty.”

Last month, EU leaders failed to reach agreement on an extension to the upcoming seven-year budget plan, for the years, 2021

to 2027. They could not agree either on how much each sector should receive.

Although talks have continued since then, the novel coronavirus pandemic has spread further across Europe, which now accounts for two thirds of the global death toll: 21,334 out of the latest world total of 30,003. That has changed the outlook of many political leaders, with the whole EU bloc facing the prospect of slipping into recession by the end of the year.

But the 27 EU leaders could not agree on the best economic response to the economic damage wrought by the pandemic during a video-conference Thursday. They asked the Eurogroup bloc of nations to come up with proposals next month.

“The Commission will participate in these discussions and stands ready to assist, if supported by the Eurogroup,” von der Leyen said. “In parallel the Commission is working on proposals for the recovery phase within the existing treaties.”

Italy, Spain and France—the hardest hit countries so far, with cases spreading fast—are pushing for Europe to find a way to better share the financial burden. But the Netherlands and Germany are skeptical, fearing their big-spending southern neighbors will exploit the crisis to push for a pooling of eurozone government debts. — Agencies

## Lebanon to form debt plan by year-end

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon Friday pledged to finalise a plan to restructure the country's massive debt by the end of 2020, just weeks after its first default in history. Finance Minister Ghazi Wazni promised “a full restructuring of the government debt—both Lebanese pound and dollar denominated debt” as part of a wider economic recovery plan.

“Our aim is to finalize this ambitious turnaround agenda before year-end 2020,” he said during a presentation to investors by webcast. Describing the Lebanese economic model as “broken”, he also pledged banking sector and fiscal reforms.

One of the most indebted countries in the world, Lebanon is burdened by a public debt equivalent to more than 170 percent of GDP. Last Monday, the finance ministry said it would discontinue payments on all of its outstanding

dollar-denominated Eurobonds.

This came after its first default in history on a \$1.2 billion Eurobond originally due on March 9.

The country is embroiled in one of its worst economic crises since the 1975-1990 civil war, now compounded by an outbreak of the novel coronavirus. In a bid to halt the spread of the illness, the government has ordered a lockdown until April 12 and ordered all non-essential businesses to close.

The finance ministry's director-general Alain Bifani warned that the pandemic would only “exacerbate the deterioration of social conditions”. He said 45 percent of Lebanese already lived in poverty, and 22 percent in extreme poverty. He predicted the economy would further contract by around 12 percent this year, and inflation would reach up to 25 percent.

Even before the coronavirus, prices had soared and many businesses had been forced to slash salaries, fire staff or close. The pandemic is just the latest crisis to hit Lebanon, already reeling from months of unprecedented anti-government protests that sought to dislodge a ruling elite seen as incompetent and corrupt. — AFP

## Business

# Left jobless, Colombia's informal workers to get government aid

## Half the wage earners work off the books with no savings

**BOGOTA:** The poorest residents from street vendors to war victims will receive cash and food during the coronavirus lockdown in Colombia, where roughly half the wage earners work off the books with no savings, authorities said. The government said it will spend \$120 million to help about three million informal economy workers like cleaners, maids, street vendors and construction workers who lack a financial safety net.

The South American nation of 50 million people has

The amount is the equivalent to about 12 percent of the minimum monthly wage.

Duque said on a televised program from the presidential palace that the measures were introduced "so that we can weather these storms without hunger in our country."

He also said about 2.6 million Colombian families who do receive a monthly cash transfer from the government's 'Families in Action' program will get an additional payment of about \$80. The program mainly covers unemployed single mothers and poor rural families. In addition, 206,000 young people participating in the government's 'Youth in Action' welfare program will also receive an additional payment of about \$50. As the lockdown has brought the country's informal economy to a halt, the streets of Bogota and other major cities were empty, particularly hurting street vendors who rely on their daily earnings to buy food and pay rent.

Like others in the nation's informal economy, they have no savings or access to bank loans and very limited health care. In Bogota, a city of 8 million people, local authorities pledged this week to help the 53,000 registered street vendors by providing food parcels.

So far, about 3,500 parcels have been delivered. Also getting aid are the nation's nearly 9 million people listed as official victims of its 52-year war that ended in 2016, Duque said. They are mostly people who were displaced from their rural homes by warring factions and now live in city slums.



Workers are seen in a construction area at Hidroituango hydroelectric plant in Ituango, Colombia.— Reuters

Since 2011, war victims have been entitled to a one-time compensation payment of about \$2,000.

Payments scheduled for later this year for 50,000 war victims will be moved up to as early as next month, the government has said. But the benefits will not reach many of those in need who will be forced to fend for themselves, said Uber driver Juan Cardenas.

"I haven't heard of anything or got anything. I'm not on any list to receive benefits," Cardenas told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. He said he has not been able to work since the ride-hailing platform has been suspended during the lockdown. "I'm going to have to eat less and borrow money," he said.— Reuters



**3m Colombians to get \$40 in one-time cash transfer**

been under lockdown since Tuesday to stem the spread of the coronavirus, which has infected at least 539 people and killed eight in Colombia so far.

Colombians are under orders to stay at home until April 13, and the elderly are confined until the end of May. President Ivan Duque announced this week that three million Colombians who are not participating in government welfare programs would receive \$40 in a one-time cash transfer next week.



**SAN FRANCISCO:** Bird has already paused shared scooter operations in many markets around the world and drastically cut spending, and is now 'saying goodbye' to 30 percent of its workforce.

## Layoffs at e-scooter startup Bird

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Electric-scooter startup Bird on Friday said it is laying off nearly a third of its workforce to survive damage done to its service by the coronavirus pandemic.

Bird has already paused shared scooter operations in many markets around the world and drastically cut spending, and is now "saying goodbye" to 30 percent of its workforce, founder and chief executive Travis VanderZanden said in a memo to employees at the Southern California-based company.

"We've watched the COVID-19 pandemic radically and quickly transform our lives, the world, and our business in less than a month," VanderZanden said in the memo, a copy of which was shared with AFP.

"Given the unknown timeline and current economic situation, we were forced to cut back in this way to elongate the trajectory of Bird and our mission." Bird recently raised hundreds of millions of dollars from investors, but is

slashing costs to ensure it has enough money to keep it running through next year, according to VanderZanden. Bird is curbing all spending not related to keeping the startup afloat, according to the chief executive.

"History suggests that people will demand a large scale mobility option that still allows for personal distancing," VanderZanden said. "And Bird will be there." Bird workers losing jobs were assured severance pay and extended health plan coverage. "This once in a decade black swan event presents one of the greatest challenges in history," VanderZanden said in the memo.

Transport company Lime last week pulled its electric scooters from nearly two dozen countries, including the United States, as the new coronavirus spread worldwide.

"Like you, we are worried about the cities we love and call home, the people we serve, and our colleagues on the ground," said Brad Bao, the chief executive and founder of Lime. Bao said in cities where the scooters will still be available, the company is taking extra precautions including "cleaning all parts of the scooter that are touched by people." Nonetheless, Bao said, customers should wipe down scooters or bikes before using them and wear gloves as a precaution.—AFP

## Russia's Rosneft halts work in Venezuela

**MOSCOW:** Russian oil giant Rosneft announced Saturday it is halting its activities in Venezuela and selling its assets there, a country that has been hit by US trade sanctions. "Rosneft announces the termination of its operations in Venezuela and the disposal of its assets, related to operating in Venezuela," the company said in a statement.

Russia however remains a key partner to Caracas. State oil giant Rosneft said it had sold its Venezuelan assets to a company 100 percent-owned by the Russian government. The interests sold by Rosneft include joint ventures of Petromonagas, Petroperija, Boqueron, Petromiranda and Petrovictoria, "as well as oil-field services companies, commercial and trading operations," the company said. All Rosneft shares and operations linked to Venezuela will be "disposed of, terminated or liquidated",

the company stressed. Russia, with China and Cuba, is one of the main allies of Venezuela's leader President Nicolas Maduro, but US sanctions against his regime had put Rosneft under increasing pressure. In February, Washington announced sanctions against a Rosneft subsidiary because of its presence in Venezuela.

Rosneft spokesman Mikhail Leontiev said the company had fulfilled its obligations and now had a right to expect the lifting of sanctions, Russian news agency Ria Novosti reported.

Last August, Russia and Venezuela were collaborating on developing two new gas fields on the east coast, in the Caribbean Sea. Rosneft boss Igor Sechin, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, was one of the main investors.

Maduro has ruled Venezuela since 2013. He was re-elected for a second term in 2018, a vote boycotted by the opposition which rejected the results. The US and a large part of the international community has also refused to recognize Maduro's victory and Washington has applied economic pressure with sanctions against the government there.—AFP

## World's largest glove maker sees shortage

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's Top Glove Corporation Bhd, which makes one in every five gloves globally, expects a product shortage as demand from Europe and the United States spikes because of the widening coronavirus outbreak is exceeding its capacity.

The company has extended shipping times to cope with the demand surge. Executive Chairman Lim Wee Chai told Reuters by phone on Friday. Lim said orders received in the past few weeks, mainly from Europe and the United States, were almost double the company's production capacity. Top Glove can produce 200 million natural and synthetic rubber gloves a day.

There are now more than 600,000 coronavirus cases across 202 countries and territories globally, with the United States overtaking China as the country with the most infections. Europe continues to report the most deaths. "Some customers panic order; normally they order 10 containers a month but now they suddenly increase to 20 containers," he said.



**KUALA LUMPUR:** A worker monitors a production line at a Top Glove factory in Meru outside Kuala Lumpur.— Reuters

The World Health Organization warned on Friday that the "chronic global shortage of personal protective gear" is among the most urgent threats to the virus containment efforts.

"Definitely there is a shortage. They order 100 percent more, we can only increase 20 percent so there is a shortage of about 50 percent to 80 percent," he said. The exceptional buying momentum could last another three months but orders are expected to remain strong for up to nine months even as demand from Asian markets has started to slow slightly, Lim said. To cope, the company has adjusted its delivery time from as short as 30 days to as long as 150 days.

Lim said the company was ensuring all its customers get a fair share of extra gloves delivered.

"We manage their volume, limit them to buy so much per customer. We have to manage but it's a good problem for us to solve," he said. Lim said the company is adding new machines every week, and could increase its production by as much as 30 percent. This month, Top Glove stepped up its factory utilization by 10 percent to 95 percent and expects to reach near maximum utilization in April. The company is rushing to source about 1,000 workers to keep up. Top Glove normally hires from Nepal but is now drafting workers from Malaysia because of travel restrictions.—Reuters

## Moody's cuts S Africa's credit ratings to junk

**JOHANNESBURG:** Moody's has downgraded South Africa's credit rating to junk status, piling more anguish on an economy already in recession and battered by Africa's worst coronavirus outbreak. Moody's move "could not have come at a worse time", the South African government said, as it would "further add to the prevailing financial market stress".

The downgrade late on Friday came as South Africa began a three-week nationwide lockdown to try to halt the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 1,100 people in the country. "The key driver behind the rating downgrade to Ba1 is the continuing deterioration in fiscal strength and structurally very weak growth," Moody's said. "The government's own capacity to limit the economic deterioration in the current shock and more durably is constrained," it said, blaming "unreliable electricity supply, persistent weak business confidence and investment as well as long-standing structural labor market rigidities".

Losing an investment-grade notation has a real impact on a government's ability to borrow in international debt markets, as many of the world's investment funds are barred by their statutes from investing in junk bonds. Crucially, South Africa will now be excluded from the FTSE World Government Bond Index (WGBI).

### 'Kicks South Africa'

The downgrade "kicks South Africa when it's down", said Daniel Silke, a political economy analyst, on Twitter. But he said South Africa had been edging towards such a situation since last year "due to politically constrained economic reforms & broader governance failures coupled with rising debt levels".

Annabel Bishop, an analyst with Investec, said additional public spending to support the economy during the coronavirus crisis "will worsen government finances, as will the contraction in GDP and the negative impact to corporate and household incomes on the shutdown".—AFP

## ECB asks banks to halt dividends over virus crisis

**FRANKFURT:** The European Central Bank on Friday asked eurozone banks to freeze dividend payments "until at least October 2020" to preserve liquidity that can be used to help households and companies through the coronavirus crisis. The Frankfurt institution also asked banks not to buy back shares, another tool to reward shareholders, at a time when policymakers everywhere are taking unprecedented steps to support the global economy.

"The ECB expects banks' shareholders to join this collective effort," it said in a surprise statement. The measures would "boost banks' capacity to absorb losses and support lending to households, small businesses and corporates during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic", it added. The ECB's proposal, which would affect dividends for the financial years 2019 and 2020, echoes that of the Brussels-based European Banking Federation which earlier this week said "listed banks should not accrue dividends or undertake share buybacks so as to maintain maximum capital preservation" during the crisis. The ECB's suggestion is likely to be welcomed by eurozone citizens, many of whom vividly remember the taxpayer bailouts of global banks during the 2008-2009 financial crisis. "The coronavirus outbreak is threatening the lives of many people around the globe and is pushing the economies of many countries into recession," ECB supervisory board chair Andrea Enria said in a separate blog post.

"Unlike in the 2008 financial crisis, banks are not the source of the problem this time. But we need to ensure that they can be part of the solution." He estimated that compliance with the ECB's proposal would keep an extra 30 billion euros (\$33 billion) of capital in the financial system.

### 'No limits'

While many eurozone banks may be able to hold off on their 2020 dividend payments, some have already paid out those for 2019 or have committed to doing so. The ECB said it was not asking for those payouts to be scrapped, but lenders whose shareholders are set to vote on dividend proposals in upcoming annual meetings "will be expected to amend such proposals in line with the updated recommendation".

After initially facing criticism for not taking as much action as other central banks in the coronavirus fightback, the ECB has in recent weeks unleashed a flurry of measures to shore up the 19-nation euro area. That includes a "big bazooka" scheme to buy an additional 750 billion euros (\$832 billion) in government and corporate bonds this year to keep cash flowing through the financial system. The ECB has also launched a fresh round of ultra-cheap loans to banks and eased rules on capital buffers to encourage banks to offer loans to households and businesses.

It further sought to calm markets by promising there would be "no limits" to its commitment to protecting the euro. The ECB warned earlier this month that it expected banks "to use the positive effects coming from these measures to support the economy" and not to increase dividends or bonus payouts. Authorities in the Nordic countries of Finland, Norway and Sweden have likewise been urging banks to forgo paying out dividends.

Thousands of companies worldwide have been forced to close their doors to slow the spread of the virus, while large swathes of employees have seen their working hours cut or are facing unemployment. Several major firms have already said they would scrap their 2019 dividends, among them German airline giant Lufthansa and European plane maker Airbus.—AFP

## Business



The KIB Annual General Meeting



Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah



Mohamed Said El Saka



Raed Jawad Bukhamseen

# KIB achieved significant assets growth and brand standing in 2019

## Al-Jarrah: We achieved strong, sustainable growth and moved forward in our strategic plan

KUWAIT: The Shareholders Annual General Meetings (AGM/EGM) of KIB held on 26 March 2020 and attended by 83.7 percent of shareholders. The meetings were convened in a manner that took into account the public safety complying with all the preventive measures issued by the Ministry of Health. Further instructions and guidelines were applied to combat the spread of the COVID - 19 virus, for example KIB provided hand sanitizers, a specialized medical team monitored the temperatures and ensure that there is sufficient distance between the attendees, in order to ensure the safety of all attending the meetings.



**KIB recorded  
KD 17 million in  
net profit in 2019**

The AGM approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 7 percent of the nominal value of the share (7 fils per share) amounting to KD 6,797 on existing shares (excluding treasury shares). Additionally, bonus shares of 5 percent of the authorized, issued and fully paid up capital (5 shares for every 100 shares) to shareholders registered in the Bank's register of shareholders at the end of the entitlement date set as Tuesday, 21 April 2020. Cash dividends and bonus shares will be distributed to the entitled shareholders on Thursday, 23 April 2020.

During the AGM, Chairman of KIB, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, commented: "During the year 2019, KIB recorded continuous developments in its systems and operations, as well as remarkable growth in business activities. This was a result of the collective and ongoing effort made by our talented people, who worked to improve the Bank's customer service and shareholder value which reflected positively on our performance indicators, strengthened our standing and brand both locally and internationally."

Al-Jarrah stated that, as per the audited consolidated financial statements, KIB achieved a net profit of over KD 17 million for the year ended 31 December 2019 and EPS of 15.01 fils. The Bank's improved performance reflected positively on its core operational income which reached KD 68.5 million compared to KD 66.6 in 2018. This was a result of 16 percent growth in financing income, (approximately KD 14 million), to reach approximately KD 103 million compared to approximately KD 89.5 million recorded in 2018.

Additionally, there was a notable increase in KIB's investment income of 160 percent or KD 2.5 million to reach KD 4.1 million compared to KD 1.6 million in 2018. Fees and commission income increased by 4 percent to reach KD 10.2 million compared to KD 9.8 million in 2018.

### Upcoming Strategy (2020-2024)

Al-Jarrah added that the year 2019 witnessed a combination of economic challenges across the globe, which impacted the global economy. However, he also noted that the local economy witnessed more stability, although economic rates have slowed down,

which in turn added to operational challenges.

Al-Jarrah pointed out the strength of the current Kuwaiti economy, which is based on solid fundamentals that contributed to the stability of the operating environment, despite the tensions of international and geopolitical trade in the region. KIB has been flexible to handle, based on its strong, sustainable growth of its balance sheet, successfully expanded business operations and developed its services and products. The Bank is enthusiastically forging ahead with the final stages of its strategic plan to build on what it has accomplished so far in the past five years and outline its next strategic plan for (2020-2024), which aims to build an advanced digital business model that will bring KIB closer towards its strategic vision to become the Islamic bank of choice in Kuwait.

### Ongoing Improvement in Most Financial Indicators

On his part, Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at KIB, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen pointed out that the Bank's total assets grew by 24 percent to reach KD 2.69 billion compared to 2.16 billion in 2018. This was a result of an increase in KIB's financing portfolio of KD 260 million or 16 percent, to reach KD 1.86 billion compared to KD 1.60 billion in 2018. Additionally, there was an increase in the investment portfolio by KD 74 million or 44 percent to reach KD 240 million compared to KD 166 million in 2018. Depositors' accounts also grew to reach KD 1.47 billion or a KD 151 million increase or an increase of 11 percent, compared to KD 1.32 billion recorded last year. Total shareholder equity amounted to KD 281 million, or an increase of 3 percent.

Bukhamseen also noted that these positive indicators have helped maintain the rate of profits in depositors' accounts in 2019. The annualized return on KIB (KD) Deposit increased to 3.50 percent in 2019 and the annualized return for the long-term deposit account (three-year) was 3.70 percent in 2019. The Al-Ithmaar Call Account for companies has achieved notable success where the net annualized return reached 1.75 percent at the end of 2019. The Investment Savings Account continued to achieve the highest returns in the local market during 2019, with a net annualized return of 2.1 percent at the end of 2019. Profits will be credited to eligible depositors' accounts upon announcement of financial results.

### Continuous Drastic Development

Bukhamseen added that, KIB is aware of the rapid changes that the market is going through as well as intense competition from both within and outside the banking sector. Accordingly, the Bank has taken exceptional steps across all its business activities to hold true to its brand promise of being a 'Bank for Life'. He also noted that KIB aims at building a true partnership with its customers to provide them with a unique banking experience that meets all their goals and exceeds their expectations. In 2019, the Bank continued to develop its systems, digitize operations, invest in infrastructure, as well as attract talent and develop human capital in order to enhance its competitive advantage and enable it to anticipate and respond to current and future needs.

He noted that KIB's solid foundation built over the past few years, as well as its strong understanding of rapid technological developments and their business implications, has driven the Bank to look forward to the future with passion and positivity. Looking ahead, the Bank is set to launch another comprehensive digital transformation across all its activities and operations. The new strategic plan will include a set of initiatives aimed at developing a business model with decision-making processes using advanced analytical models to identify needs of current customers, attract new customers, forecast future needs, and develop products and loyalty programs specifically designed for them. Additionally, the plan will also include attracting new talents in financial technology and data analysis.



Sami Shabshab



Sadon Abdullah Al-Sabt

"For over 30 years, Markaz continued to strengthen its presence in international real estate markets and we have been able to achieve strong results and witness the growth of our portfolio by building lasting relationships with market leading operating partners, service providers and lending institutions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our partner for the strong performance delivered on this investment. We would also like to thank all of our investors for their continued support and trust."

Shabshab added: "Our philosophy is and contin-

uous digital transformation across all its activities and operations. The new strategic plan will include a set of initiatives aimed at developing a business model with decision-making processes using advanced analytical models to identify needs of current customers, attract new customers, forecast future needs, and develop products and loyalty programs specifically designed for them. Additionally, the plan will also include attracting new talents in financial technology and data analysis.

### A Complete Digital Transformation

KIB's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Mohamed Said El Saka also stated that during 2019, the Bank successfully implemented its ambitious strategic plan that it launched back in 2015. By doing so, KIB was able to employ changes across most of its business activities, update its systems, develop its infrastructure, strengthen its competitive advantage, as well as witness a significant improvement in most of its key financial indicators, some of which recorded notable rates. The Bank has also developed its human capital and attract a number of exceptional talent.

- Al-Jarrah: AGM decided to distribute 7% cash dividends and 5% bonus shares
- Al-Jarrah: Operating profit reached KD 68.5 million
- Al-Jarrah: A new strategic plan will be launched (2020 to 2024) to build an advanced digital business model
- Al-Jarrah: Lauded CBK's efforts in supporting KIB's journey
- Bukhamseen: Total assets increase by 24%
- Bukhamseen: 16% growth in financing portfolio and 44% growth in investments
- Bukhamseen: Maintain profit rates for depositors' accounts
- Bukhamseen: KIB has taken exceptional steps across all its business activities
- El Saka: Latest credit rating reflects our exceptional standing.
- El Saka: KIB has established strong partnerships with all its customers
- El Saka: KIB has comfortable capitalization in term of Capital Adequacy Ratio of 19.24%

Additionally, KIB has formed a highly-experienced management team that works in unison with a clear strategic framework; thereby strengthening its ability to innovate, improving asset quality and shareholder returns, and brought the Bank closer to achieving its strategic vision of becoming the Islamic bank of choice in Kuwait.

El Saka added KIB's positive performance indicators contributed to the strength of its brand, creditworthiness, and financial standing. The Bank had issued a \$300 million Additional Tier 1 (AT1) Sukuk, which came as part of its expansion strategy to enhance capital adequacy at 19.24 percent as at 31 December 2019. The Sukuk served as a new addition to its impressive roster of success, as it received attention from investors across 26 countries worldwide with a final distribution of 51 percent international investors and 49 percent regional investors.

He also noted that KIB continues to enjoy a stable operating environment in Kuwait. Our latest credit rating reflects our exceptional standing, the strength of our strategic direction.

### Continuing Our Path of Success

El Saka also noted that during the year 2019, KIB entered a new stage of a true partnership with its customers. So far, the Bank has updated its business systems and increased the effectiveness of its operations, redesigned and launched new product offerings, developed its infrastructure and invested in

ues to be sector and strategy agnostic under which we identify and source opportunities depending on market trends and timing. We have bought, sold, developed and renovated real estate assets across all major sectors (industrial, office, multifamily and retail). Our main focus is to create value to our investors, shareholders and stakeholders through prudent due diligence, timely acquisitions and world-class execution."

Sadon Abdullah Al-Sabt, Vice President of International Real Estate at Markaz, reiterated the company's continued commitment towards its real estate investment program both in the US and in Europe. He stated: "This exit is one of a series that have achieved more than the initial expected IRR. In 2019, Markaz successfully exited two development projects within our US development program with returns exceeding original pro-forma expectations. Furthermore, we fully exited one of our distressed debt assets in Arizona and currently have only one remaining. In addition, we broke ground on four different development projects in 2019 including two industrial projects in Europe (Germany and Poland). The weighted average IRR generated by international real estate projects reached 19.5 percent in the current real estate cycle (since 2010)."

technical systems. By doing so, KIB's performance indicators continued to improve year after year, becoming more capable and resilient. The Bank looks forward to a positive future to achieve its strategic goals and continue its successful journey powered by a strong vision and strategic plan.

### Local Awards and Global Recognitions

As a testament to its positive developments and excellent results efforts in 2019, KIB garnered a number of prestigious regional and international awards. KIB was awarded the 'Best Sharia Compliant Bank - MENA 2019' for the fifth consecutive year by Capital Finance International (CFI.co), 'Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait 2019' by World Finance for the sixth consecutive year, as well as the 'Fastest Growing Islamic Bank MENA 2019' award from Capital Finance International (CFI.co) for the fourth consecutive year. The Bank also received the debut 'GCC Best CSR Business Model' award by World Finance and the 'Best CSR Initiative - Arab Banking' from the World Union of Arab Bankers in recognition of its efforts in improving financial literacy.

### Credit Rating

According to its report issued in 2019, Fitch Ratings affirmed KIB's Long Term Issuer Default Rating (LT-IDR) at "A+" with a Stable Outlook. Fitch also affirmed the Bank's Viability Rating (VR) at "bb-". Fitch Ratings also noted that the Bank has the capacity to further improve as a result of its business operations and risk appetite, as well as the stability of its assets.

### Thanks and Appreciation

Al-Jarrah also lauded the Central Bank of Kuwait's continuous support for KIB's ongoing journey. He also appreciated its supervisory role in the local banking sector in Kuwait and extended his sincere appreciation to the Bank's Board of Directors, the executive management, the members of the Sharia Supervisory Board, all shareholders, employees and customers of the Bank. He also lauded their trust in KIB and their key role in making it what it is today.

He also lauded the efforts of the Kuwaiti government and political leadership, as well as their outstanding ability to handle the global crisis. As part of its efforts, the government issued instructions and preventive measures to combat the COVID - 19. Additionally, he also wished good health and safety for all under these exceptional circumstance, a speedy recovery for all those infected, and to protect Kuwait under the patronage of HH the Amir of the State of Kuwait, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

Al-Sabt added: "Our current International real estate portfolio consists of 15 standalone investments worth over \$450 million across various markets. The full economic implications of the COVID-19 are not yet clear and uncertainty still prevails due to the unprecedented nature of the event. However, our existing portfolio is well positioned to weather the downturn and strongly recover as the crisis subsides. We strongly believe in the long-term value proposition of our investment program, which is designed to capitalize on real estate opportunities in the United States and in Europe. The current crisis will no doubt bring to the market unique transactions with significant long term upside which Markaz is ready to capture."

Markaz has been active in the US real estate market since 1977 with the launching of its first syndicated transaction. Since 1988, Markaz has been conducting real estate transactions in the US through Mar-Gulf, the US real estate arm and wholly owned subsidiary of Markaz. Over the past thirty years, Markaz and Mar-Gulf have been involved in the ownership and development of real estate properties in a variety of segments (Industrial, Retail, Multifamily and Office) across the US with a total acquisition cost exceeding \$1.65 billion.

## Markaz exits Parc Santa Fe industrial property in US

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C "Markaz" announced the successful sale of Parc Santa Fe, a (344,542) square foot industrial property located in Denver, CO, for \$58,000,000. Launched in April of 2018, the investment involved the acquisition and development of a greenfield land parcel into a Class-A industrial facility. The sale of the property, which was in line with the initial investment strategy, delivered a net internal rate of return to investors (IRR) of 27.7 percent and a Return on Equity (ROE) of 49.6 percent. Both return metrics exceeded initial estimates of 11.9 percent (IRR) and 43.0 percent (ROE) driven by strong market selection, excellent project execution and active monitoring & oversight of the project.

Sami Shabshab, President of Mar-gulf Management Inc, Markaz's US real estate arm, stated:

# French chefs cook up antidote to coronavirus confinement

PARIS: Frustrated at stay-at-home confinement, France's celebrity chefs are cooking up an antidote to the gloomy days of pandemic and quarantine with the help of television and social networks. "Today it's not chef Lignac talking, it's Cyril who like all French people has to do his shopping near where he lives," says Cyril Lignac, the nation's current gastronomic media star.

On prime-time television, he sports a T-shirt to prepare dinner from his home on his new show "Everyone in the Kitchen". The show focuses on everyday cooking and the travails of the public in a time of national emergency. The coronavirus crisis has enabled chefs "to play a different tune in the kitchen", he tells AFP. "It's very interesting to improve people's daily lives by cooking just from the cupboard and the fridge."

The show, which opened on France's M6 channel on Tuesday, is scheduled to last only as long as the public's confinement in their own homes. Lignac says he wants to help his compatriots by proving how easy, good and well-priced it can be to cook at home. Other chefs are following a similar path. "There are no tricks," says Paris chef Amandine Chaignot during an online class explaining how to prepare asparagus. "I have a tiny kitchen, if I can do it, you can too."

Chaignot may be more used to serving up prestigious banquets but here she's whipping up a dish with one pot-asparagus and eggs bubbling away before runny yolks are mixed with butter and poured over chopped-up white stalks. Her video was made for mates who often eat in restaurants, she says. "You can miss so much if you tell yourself 'I don't know how to do the simplest of things,'" she tells AFP. "It has to be easy, quick and not involve a lot of equipment or ingredients you cannot source."



PARIS: French chef Eric Duquenne, former team leader in the kitchens of the Elysee Palace, packs dishes he cooked in his closed restaurant "Les 3 Presidents" in Paris before a delivery to an hospital for the medical personnel on the ninth day of a lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) in France. — AFP

In the Mediterranean city of Marseille, two-star Michelin gourmet Alexandre Mazzia describes himself as a "dad" who does homework, sport and cooking with his children. In a rare moment of downtime, he posted on social media some recipes adapted to a time of quarantine. They include a chocolate cake that is "made like an omelette" with no need to whip up egg whites or sift flour, and a

green Puy lentil salad that swaps kumquat for green apple and cashews for any nut. "I received 350 text messages asking me what to do with Puy lentils," says the award-winning chef. Triple Michelin star Christophe Bacquie has also taken to social media to help the nation to get cooking.

He wants to put Mediterranean tastes on our plates—endives in orange, honey and rosemary,

lemon and olive oil cake. "It was my wife who convinced me to go on Instagram," he says. With the markets closed, he says, shoppers are unlikely to find such things as a John Dory fish to cook with asparagus. Instead, go for a traditional dish like potato galette without eggs or flour, Bacquie says. "We use what we have," says Bacquie. "Everyone is confined, we have a duty to lead by example." — AFP

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## Lifestyle | Features



Picture shows eastern chocolate bunnies wearing protective face masks at the bakery Bäckerei Bohnenblust in Bern, amid the spread of the COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

## Dogs being trained to sniff out COVID-19

A British charity has teamed up with scientists to see whether dogs could help detect COVID-19 through their keen sense of smell, they said on Friday. Medical Detection Dogs will work with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and Durham University in northeast England to determine whether canines could help diagnose. It follows previous research into dogs' ability to sniff out malaria and is based on a belief that each disease triggers a distinct odor.

The organizations said they had begun preparations to train dogs in six weeks "to help provide a rapid, non-invasive diagnosis towards the tail end of the

epidemic". The charity has previously trained dogs to detect diseases such as cancer, Parkinson's and bacterial infections by sniffing samples taken from patients.

They can also detect subtle changes in skin temperature, potentially making them useful to determining if a person has a fever. "In principle, we're sure that dogs could detect COVID-19," said Claire Guest, founder and chief executive of Medical Detection Dogs. "We are now looking into how we can safely catch the odour of the virus from patients and present it to the dogs.

"The aim is that dogs will be able to screen anyone, including those who are asymptomatic, and tell us whether they need to be tested. "This would be fast, effective and non-invasive and make sure the limited NHS (National Health Service) testing resources are only used where they are really needed." The head of disease control at the LSHTM said dogs could detect malaria with "extremely high accuracy" and, as other respiratory diseases changed body odour, there was a "very high chance" it could also work with COVID-19.

Detection dogs could be deployed at airports at the end of the epidemic to rapidly identify people carrying the virus, helping prevent the re-emergence of the disease, according to Steve Lindsay from Durham University. Over 500,000 coronavirus infections have now been recorded across 182 countries, contributing to 22,920 deaths, according to an AFP calculation based on official country data and World Health Organization figures. The number of actual infections is believed to be higher since many countries are only testing severe cases or patients requiring hospitalization. —AFP



In this file photo Britain's Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall (center), watches a display by a working dog as she visits its Medical Detection Dogs (MDD) charity in Great Horwood, outside Milton Keynes, north of London. —AFP

## Moscow's Bolshoi to livestream shows for free

The legendary Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow has announced it will broadcast its best classic performances online for free in response to new restrictions to slow the spread of coronavirus. The Bolshoi's announcement came after the Moscow mayor ordered the closure of all non-essential services and encouraged residents to stay home. "Our country, like the rest of the world, is experiencing a very difficult time" said Vladimir Urin, general director of the Bolshoi Theatre, announcing the digital shows. "We've never faced this type of situation before and since we had to close the theatre we didn't want to lose our connection with our audience," he said.

The ballet and opera house said it will show six of its most popular productions on its YouTube channel beginning Friday with the Swan Lake ballet. "We're honored that YouTube can support the Bolshoi as they

engage with fans in new ways during these challenging times," Julia Solovieva, head of Google in Russia, said in the statement. The "Golden Collection" of the Bolshoi's most popular productions include Sleeping Beauty and The Nutcracker, ballets scored by the Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The Bolshoi earlier cancelled all of its scheduled performances between March 17 and April 10, following restrictions on public events of more than 50 people.

Dozens of theatres and operas around the world have closed their doors to the public in recent days to slow the spread of the coronavirus, with some live streaming shows. Russia has recorded 840 coronavirus cases and two COVID-19 related deaths, according to official figures published Thursday. —AFP



A man wearing a protective face mask uses his mobile phone in front of the Bolshoi theatre in downtown Moscow, where all events were cancelled in a measure to fight the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

## Armani's Italian factories to make medical overalls



Giorgio Armani

Fashion brand Armani said it would start making single use medical overalls for hospital workers at all its Italian factories. The group - whose brands include Giorgio Armani and Emporio Armani - said they would be used for "the individual protection of healthcare workers engaged in the fight against the Coronavirus disease."

Founder Giorgio Armani has donated 2 million euros (\$2.2 million) in recent

weeks to hospitals around Italy, including Bergamo and Piacenza in the hard-hit north, the company said. The company operates four factories in Italy, a spokeswoman told AFP. Like many other fashion brands, Armani has in recent years moved much of its production out of Italy to other countries where labor costs are lower. —AFP

## Paris fashion highlights fall victim to coronavirus

Two of the main events in the fashion calendar — Paris men's fashion week and the haute couture shows — scheduled for June and July have been cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, organizers said on Friday. "Strong decisions are required to ensure the safety and health of (fashion) houses, their employees and everyone working in our industry," the Federation de la Haute Couture et de la Mode (FHCM) said in a statement. "The board of directors... has come to the decision that, in the present conditions, the

menswear Paris Fashion Week, scheduled from June 23rd to June 28th, 2020, and the Haute Couture Week scheduled from July 5 to July 9, 2020, cannot take place," it said.

It added: "However, the Federation is actively working with its members on possible alternatives," without giving further details. The big French fashion houses are among the many businesses suffering due to the pandemic, with French design houses Yves Saint Laurent and Balenciaga of the luxury Kering group

producing surgical face masks. Their rival LVMH has for its part launched into the production of sanitising hand gel for hospitals at three perfume and cosmetics factories in France. —AFP

A model presents a creation by designer Nicolas Ghesquiere as part of his Fall/Winter 2020/21 women's ready-to-wear collection for fashion house Louis Vuitton in Paris on March 3, 2020. —Reuters



## Miranda Lambert's Covid-19 anxiety

Miranda Lambert is suffering with anxiety amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The 36-year-old country music singer admitted she has been worrying about "the state of the world" as many countries go into lockdown to deal with the spread of the virus but said she is finding peace in spending time at home on her farm with husband Brendan McLoughlin.

She wrote on Instagram: "I haven't really known what to say on social media during all this. I'm not great at socials anyway and a time like this makes it that much more difficult for me to figure out how to be. Tuesday of this week is when I finally realized I could unpack. For the next few months for me there are no shows, no sound checks, no bus calls, no flights. Just home. Once I processed it, I actually got a feeling of peace even though, like all of us, my anxiety about the state of the world right now is still through the roof.

"I've started working on some projects around the farm that I kept running from because I had to leave for work and some I've wanted to run from because organization is not my fav. I've been having some pretty cool virtual happy hours with friends and family. Brendan and I have been cooking, cleaning, working out, spending time with dogs and horses and just being together quietly. Well besides the country music constantly coming through the speakers (sic)."

Miranda also revealed that she is writing new music, explaining: "I have written a few songs for the first time in a year. And text writing a cowgirl song with @ronniedunn (such a fan girl of B&D)." However, she admitted that she is missing her family and friends. She wrote: "We miss our road family, New York family and I dang sure miss my Texas fam. My soul sister @apes\_1983 just had her first baby yesterday, baby Finn, and we only get to see him through a screen for now. I wish I was there in person. Soon enough good

Lord willin. But in happy news, this box arrived today and I felt my heart jump. Some wine from @red55winery, freshly canned salsa, apple butter, Paw Paws bbq sauce, and a note on napkin. "Sending love from home. love mom and dad (be safe). I do feel safe now knowing that even though they are over 600 miles away I'm connected to all of them. Sending light to all the first responders and health care workers. Stay home. Call home (sic)." —Bang Showbiz



Miranda Lambert

## Hollywood awards grapple with virus as Globes relax rules

Hollywood's glitzy film awards are scrambling to deal with the unprecedented impact of the coronavirus on the industry, with the Golden Globes first to relax their entry rules Thursday. Most awards shows from the Globes to the Oscars require that movies must be shown in Los Angeles theaters for a minimum period to be considered. But with even private screening rooms shuttered indefinitely across the entertainment capital — and much of the world — that appears to be changing.

Films that had planned "a bona fide theatrical release" between the start of the outbreak and the end of April will be permitted at the Globes, even if the release was scrapped, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association said Thursday. Titles that go straight to streaming platforms such as Netflix or television during this time will now be eligible. And while previously studios had to invite HFPA voters to private screening events, online links or DVDs will be permitted during the pandemic lockdown, it added. The all-important Oscars — which typically take place one or two months after the Globes — have yet to announce any changes.

But a spokesperson said the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was "evaluating all aspects of this uncertain landscape and what changes may need to be made." "We are committed to being nimble and forward-thinking as we discuss what is best for the future of the industry and will make further announcements in the coming days." Other major award shows contacted by AFP said it was too early to decide on changes. But smaller awards have already been forced to adapt.

The canceled SXSW festival in Austin — which serves as a "qualifying festival" for the Oscars — went ahead with its competition despite no premieres taking place. Judges were offered online screening links to make up their minds. Winners in documentary, animated and short film categories will still be eligible for the Oscars. —AFP



File photo shows Golden Globe trophies are set on stage ahead of the 77th Annual Golden Globe Awards nominations announcement at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills on December 9, 2019. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# Lausanne rings 16th-century warning bell for virus

Renato Hausler shouts out the hour from the top of Lausanne Cathedral then sounds a centuries-old warning bell, rung only when the normally-tranquil Swiss city is facing peril. The nightwatchman is ringing La Clemence, a bell made in 1518, to call for mutual solidarity among the Lausannois in the face of the global coronavirus pandemic, Hausler told AFP. Its 3.4 tonnes of steel make a hell of a din which cuts through the still night air, above the city and out over Lake Geneva. Its C note rings in harmony with those of Marie-Madeleine, Lombard and the four other bells hanging in the tower.

Standing in his felt hat with a lantern to light the way, Hausler peals the bell with three strikes, a pause, six strikes, another pause, then repeats the pattern. Every night without fail, Hausler or one of his stand-ins calls out the hour from 10:00pm to 2:00am, north, south east and west from the bell tower, up 153 stone steps from the cathedral floor. Lausanne is one of the last places in Europe that still has a nightwatchman as a living timekeeper. Hausler has been doing the job full-time since 2002. The first written references to a night-watchman date back to 1405, after a huge blaze ripped through the city. "During the disaster, the bell rang to encourage the townsfolk, to rally people together to fight the fire," said Hausler. Linked with a network of watchmen on the ground, the cathedral watchman, perched on the highest point in Lausanne, sounded the alert around the city as quickly as possible.

### More than 200 dead

Centuries on, perilous times are back on the shores of Lake Geneva and the bell rings out for a full three minutes. More than 13,000 people in Switzerland have tested positive for COVID-19 and more than 230 peo-



Night watchman of the Cathedral of Lausanne, Renato Haeusler holds his lantern prior to manually ringing the 3600 kg "La Clemence" emergency bell in the Cathedral's belfry tower, in Lausanne, amid the spread of the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus).—AFP photos



Night watchman of the Cathedral of Lausanne, Renato Haeusler manually rings the 3600 kg "La Clemence" emergency bell in the Cathedral's belfry tower.

ple have died in the new coronavirus pandemic, according to the health ministry. The French-speaking Vaud region surrounding Lausanne has seen the highest numbers of cases of all of Switzerland's 26 cantons, with nearly 3,000 people infected.

The Alpine country has not confined its population indoors but outdoor gatherings of more than five people are banned. And in the evening, the streets of Lausanne, a student city that is usually very lively —

especially on weekends — is strangely silent. "Since these restrictive measures urging people to stay at home, it has completely changed," said Hausler. "It is quiet all week, even from 8:00pm, and when I get here, there is hardly any activity around the cathedral or even in the city so it brings a tranquility that I have never experienced before. "There is a real calm which resembles what it would have been like in the past, before there was all this traffic noise.

"There is perhaps just one last thing that would bring us right back to how things were in the Middle Ages: turning out the lights." Besides Lausanne, only six other European cities are thought to keep up a nightly watch: Annaberg, Celle and Nordlingen in Germany; Ripon in Britain; Krakow in Poland, and Ystad in Sweden.—AFP



Chefs and members of the Hungarian Gastronomy Society, Gabor Mogyorosi (left) and President Tamas B Molnar prepare meals for medical staff in the kitchen of the "Bobo" restaurant at Harris Park in Budapest. — AFP photos



Chefs and members of the Hungarian Gastronomy Society prepare meals for medical staff.

## 'Embrace your passion': Confinement tips from French barrel sailor

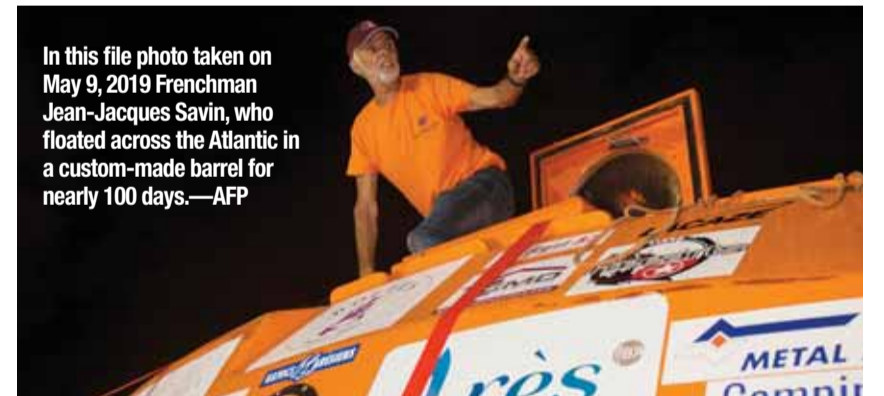
Frenchman Jean-Jacques Savin, 73, made a splash last year by crossing the Atlantic alone in a custom-built barrel, a 127-day trip that was followed by thousands via his regular Facebook posts. In an interview with AFP, the former paratrooper revealed his tactics for fending off cabin fever after France issued strict stay-at-home orders this week to fight the coronavirus outbreak. Savin spent four months in a barrel with just six square meters (65 square feet) of cramped living space. So any advice for people confined to their homes?

"Everyone needs to embrace their passion. This time of isolation can be an opportunity for discovery — start drawing, learn to play the harmonica, if it doesn't bother the neighbors," he said. "You need to tire yourself out physically, not mentally, and walk as much as you can. Above all, don't zone out in front of the television at night and then sleep until noon." Savin managed almost half a year of solitude during a trip on which he was just carried along by the currents. "When you decide to take on a challenge, no matter what difficulties come up — except for health problems — you know at one point it will be over. The solitude never bothered me, I actually appreciated it, because I chose it. "I wrote my journal, I read a lot, I exercised... I adapted to the solitude, the weather, I emptied my head and accepted that it would be long. I also knew that it was just for a while."

### 'Mother Nature's message'

He was speaking as France was gritting its teeth at the start of a long confinement period — with only essential trips out of the house allowed — that could last several weeks or possibly longer to battle the coronavirus. "In this case, confinement has been imposed on us and quite quickly. But we're not totally isolated, we all have telephones. I have friends who call and they're often bored. I hate to interrupt them, but I have things to do."

Savin said he felt safe hunkering down in the countryside in southwest France, with the confinement rules imposing no major hardship or change in routine for him. "I'm lucky. I own 40 hectares (100 acres) of pine and oak forests about 12 kilometres from my house in Ares, on the Arcachon bay. I'm living in a 20-square-metre cabin with candles for light, a stove and a stream nearby for taking baths. "Like everyone else, I have plenty of pasta, rice, semolina. And I love sardines. I have around 30 tins. I can hold out for 25 days, and if I have to stay six months, I'll stay six months. "This virus is Mother Nature's way of sending us a message. We'll need to listen to it once this is over," he said.—AFP



In this file photo taken on May 9, 2019 Frenchman Jean-Jacques Savin, who floated across the Atlantic in a custom-made barrel for nearly 100 days.—AFP

## Top Hungarian chefs feed hard-pressed hospital staff

Top chefs in Hungary have been firing up their ovens to cook up gourmet meals for hard-pressed hospital workers battling to stem the spread of the new coronavirus pandemic. "It may not look like a fine-dining meal when it's in this take-away plastic microwave-ready box," said Lajos Takacs, one of a group of chefs behind the idea. "But until that moment it could be served up in any top restaurant," Takacs, 47, told AFP while ladling a sauce over a portion of Bavarian roasted pork shank and steamed cabbage.

After emergency anti-virus measures shuttered restaurants in Hungary, Takacs and two other chefs who run the Hungarian Gastronomic Society (MGE), decided against hanging up their chef's aprons. Although Hungary has reported just 300 Covid-19 infection cases so far — and 10 deaths — the numbers are expected to rise sharply. "It's like wartime, frontline workers risking their health to do their jobs have our respect, it's the least we can do," said MGE president Tamas B. Molnar, 65, while shredding heads of cabbage.

Founded 15 years ago as a collective of



A picture shows a meal that chefs and members of the Hungarian Gastronomy Society prepared for medical staff.

cooks, butchers and bloggers, during "peacetime" MGE typically organizes cooking competitions, product sampling, and promotes local gastronomy. Its appeal for ingredients on social media, backed by several celebrity chefs, quickly bore fruit, as well as meat and vegetables. Since the initiative was launched two weeks ago food donations arrive in bulk every day at the

spacious kitchen, offered by a friend, located in a posh district of Hungarian capital Budapest.

"Tomorrow we have beef and "mangalica" pork (a Hungarian delicacy) coming in from one company, 80 kilograms (180 pounds) of mushrooms, crates of eggs and gourmet pasta from another," said Molnar. "From simple but good ingredients we want to make really quality meals for hospital staff that are easy to eat under work pressure," he said, after receiving a sack of potatoes from an anonymous donor. After cooking around 100 portions per week the group delivers the meals to Budapest hospitals treating coronavirus patients. "We just hand them over at the entrance as it's not wise to go in," Molnar told AFP at the entrance of the Uzsoki utca Hospital, before driving back to the kitchen. "Next, we plan to provide quality hot meals to paramedics and ambulance-drivers," he said. The initiative mirrors similar drives by leading chefs in cities across virus-hit Europe including Paris, Berlin and Brussels.

## Bob Dylan drops first original music in nearly a decade

Bob Dylan surprised fans overnight into Friday by releasing his first original music in eight years, a 17-minute ballad about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Backed by delicate piano, strings and muted drums, "Murder Most Foul" retells the shooting of the US president while describing the evolution of 1960s counterculture. "This is an unreleased song we recorded a while back that you might find interesting. Stay safe, stay observant, and may God be with you," Dylan posted on his website, along with a portrait of



In this file photo Bob Dylan performs during the 21st edition of the Vieilles Charrues music festival in Carhaix-Plouguerv, western France.—AFP

Kennedy, who was slain in 1963 while riding in a motorcade through Dallas.

The song is packed with artist name-drops and pop culture references, including to The Beatles, Charlie Parker, the Eagles, Stevie Nicks and the Woodstock festival. "Shot down like a dog in broad daylight / Was a matter of timing and the timing was right / You got unpaid debts; we've come to collect / We're gonna kill you with hatred; without any respect," Dylan recounts in his signature sandpaper vocals. It's the folk singer's first original song since his 2012 album "Tempest," though he has released a number of cover albums in the interim.

"Murder Most Foul" is also the first song Dylan has penned and released since he reluctantly accepted the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature, the first songwriter awarded the honor. At 78, Dylan has maintained a relentless touring schedule, though he was forced to cancel a string of April dates in Japan over the coronavirus pandemic. The artist is still set to kick off a North American tour in June.—AFP

## Stuck circus 'overwhelmed' by generosity amid virus lockdown

A travelling Czech circus stuck abroad under the coronavirus lockdown has been overwhelmed by the generosity of strangers helping to feed its troupe of animals after cancelled shows left it penniless. Stranded in Latvia, the family-run Circus Alex has been unable to perform or return home since borders were closed in mid-March. Its desperate owners were forced to turn to social media to ask for help to feed their horses, goats, a llama and themselves.

"We have been overwhelmed by the support of strangers," circus owner Anna Polachova told AFP, adding the circus has received "more food for ourselves and our animals than we can eat!"

The circus features three horses, a horned female goat named Alina with two kids and Jozef, a llama. Although Latvia bans using force to make animals perform tricks that are unnatural for a given species, it permits zoos so long as animals are treated humanely. "We

were preparing for the 2020 season and set up our tent in Riga, but the very next day we were informed that all public gatherings and cultural performances with more than 50 people are prohibited due to coronavirus," said Polachova, whose family has worked in the circus business for generations. "Our hired jugglers and magicians have returned home but our family must stay with our animals," Polachova added.—AFP



Horses of the Cirkus Alex circus stand in their temporary enclosure in Stopini, Latvia.



A pony of the Cirkus Alex circus stands in its temporary enclosure.



An Emirati man wearing a protective facemask walks past a mural in Dubai on March 28, 2020. —AFP

## Wealth funds seen shedding up to...

Continued from Page 1

the spiralling oil price and rocketing spending as administrations rush out emergency budgets.

Around \$100-\$150 billion in stocks have likely been offloaded by oil-producer sovereign wealth funds, excluding Norway's fund, in recent weeks, Panigirtzoglou said, and a further \$50-\$75 billion will likely be sold in the coming months. "It makes sense for sovereign funds to frontload their selling, as you don't want to be selling your assets at a later stage when it is more likely to have distressed valuations," he said.

Most oil-based funds are required to keep substantial cash-buffers in place in case a collapse in oil prices triggers a request from the government for funding. A source at an oil-based sovereign fund said it had been gradually raising its liquidity position since oil prices began drifting lower from their most recent peak above \$70 a barrel in Oct 2018. In addition to the cash reserves, additional liquidity was typically drawn firstly from short-term money market instruments like treasury bills and then from passively invested equity as a last resort, the source said.

It's generally a similar trend for other funds. "Our investor flows broadly show more resilience than market pricing would suggest," said Elliot Hentov, head of policy research at State Street Global Advisors. "There has been a shift toward cash since the crisis started, but it's not a panic move but rather gradual." The sovereign fund source said the fund had made adjustments to its actively-managed equity investments due to the market rout, both to stem losses and position for the recovery, when it comes.

Exactly how much sovereign wealth funds invest and with whom remain undisclosed. Many don't even report the value of the assets they manage. On Thursday, the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund said it had lost \$124 billion so far this year as equity markets sunk but its outgoing CEO Yngve Slyngstad said it would, at some point, start buying stocks to get its portfolio back to its target equity allocation of 70 percent from 65 percent currently. Slyngstad also said that any fiscal spending by the government this year would be financed by selling bonds in its portfolio.

State-backed, energy-rich funds account for a

significant chunk of the roughly \$8.40 trillion in total sovereign wealth assets, funds they've built up as a bulwark for when oil revenues dry up. Sovereign funds have become major players on global stock markets, accounting for roughly 5-10 percent of total holdings, and an important source of income for Wall Street asset managers.

While they have been hit hard by the approximate 20 percent slide in global equity prices, the oil-based funds' governments in Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Angola have also seen their finances strained by a nearly two thirds drop in oil prices this year. Gulf sovereign wealth funds could see their assets decline by \$296 billion by the end of this year, according to Garbis Iradian, chief Middle East and North Africa economist at the Institute of International Finance (IIF).

Around \$216 billion of that fall would be from stock market losses and a further \$80 billion from drawdowns taken by cash-squeezed governments. The central banks of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have offered a total \$60 billion in stimulus, although expectations of tighter liquidity have already pressured Gulf currencies, pegged for decades to the US dollar.

"There's a question of whether some of these funds are going to be used to support currencies, as some legal frameworks allow this," said Danae Kyriakopoulou, chief economist of the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF), a think tank. "In the previous 10 years some countries moved reserves from their central banks to sovereign funds, allowing them to invest in more risky assets as they have greater flexibility. Now, that may be a problem, because you have more reserves in the sovereign fund than the central bank when you may need the reserves to defend the currency."

Saudi Arabia is among countries that have in recent years moved reserves from its central bank to beef up its sovereign investment vehicle, Public Investment Fund, which holds stakes in Uber and electric car firm Lucid Motors, and had around \$300 billion in assets under management in 2019. In 2015, the last time crude prices collapsed, Saudi Arabia's central bank, which then oversaw a larger chunk of the kingdom's investments, mainly in securities such as US Treasury bonds, ran down its foreign assets by over \$100 billion to cover a huge state budget deficit. This month, Saudi Arabia's Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said the country would look to borrow to finance its deficit after announcing an economic support package worth more than \$32 billion. — Reuters

Dubai, the region's business and tourism hub and a major air transit center, announced more incentives to protect an economy which has been hit hard by global travel disruptions and the closure of most public venues in the UAE. Among measures announced by the Dubai Free Zones Council on Saturday were six-month rent waivers, cancellation of fines and permitting temporary employee contracts until the end of the year to support employment efforts, state news agency WAM said.

The global coronavirus death toll surged past 30,000 over the weekend as Europe and the United States endured their darkest days of the crisis. A back-flip from US President Donald Trump on quarantining New York highlighted the panic and confusion across many parts of the world in trying to contain the pandemic, which has seen more than a third of humanity placed under unprecedented lockdowns.

More than 30,800 deaths had been reported worldwide by yesterday, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally, as the virus continued to leave a devastating imprint on nearly every aspect of society: wiping out millions of jobs, overwhelming healthcare services and draining national treasuries. Europe alone accounted for more than 20,000 fatalities, where hardest-hit Italy and Spain each reported more than 800 dead in one day.

Pablo Rodriguez, a radiologist at a Madrid hospital, described the influx of patients as "a total tsunami". "It's like going to the front line in a war," he said. Officials in some countries have warned that the worst is yet to come. But in the Chinese city of Wuhan where the virus first struck late last year, officials took tentative steps back towards normality, partially reopening it after more than two months of near-total isolation for its 11 million residents.

Trump decided late Saturday against imposing a broad lockdown on New York and its neighbors

## Fears of setback in liberties in...

Continued from Page 1

While the government said the powers would be used to the "narrowest extent", Human Rights Watch (HRW) urged Amman not to abuse fundamental rights for the cause of combatting the virus.

In Morocco, known for its muscular security policy, the arrests of offenders - who risk heavy fines and jail time - have generated little protest and are even praised on social media. Like many countries, Rabat has bolstered a campaign against misinformation, but the adoption without debate of a law on social media controls has elicited concern.

Many are crying foul over surveillance in Israel, where domestic security agency Shin Bet, usually focused on "anti-terrorist activities", is now authorized to collect data on citizens as part of the fight against COVID-19. Embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu drew criticism for imposing the measure with an emergency decree after a parliamentary committee rejected it.

In an editorial published by the Financial Times, Israeli historian and best-selling author Yuval Noah Harari warned that, "If we are not careful, the epidemic might nevertheless mark an important watershed in the history of surveillance. A big battle has been raging in recent years over our privacy. The coronavirus crisis could be the battle's tipping point," he said.

In Algeria, more than a year into an unprecedented popular movement known as "Hirak", it took the emergence of the pandemic to pause weekly protests. But rights groups have accused Algerian authorities of using the health crisis to crack down on dissent via the courts. "The Hirak has suspended its marches but the #Algeria government has not suspended its repression," HRW's Eric Goldstein wrote on Twitter after journalist Khaled Drareni, who had been arrested several times for covering

## Saudi intercepts missiles over...

Continued from Page 1

"This militia lives only on wars and doesn't understand peace language," he said.

Yemen's broken healthcare system has so far recorded no case of the COVID-19 illness, but aid groups have warned that when it does hit, the impact will be catastrophic. The country is already

the protests, was put in pre-trial detention on Thursday.

Lebanon faced similar accusations as police on Friday night dismantled tents in the heart of the capital Beirut where protesters had maintained a sit-in to keep up pressure on authorities. The authorities "are taking advantage of the fact that people are preoccupied with their health and confined to repress any dissenting voices," activist and film director Lucien Bourjeily tweeted.

In the fledgling democracy of Tunisia - a former police state where security apparatuses have seen little reform - many have denounced heavy-handed police enforcement of pandemic-related movement restrictions. The Tunisian League for Human Rights has requested clarifications on social distancing measures after people expressed frustration online over apparently arbitrary police interventions.

In Egypt, authorities have targeted media questioning low official virus infection figures. British newspaper The Guardian said its correspondent was forced out of the country over an article that suggested authorities were underreporting cases. With the number of cases rising, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's government imposed movement restrictions and threatened heavy fines and prison sentences for non-compliance.

In a country lacking an independent media or judiciary, families of prisoners of conscience sounded the alarm over the possibility of a coronavirus outbreak in overcrowded and unsanitary prisons. Amnesty International has called for the "immediate and unconditional" release of political prisoners, estimated by rights groups to number around 60,000, only 15 of which have so far been let out by Egyptian authorities. Jordan, Tunisia and Sudan have ordered thousands of inmates to be freed to limit the risk of contagion.

Activists in the Gulf too have called for the release of political prisoners held in what HRW researcher Hiba Zayadin said are often overcrowded and unsanitary conditions with limited access to health care. Kuwaiti activist Anwar Al-Rasheed asked on Twitter, "In the midst of this pandemic, is it not yet the time to release prisoners of conscience?" — AFP

gripped by what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Saudi Arabia is also scrambling to limit the spread of the disease at home. The kingdom's health ministry has reported 1,203 coronavirus infections and four deaths from the illness so far.

Fighting has recently escalated again between the Houthis and Riyadh-backed Yemeni troops around the strategic northern districts of Al-Jouf and Marib, ending a months-long lull. The warring sides had earlier shown an interest in de-escalation, with a Saudi official saying in November that Riyadh had an "open channel" with the rebels with the goal of ending the war. — AFP

## First virus death in Qatar; Europe...

Continued from Page 1

The Bahraini Health Ministry told Reuters that Manama was continuing its repatriation plan and had operated three charter flights so far to Iran, which is one of the epicenters of the disease.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's health ministry reported 99 new cases and declared one death on Saturday, taking the kingdom's death toll to four, while the United Arab Emirates declared 63 fresh cases and Oman 21. This took the cumulative confirmed infections to 1,203 in Saudi Arabia, 468 in the UAE, 457 in Bahrain and 152 in Oman, according to each country's official figures. The official COVID-19 death toll across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stands at 11, including four in Bahrain and two in the UAE.

The UAE on Saturday extended to April 5 a nightly curfew to sterilize public places to combat the spread of coronavirus. The UAE's deep clean campaign, being implemented between 8 pm and 6 am each day, began on March 26 and had been due to end on the morning of March 29. "We are all hoping that everybody - citizens, residents and visitors - will stay at home during this period," Farida Al-Hosani, a health ministry spokeswoman, told a news conference. Saudi Arabia on Saturday extended a curfew in some neighborhoods of Madinah to 24 hours per day, as a "precautionary" measure.

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan visited a mobile coronavirus testing center on Saturday and posted on Twitter a picture of himself receiving a nasal swab while in a car.

after a strong pushback from local political leaders and warnings of the panic it could spark. "A quarantine will not be necessary," Trump tweeted, about eight hours after he stunned the New York metropolitan region - the epicenter of the US outbreak - with a proposal to place it under quarantine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, however, asked area residents not to travel except for essential purposes. Trump's reversal came on the same day the US death toll topped 2,100, more than doubling in just three days. Of the fatalities, more than a quarter were in New York City. Health officials say they fear New York may follow the deadly path charted by Italy, with health professionals exhausted and hospitals desperately short of protective equipment and ventilators.

"It's abysmal," said Andrew, a psychiatry resident in a New York hospital who spoke on condition his name be changed. He is now quarantined at home with a likely case of the virus himself. "There's not enough money, there aren't enough tests, there's not enough personal protective equipment for people who are dealing with this," he told AFP in an interview punctuated by coughs.

The United States now has the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 infections globally with more than 124,000 cases, according to the Johns Hopkins tally. One of the fatalities announced Saturday was that of a Chicago infant less than a year old, marking an extremely rare case of juvenile death in the pandemic.

European nations have been harder hit than the US on a per capita basis with over 20,000 deaths - around half in worst-hit Italy. Spain, with the world's second-highest toll, added 832 deaths on Saturday for a total of 5,812. Madrid toughened a nationwide lockdown, halting all non-essential activities, though officials said the epidemic in the country seemed to be nearing a peak. Russia said it would close its

borders today, despite reporting relatively low levels of the virus.

More than 664,000 cases of the novel coronavirus have been officially recorded around the world since the outbreak began late last year, according to the Johns Hopkins tracker. Variations in testing regimes - and delays in some countries - mean the true number is likely far higher. In France, which has seen close to 2,000 deaths, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe warned the "battle" was just beginning.

The British toll passed 1,000 on Saturday while Belgium saw a steep climb in deaths, with 353 recorded on Saturday - up from 289 the day before. Elsewhere, Iran announced 139 more deaths, and India sealed a dozen villages that had been visited by a guru now known to be infected and a possible "super-spreader". South African police used rubber bullets in Johannesburg to enforce social distancing on a crowd queuing for supplies outside a supermarket during a national lockdown.

In Italy, a cardiologist from Rome who has recovered from COVID-19 recalled his hellish experience. "The oxygen therapy is painful, looking for the radial artery is difficult. Desperate other patients were crying out, 'Enough, enough,'" he told AFP. Infection rates in Italy are on a downward trend. The head of the national health institute Silvano Brusaferro predicted a peak "in the next few days".

Europe has suffered the brunt of the coronavirus crisis in recent weeks, with millions across the continent on lockdown and the streets of Paris, Rome and Madrid eerily empty. Other countries across the world were bracing for the virus' full impact. As even rich countries struggle, aid groups warn the toll could be in the millions in low-income countries and war zones such as Syria and Yemen, where healthcare systems are in tatters. — Agencies



Stars

Daily SuDoku

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hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

medium

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

A financial goal you've been hoping to reach very soon might seem right around the corner, Aries, but there still seem to be a thousand things you have to do before it's actually realized. This could get you down temporarily, but don't get stuck there. Make a list of whatever needs to be done and then tackle each task one at a time until the goal is reached. Get busy!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Financial worries could plague you today, Libra. This is unfortunate, because your concerns are probably misplaced. There may be a few adjustments to make, but nothing a little belt-tightening for a few days can't fix. Find something inexpensive but fascinating to do like reading or watching a documentary. You'll forget your troubles and learn something in the meantime.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Expect a hectic pace today, Taurus. Some of your colleagues may have been procrastinating a little and now everything has to be done at once. Don't get too frustrated, however. There are unspoken reasons for their behavior that they haven't shared with you. Just do the best you can and hope that others will as well. If some of it has to wait, it won't be the end of the world!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Love matters could have you feeling uptight and somewhat fearful today, Scorpio. Perhaps this involves a relationship that hasn't really manifested yet, or maybe you and your beloved have had a dispute of some kind. Don't worry too much. You should hear some reassuring words before too long. Try to stay calm when talking to your partner. Sounding desperate or scared could push him or her in the opposite direction.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Have you been planning to travel, perhaps for business, Gemini? You might receive word that your trip has to be postponed, which could be disappointing. However, bear in mind that this is only a delay, not a denial. All signs are that you'll make that trip, so don't panic. Think of it as more time in which to prepare. You'll want to be thoroughly ready before you go. Enjoy your day.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Idealized romantic feelings could pour out today when talking to your love interest, Sagittarius. That's fine, but you should exercise restraint. If it's a new relationship, your partner could be scared off. If it's a long-term involvement, your friend might feel at a disadvantage. Channel the feelings into a poem, song, or painting. If you must voice them directly to your friend, keep the terms general. Don't put your beloved on the spot.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A proposed get-together with a love interest might have to be postponed until much later tonight or perhaps another evening. This could make you a little blue. Your insecurity might even get the better of you. Does your friend not want to meet? Don't fall into this kind of thinking. Accept that there's a reason and go with the flow. You'll enjoy the date that much more for the delay.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Money worries could cause you to resist attending a group event with some friends, Capricorn. Are you afraid you'll be tempted to spend more than you can afford now? You probably will, but that's no reason to stay away. Leave your checkbook and credit cards at home. Take only a minimal amount of cash. If you see something you can't live without, take the name and number of the vendor for later.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Are you expecting a close friend or love partner to visit you at home, Leo? Don't panic if your friend doesn't show up at the allotted time. It doesn't mean that no one is coming! There probably has been a traffic jam, last-minute phone call, long line at the supermarket, or some other mundane delay. Be patient and your friend will show up eventually. Hang in there!



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Someone you know from work could suddenly seem to have romantic feelings for you, Aquarius. At first this might make you a little uncomfortable, since you've never thought of this person in that way before. Don't do anything rash. Think about it first. Maybe there's potential, maybe not, but don't jump at it or dismiss it out of hand. Who knows? This person could prove to be your ideal mate!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

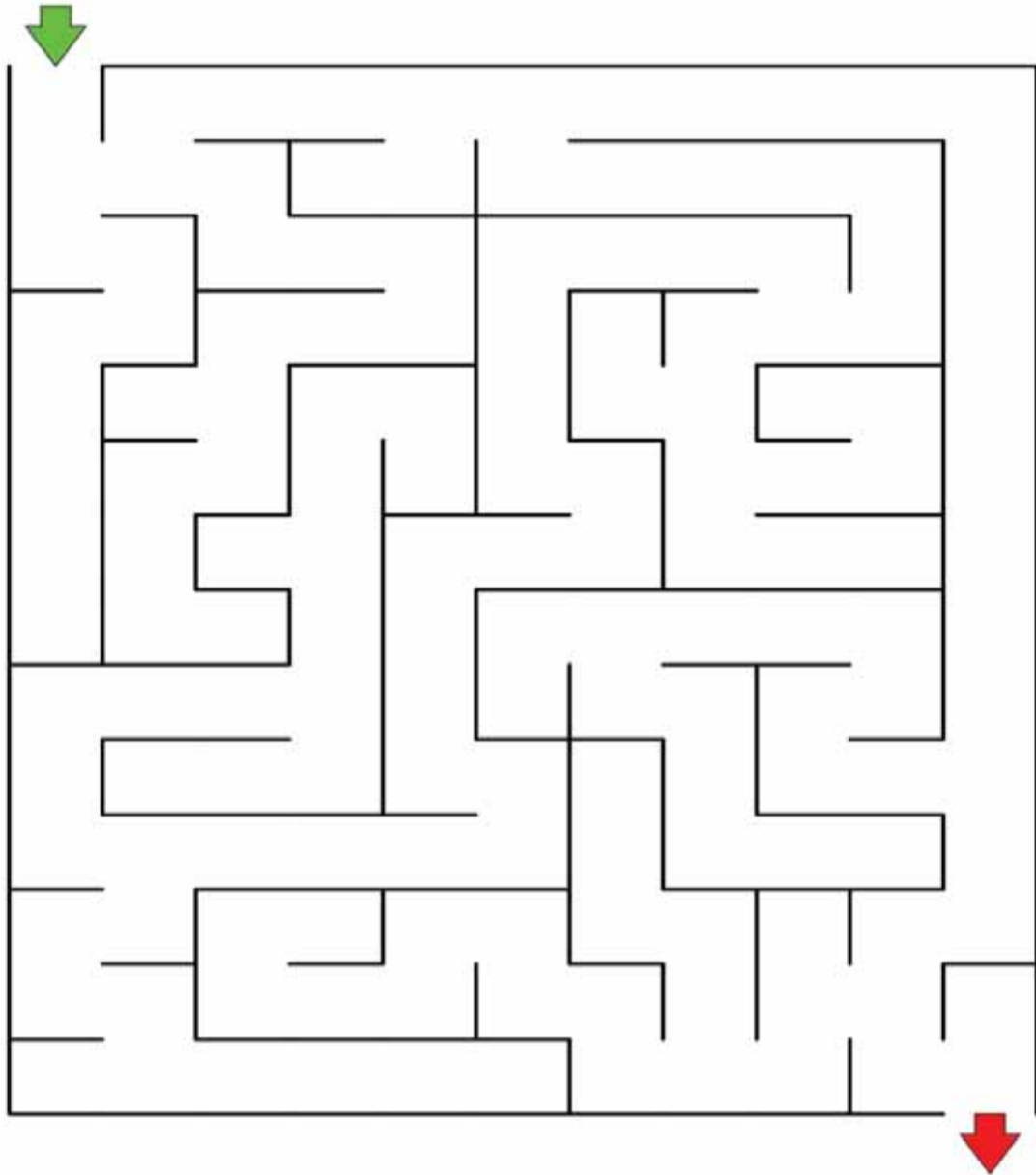
An emotional phone call could come from a close friend or love partner, Virgo. This person has a lot of worries, and is apt to lay them all on you if you let it happen. You won't want to drop everything that you'd planned to work on today. Tell your friend that you should get together for dinner or coffee and you'll talk about it, and then finish your tasks as quickly as possible.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Is your love interest out of town, Pisces? If so, you might spend much of the day feeling lonely and gloomy. Your friend misses you, too, so don't think you'll be alone for long. Try to fill the hours until your partner returns with activities that you love, such as reading or artistic pursuits. The time should then go quickly and you'll be back together before you know it.

Find the way



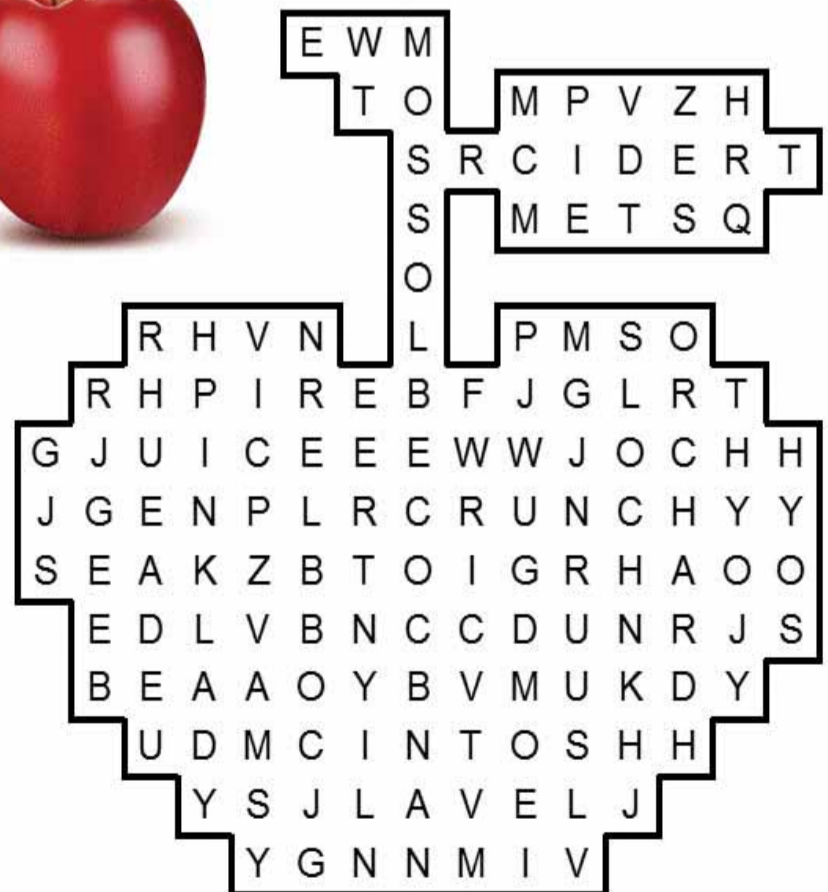
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Color It



Crossword

Apple Word Search



BLOSSOM  
CIDER  
COBBLER  
CORE  
CRUNCHY  
GALA  
GREEN

JUICE  
JUICY  
MCINTOSH  
ORCHARD  
PEEL  
PIE  
PINK LADY

RED  
SEEDS  
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TREE  
WORM

## Sports

Star batsman  
Smith's leadership  
ban ends

**SYDNEY:** A two-year leadership ban slapped on Steve Smith after the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa ended yesterday, leaving the master batsman free to skipper Australia again.

The 30-year-old captained the team until he was suspended for 12 months over a brazen attempt to alter the ball with sandpaper under his watch during a Test in Cape Town in 2018.

Part of his punishment included a further year-long exile from any leadership role, which has now expired.

Co-conspirator and former vice-captain David Warner was banned from any leadership role for life, although both have successfully resumed their international careers.

There have been calls for Smith to take back the Test captaincy from Tim Paine, but it remains unclear whether he wants to, with the 35-year-old seemingly intent on playing on.

Coach Justin Langer last year praised Paine's leadership as "brilliant" and said Smith may not want the "burden" of captaincy on top of batting pressures. Aaron Finch is skipper of the Twenty20 and one-day teams.

Smith told Channel Nine television yesterday he was focused only on trying to stay physically and mentally fit during the coronavirus shutdown of Australian cricket. He was supposed to be preparing for a big-money payday at the Indian Premier League, but the tournament has already been delayed until April 15 in response to the pandemic.

With India in a three-week lockdown in a bid to contain a spread of the virus, Smith admitted the IPL appeared unlikely to go ahead. "I think the country's basically shut its borders until the 15th of April," he said. —AFP

Photo of the day



CAIRO: Dominic Di Tommaso, freerunning athlete, performs in Cairo, Egypt. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

F1 could race into January  
if necessary, says Binotto

## Ferrari boss sees January end to F1 season

**LONDON:** Formula One could shorten grand prix weekends and race into January if that helps salvage a season ravaged by the coronavirus, according to Ferrari boss Mattia Binotto.

The opening race in Australia on March 15 was cancelled and the showcase Monaco Grand Prix in May has also been scrapped, the first time since 1954 that it has not featured on the championship calendar. A further six rounds have been postponed, and more look likely to follow with countries in lockdown, but Formula One bosses have said they hope to get back on track sometime in the European summer with a reduced season of 15 to 18 races.

Binotto told Sky Sports Italia that the teams had given the Formula One powers-that-be complete freedom to do what was necessary to have a championship.

"We are in constant dialogue," he said. "I have felt, along with the other team principals, that these are decisive moments."

"We've decided to give complete freedom to (Formula One chairman Chase) Carey and the FIA to put together as soon as possible a

timetable for us to get racing again, we are willing on our side.

"We're assessing various ideas: races closer together, maybe doing two or three races in January, considering also the option of cancelling (Friday) practice."

Formula One needs a minimum of eight races for a valid championship and the 2020 season is currently due to end in Abu Dhabi on Nov. 29.

The sport normally has a break until launches and pre-season testing in February but, with cars now remaining the same in 2021 with major rule changes deferred a year to save money, there would be little need for that anyway.

"If this allows us to guarantee a more complete 2020 world championship, with the following season not starting until March, there is great availability for that," said Binotto.

The 2020 championship was originally

meant to have a record 22 races, with Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton hoping to equal Michael Schumacher's record seven titles and surpass the Ferrari great's unprecedented 91 wins. Hamilton so far has 84 wins.

The Briton could be kept waiting on both accounts if the sport is unable to put together enough races.

Former commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone told Reuters on Friday that he would be very surprised if the sport managed to put together even a reduced season of 15-18 races.

Earlier, as the virus spread globally, so has its impact on world sport and so far, Grand Prix races scheduled for Bahrain, Vietnam, China, Netherlands, Spain and Azerbaijan have been postponed.

The iconic Riviera showpiece in Monaco and the season-opening Australian race were cancelled. "We have decided to give total free-

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We are in  
constant  
dialogue

”



Mattia Binotto

dom to the FIA in terms of scheduling," Binotto told Sky Sport Italia.

"We are looking at several options: If you hold them one right after the other, you can run two or three races in January."

The 2020 season is not due to open until June 14 in Canada at the earliest.

Earlier in the week, F1 boss Chase Carey said he still envisaged a 15-18 race calendar from an initial schedule of 22. —Agencies

French  
chess team  
quarantined  
in Russia

**MURMANSK:** When a group of French chess players travelled to the Russian Arctic city of Murmansk for a tournament this month, they didn't expect to end up in quarantine and face delays in getting home.

Hailing from the Ile-de-France region, the 14-strong group, which includes eight minors, arrived in Murmansk, 1,480 kilometres (920 miles) north of Moscow, on March 12 to play opponents from Russia, Ireland and the Netherlands.

But the tournament was derailed when an Irish player was diagnosed with the coronavirus, forcing other participants into quarantine.

Jurriaan Kien, an official accompanying the French players, told Reuters from quarantine in a Murmansk hospital on Saturday that the group are due to return to France on Monday despite Russia having grounded all international flights. He said that he had received assurances from the airline that their flight from Moscow had so far not been cancelled.

"We have a Plan B because we are chess players and always anticipate the next move," Kien said. "If for some reason we arrive in Moscow and we can't leave, we will be hosted at the French embassy's

residence in Moscow. They have already prepared 14 beds." The group has kept a regular schedule while in quarantine, where they have all been tested three times for the virus and were found to be healthy. Each day they follow their school curriculum, practice English, hold a French dictation and play chess. Russia, which has recorded 1,264 cases of coronavirus, has halted all international flights and on Saturday said it would be closing all border checkpoints from Monday.

Chess grandmaster Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, currently ranked eighth in the world, returned to France this week from a tournament in Yekaterinburg, a city 1,400 kilometres (885 miles) east of Moscow, just as all international flights were being suspended.

Vachier-Lagrave was tied for the lead in the Candidates Tournament, which brought together contenders vying for the chance to challenge defending world champion Magnus Carlsen of Norway for the world title, when it was abruptly suspended on Thursday because foreign participants were at risk of remaining stranded in Russia.

"We made the effort to come play because this is a very important tournament, but we knew there was a chance it would not be completed," Vachier-Lagrave told Reuters from his home in Paris. "You just have to remain calm and wait for the world to do better. Then when everything is resolved, we can play chess again." —Reuters

Robinson  
to re-sign  
with Chiefs

**KANSAS CITY:** Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Demarcus Robinson is signing a one-year contract to remain with the team, multiple media outlets reported Saturday. NFL Network's Tom Pelissero reported that Robinson will receive \$2.3 million fully guaranteed.

Robinson's production has steadily increased during his three seasons with the Chiefs. His catches (32) and receiving yards (449) in 2019 served as career highs, while his four touchdown receptions matched his total in 2018.

The 25-year-old's best game came in Kansas City's 28-10 victory over Oakland on Sept. 15. He had six catches for 172 yards and two touchdowns. —The father of former New Orleans Saints and Atlanta Falcons quarterback Bobby Hebert Jr. died of complications from the coronavirus, the family announced. Bobby Hebert Sr. was 81.

Hebert Sr. was a colon cancer survivor who had

multiple strokes and had open heart surgery for a birth defect. Hebert Jr., who works for WWL Radio in New Orleans, discussed his father's battle with the virus on a recent radio appearance, saying, "You can be tough and the virus can still overwhelm you." He called coronavirus "an unseen enemy."

• The Baltimore Ravens reached a one-year, \$3 million deal with defensive end Derek Wolfe, multiple outlets reported. The deal also includes \$3 million in incentives, according to NFL Network. Wolfe, 30, who has played all eight of his NFL seasons with the Denver Broncos, is coming off a season when he started in all 12 games he played. He had 34 tackles and a career-best seven sacks to give him 33 sacks in his career.

• Defensive end Shelby Harris has agreed to a one-year deal to remain with the Denver Broncos, according to multiple reports. The contract is worth \$2.5 million in guaranteed money and includes incentives that could push it to \$3.25 million, The Athletic reported. Harris, 28, was expected to move on in free agency, but the Denver Post reported

that changed after the veteran met with coach Vic Fangio to discuss his role on the team.

• The Tampa Bay Buccaneers re-signed cornerback and special-teams standout Ryan Smith. Smith played over half of the Buccaneers' special-teams snaps in 2019 despite sitting out the first four games on suspension. The 26-year old recorded 11 tackles and one pass defended last season.

• The New York Giants agreed to terms with former Jets tight end Eric Tomlinson to provide depth at the position. Contract terms were not released. Tomlinson, who turns 28 next month, was an undrafted free agent from UTEP when he signed with the Philadelphia Eagles in 2015 before he was cut. He then joined the Houston Texans' practice squad. He signed with the Jets in 2016 and spent three seasons with the team, appearing in 36 games where he caught 16 passes, including a touchdown.

• The Atlanta Falcons and linebacker Edmond Robinson, formerly of the XFL, agreed to a one-year contract. Financial terms of the deal were not announced. Robinson, 28, played in five

games with the Houston Roughnecks before the XFL season was suspended. He had 22 tackles, two sacks and a forced fumble.

• The Minnesota Vikings re-signed offensive guard Dakota Dozier to a contract, the team announced. Terms of the deal were not disclosed by the Vikings, however TwinCities.com reported that the contract was for one year and \$1 million. Dozier started four games last season with Minnesota after spending his first five NFL campaigns with the New York Jets.

• Former Denver Broncos receiver Orlando McDaniel, also a former LSU football and track standout, died Friday night due to the coronavirus. He was 59. LSU track coach Dennis Shaver told media outlets on Saturday that McDaniel fell ill after returning from a trip to the Washington D.C. area. McDaniel lived in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and coached track and field athletes. McDaniel caught 41 passes for 719 yards and two touchdowns as an LSU senior in 1981 and was a second-round draft pick of the Broncos. He played in three games in 1982 but didn't catch a pass. —Reuters

## Sports

# Juventus players, Sarri agree pay cut due to coronavirus

## Personal agreements with players and coach will be finalised

**MILAN:** Juventus players and coach Maurizio Sarri have reached an agreement over a wage reduction that will save the Italian champions 90 million euros (\$100.26 million), the Serie A club announced on Saturday.

Sarri and the first-team players have agreed what amounts to a four-month pay reduction to help Italy's most successful club during the coronavirus crisis. The effective one-third cut to the players' annual salaries will mean a huge drop in wages for a squad headed by marquee Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo, the best-paid footballer in Italy who is reported to earn 31 million euros a year.

The agreement comes at a time when many clubs around Europe have had to cut wage bills because of the dramatic impact of matches having had to be postponed or played behind closed doors due to the spread of the virus.

"The economic and financial effects of the understanding reached are positive for about 90 million euros for the 2019/2020 financial year", Juventus said in a statement.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly payments of March, April, May and June 2020", it added, saying personal agreements with Sarri and the players will be finalised in the coming weeks.

The Turin-based club, in one of the regions hit hardest by the crisis, have suffered in recent weeks with three of their players having tested positive for

the virus — forward Paulo Dybala, defender Daniele Rugani and midfielder Blaise Matuidi.

Soccer around the world has been brought to a standstill by the pandemic with Italy having suffered more than 10,000 deaths from the virus, the highest number in any country. Italy's top-flight Serie A league has been suspended since March 9 with Juventus, seeking a ninth successive title, leading the league by one point from Lazio with 12 games each remaining. "Juventus Football Club S.p.A. announces that, due to the current global health emergency (which) is preventing the performance of the sporting activity, it has reached an understanding with the players and the coach of the First Team regarding their compensation for the residual portion of the current sport season," the club statement said.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly wages of March, April, May and June 2020.

"In the coming weeks, personal agreements with the players and the coach will be finalised, as required by the current regulations.

"Should the current season's matches be rescheduled, the Club will negotiate in good faith with the players and the coach conditional increases of compensation according to the actual resumption and finalisation of official competitions.

"Juventus would like to thank the players and the coach for their commitment at a difficult time for



MILAN: Juventus star Cristiano Ronaldo and coach Maurizio Sarri (right) have agreed to take pay cuts. — AFP

everyone." Long-standing defender Giorgio Chiellini led the players' negotiations amid reports in the Italian media that Ronaldo had agreed to sacrifice 3.8 million euros of his yearly wage to ease the financial burden on the club while Italy is in lockdown.

The agreement comes the day after leading Spanish club Atletico Madrid took the decision to cut the wages of their staff, including the players, to ease the financial burden on the club.

Atletico joined La Liga rivals Barcelona, who imposed a compulsory wage reduction on their players during the period of lockdown after Spain became the second-most affected country by the coronavirus in Europe behind Italy.

German Bundesliga clubs Borussia Moenchengladbach and Borussia Dortmund have also said their players would forego some of their salary.—Reuters

## Spark win season defeat by knocking off Hunters

**HANGZHOU:** The Hangzhou Spark kicked off their season with a bang, coming back to take a 3-2 reverse sweep against the Chengdu Hunters on Saturday. This was the first series of the year for both teams, whose debuts had been delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Hunters (0-1) came out strong, winning Ilios 2-1. Chengdu ran dive compositions for the opening rounds of Ilios before DPS Hu "JinMu" Yi broke out his signature Pharah and laid waste to the Spark. Though Chengdu only picked up two points on Dorado, JinMu's Pharah carried the Hunters to a 2-0 shutout win to put Chengdu up 2-0 going into the break.

After the break, the Spark (1-0) would bounce

back. Strong play from DPS Kyeong-bo "GodsB" Kim and main tank Xu "gruxue" Qulin would lead the Spark to a 3-2 win on Numbani and a 3-2 win on Paris.

In the tiebreaker map on Oasis, despite good performances from JinMu and Chengdu main tank Ding "Ameng" Menghan, who was a consistent menace on Wrecking Ball, Hangzhou held firm and took a 2-1 map to wrap up a 3-2 series win.

Meanwhile, The Los Angeles Gladiators picked up their first win of the year by posting a 3-1 victory over the defending Overwatch League champion-San Francisco Shock. San Francisco (1-1) ran a variety of lineups in this series, utilizing its deep bench to varying success. Los Angeles ran fairly consistent lineups, swapping DPS players in and out depending on the map.

For the Gladiators (1-1), the tank duo of Min-seok "OGE" Son and Indy "SPACE" Halpern were the biggest contributors to the win. OGE and SPACE led Los Angeles to a 2-0 win on Ilios and a resounding 1-0 full-hold win on Route 66 to go up 2-0 into the break. San Francisco would come back somewhat, taking Numbani 3-2 and tying Volskaya Industries 3-

3, but the Gladiators would come roaring back on Control, taking Oasis 2-0 and securing the series win. The win moves Los Angeles Gladiators into 10th place while it drops San Francisco to 11th.

In other Chinese team action, the Shanghai Dragons (1-0) demolished the Guangzhou Charge 3-0. Led by the debuting DPS Byung-sun "Fleta" Kim, who came over from the Seoul Dynasty, Shanghai took a 2-1 win on Nepal, 3-2 win on Route 66, and 2-1 on Eichenwalde. Fleta's Mei was on point; using her Ice Wall ability to split up the Charge (0-1) and win fights before they could truly even begin.

Meanwhile, the Seoul Dynasty (1-0) picked up a clean 3-0 win over the Los Angeles Valiant (1-2). Led by new acquisitions Joon-yeong "Profit" Park on DPS, Jae-hee "Gesture" Hong on tank and on support, Seoul soared to a convincing win. The Dynasty took Nepal 2-0, Dorado 2-1, and capped things off with a 3-2 win on Eichenwalde.

Finally, the Toronto Defiant (2-4) picked up a 3-1 win over the Boston Uprising (1-5) in a battle of teams near the bottom of the standings. Toronto took Busan 2-0, Rialto 1-0, and, after losing Hollywood 3-0, took Hanamura 2-1 to secure the win. — Reuters

## Belarus ploughs lone furrow over coronavirus

**MINSK:** As the rest of Europe shuts up shop to combat the new coronavirus, Belarus remains resolutely open for business. Restaurants in the former Soviet Republic continue to serve food, and the country's football league plays on. Despite being at the door of a Europe grappling with the deadly COVID-19, life goes on here more or less unchecked. The Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has dismissed the global health crisis as a "psychosis", and refuses to follow the example of much of the globe by imposing a lockdown.

With less than 100 positive cases and no deaths in Belarus, Lukashenko this week suggested "there shouldn't be any panic" over the virus. He encouraged his citizens to work on the land. "There, the tractor will heal everyone. The fields heal everyone," suggested the straight-talking former collective farm director who assumed power in 1994.

Vodka and saunas also figure on his list of miracle cures. And so, in stark contrast to leagues elsewhere on the European continent, the Belarus championship like the country's tractors, ploughs on, undeterred.

Special measures have been put in place nonetheless including thermal cameras to check the temperature of fans as they enter stadia which are disinfected twice a day. As a result, a rare spotlight has been shone on the humble "Vysshaya Liga", the Belarus first division.

Russian public television channel Match TV has bought the rights to screen its matches. And former Belarus star Alexander Hleb suggested in the German press that it could be lit up by the arrivals of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

"We've taken all the measures recommended by the Sports Ministry. All those who are in contact with fans...are supplied with gloves," Belarus football federation spokesman Aleksandr Aleinik told AFP.

Crowds are well down though, by half last week compared to the week before, "enabling fans to distance themselves in the stands" said Aleinik. Since Tuesday however, there has been a shift in tone from the top. In a meeting with the Chinese ambassador Lukashenko asserted that his country was "controlling very seriously" the situation. And newspapers and state television began to talk about the pandemic which has now killed more than 25,000 people.

But they stick to the line that a general lockdown is not the solution. Minsk, the capital, has become quieter over the past few days, over 65s are encouraged to stay indoors, pupils are authorised not to attend school.

During rush hour trains on the metro underground are not as full as usual, numerous companies are allowing staff to work from home. But bars, cafes and shops remain steadfastly open, without any self-distancing pro-



MINSK: File photo shows action from a match between Torpedo-Belaz Zhodino and Belshina Bobruisk during their Belarus League match on Friday.

col advice for their customers. Ivan, an employee of a new technology company, has been working from home for the past three weeks. Yet despite that precaution he meets up with his friends every evening "at the gym or in a cafe". The authorities justify the lax health regime by the strict confinement of those who have tested positive. Deputy Health Minister Elena Bogdan says that

anyone who has the virus or is showing virus-like symptoms is isolated and hospitalised.

And those they have been in contact with are placed in quarantine. The country's opposition denounces the official approach. "The authorities are preparing enormous savings on pensions" opposition minister Mikola Stalkevitch said caustically in a video message.— AFP

## UEFA president says current season may not finish

**ROME:** The head of European soccer's governing body said that the current season could be "lost" if it is unable to re-start by the end of June, although he did not rule out extending it into the next season.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin told the Italian newspaper La Repubblica that there were a number of options for concluding the season, which has been brought to a halt around Europe by the coronavirus pandemic.

"There is a plan A, B and C. The three options are to start again in mid-May, in June or at the end of June, if we don't succeed, the season will probably be lost," he said. However, he then added: "There is also the

possibility of starting again at the beginning of the next, starting the following one later. We will see the best solution for leagues and clubs."

Ceferin has said the finishing domestic leagues was the priority, even if it meant playing behind closed doors. "It's hard for me to imagine all the matches behind closed doors, but we still don't know whether we'll resume, with or without spectators.

"If there was no alternative, it would be better to finish the championships anyway," he said. "But I can say that I don't think about the finals of the European club competitions behind closed doors."

Ceferin said that the decision to postpone Euro 2020 until next year "has shown that every emergency is our emergency and every club is our club." He said that a videoconference with representatives of clubs, leagues and players was "a fantastic demonstration of unity and solidarity."

He was also talking to FIFA and its president Gianni Infantino despite recent differences. "It is important to forget personal interests and disagreements," he said. — Reuters

## Euro footballers learn to deal without the game

**LONDON:** The riches, glamour and glory of playing football in front of packed stadiums attracts the world's top players across borders but with the European game in lockdown, many have been left isolated from their families.

Coronavirus has forced governments across Europe to impose swingeing restrictions on travel and personal freedoms. Footballers' daily routines have been upended with no games to play for the foreseeable future and training sessions now conducted alone at home or via videoconferencing to maintain some semblance of team spirit.

"It is a way to keep in contact with each other, to start a little bit of routine because I think that is important," said Brighton manager Graham Potter, who has his squad doing communal morning sessions via video.

"Our guys are all here in the UK. That is why it is important for us to keep in contact and regular dialogue and make sure everyone is alright. "They are away from families, they are missing families and that is something we understand. We sympathise with that, but we felt it was right to limit international travel and to stay at home and be safe." Other clubs allowed their stars to jet home. Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar and Thiago Silva returned to Brazil and Edinson Cavani headed to Uruguay before France went into lockdown. By contrast, Chelsea's Spanish winger Pedro Rodriguez was stuck in London as he and the rest of the Blues squad were forced into self-isolation when teammate Callum Hudson-Odoi tested positive.

"It's hard not to be able to see my children," Pedro Rodriguez, whose children live in Barcelona, told Spanish radio station Cadena SER. "I imagine there are many people like me. "I tell them to stay in the house and that I miss them." Birmingham boss Pep Clotet sent his family back to Spain before a state of emergency was declared in his homeland, but remained in England to do what work he could.

"I am caught between two worlds," said Clotet. "I feel I cannot do my job properly. I keep thinking 'Maybe I should go back?' But I cannot go back because I am working."

For others, the greatest concern is filling time and the void left by no football. "I am obviously a little bored since two weeks have passed since the beginning of the quarantine at home," Juventus' Polish goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny told Sky Sport Italia.

"I am alone in Turin because my family went to Poland. Having said that, however, I must say that I am having a peaceful time. I sleep a lot." The unexpected downtime is even allowing some players accustomed to globe-trotting extra quality time with their nearest and dearest.

Sevilla midfielder Ever Banega has spent the vast majority of his playing career in Spain, but the 65-time capped Argentine international is used to hopping back and forth across the Atlantic to represent his country.

"It's strange because there is always football on. When La Liga stops, there are international games. Even in the summer, there is football with pre-season games," Banega told AFP.

"You miss a lot of moments with your loved ones. Now what I am mostly doing is taking advantage of the time with my kids, my wife, enjoying the family time." —AFP

**18** F1 could race into January if necessary, says Binotto



**19** Juventus players, Sarri agree pay cut due to coronavirus



**19** Belarus ploughs lone furrow over coronavirus



## Tokyo eye July 2021 for delayed Olympics



**TOKYO:** A notice which reads in Japanese "Under adjustment" is pasted on a countdown display for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in Tokyo on March 25, 2020. Japan started the unprecedented task of reorganising the Tokyo Olympics after the historic decision to postpone the world's biggest sporting event due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic that has locked down one third of the planet. — AFP

**TOKYO:** Tokyo Olympics organisers are eyeing next July as a start date for the postponed Games, Japanese media reported yesterday, following the historic decision to delay the event due to the coronavirus.

Given the ongoing pandemic and need for preparation time, the most likely plan would be for the Games to begin on July 23, 2021, public broadcaster NHK said, citing sources within the organising panel. It came after Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike raised the idea on Friday of moving the event to a less hot and humid time of year.

She argued that this would make marathons and other races easier to endure, meaning they could be held in the capital instead of in northern Sapporo city, where the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had decided to move them.

The Tokyo 2020 team led by Yoshiro Mori is currently discussing possible dates with the IOC, ac-

ording to the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

On Saturday, Mori told a Japanese TV station that "some kind of conclusion" would be reached within a week. The Olympics were scheduled to open on July 24 this year with the Paralympics on August 25, but Japan announced last week it had secured agreement from the IOC to postpone the Games — a decision unprecedented in peacetime. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said they would be held in around a year instead as a testament to humanity's victory over the pandemic.

The decision had been seen to open options for Tokyo, with IOC chief Thomas Bach saying that "all the options are on the table" and rescheduling "is not

restricted just to the summer months".

Meanwhile, NHK said the Olympic flame would be displayed for a month at the J-Village sports complex in Fukushima, which was used as a base camp for thousands of relief workers in radiation protection suits during the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Meanwhile, Japanese star Naomi Osaka says she's disappointed not to compete at the Tokyo Olympics this year but supports the decision to postpone the event to 2021. The 22-year-old former world number one said on Twitter Saturday that she thinks the event will be better for moving to next year in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Sport will eventually unite us again and be there

for us always, but that time is not now," Osaka wrote.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the International Olympic Committee agreed to postpone the Olympics after athletes worldwide expressed concern about trying to stage the spectacle amid so much uncertainty. "Everyone knows how much the Olympics means to me and how proud I will be to participate in my home country. Of course I'm disappointed that it won't happen this year," Osaka said.

"But we'll all be ready to go stronger than ever in 2021! I support Prime Minister Abe's brave decision and the IOC 100%."

Osaka, the 2018 US Open and 2019 Australian Open champion, asked the Japanese people to stay strong. "This is the time for people from all countries, backgrounds and races to rally together to save as many lives as we can," Osaka said. "To me that's the Olympic spirit." — AFP

## Tennis foot soldiers struggle in time of virus

**PARIS:** With careers spent scratching around dusty outposts, sometimes with "just \$100" in their pockets, Tennis' unheralded army of foot soldiers claim they are struggling to afford food after being made unemployed overnight by the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, Georgian player Sofia Shapatava is pleading with the International Tennis Federation (ITF) to dig deep and help out the hundreds of players who lost their livelihoods when the men's and women's tours went into a three-month lockdown.

"Players lower ranked than 250 will not be able to buy food in two-three weeks' time," warned Shapatava, who is not optimistic the ITF will look favourably on her plea.

"I honestly don't think so," she told AFP. "They

replied that their plate is full and they will come back to me as soon as they can. But after that email they did not reply with anything."

Shapatava, the world number 371, is a 16-year veteran of the tour. But she plays mostly secondary ITF events, a world away from the gilded Grand Slam world inhabited by multi-millionaires Serena Williams, Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

Shapatava has banked \$354,000 in career prize money from almost 1,500 singles and doubles matches.

Barely \$3,000 has come her way since the turn of the year after events in Andrezieux-Bouthion in France, Midland in Michigan, Nicholasville in Kentucky and the Californian venue of Rancho Sante Fe.

However, compared to many, the 31-year-old is well-off. There are comfortably over 1,000 players in the WTA rankings. The men's ATP Tour has just as many. Amongst a batch of women currently locked in the lowest rank of 1,283 is 27-year-old Ksenia Kolesnikova of Russia.

In 2020, she has officially made just \$68. Many players outside the lucrative top 100 traditionally

supplement their meagre incomes by coaching or playing in European club leagues.

However, those reliable revenue streams dried up after governments worldwide banned large gatherings to combat the spread of the deadly coronavirus. "I started the petition to help tennis players to be heard by ITF, after I talked to many of the people I know and about their plans for the next three months and I realised that some people won't even be able to have food," claimed Shapatava in her on-line blog.

"My problem is that my sport will die as it is, it will die, because players who are ranked lower than 150 in the world will not be able to play." Coronavirus has brought all tennis to a standstill until June 8 at the earliest.

The entire claycourt season has been wiped out with the French Open shifted to September-October instead of its traditional May-June slot. Wimbledon could follow suit next week when organisers may postpone or even cancel completely the grasscourt Grand Slam event scheduled to start on June 29.

Britain's Tara Moore, the world 233, has made just \$2,500 this year but her career earnings stand at

\$473,500, boosted by lucrative wildcards into the main draw at Wimbledon. In 2016, she made the second round at the All England Club and pocketed a welcome \$62,000.

"There are more important things like life and death, but a lot of players from smaller countries, (are) unable to earn any income, unable to claim benefits as they are considered 'self-employed,'" wrote the 27-year-old Hong Kong-born Moore in support of Shapatava's petition.

"It will be tough for many players to survive the next couple of months." Former world number 15 Alla Kudryavtseva sympathised with the plight of the current crop. The 32-year-old Russian, who famously dumped Maria Sharapova out of Wimbledon in 2008, made over \$3 million in her career, accrued mostly from success on the doubles court.

"I have savings, I'm not worried. What about those juniors that chose tennis as their career and are making the transition to pros? Who didn't have a chance to save anything yet? Who potentially invested money in themselves? "They are not student loans." The ITF did not respond to requests for a comment. — AFP